



LENTEN
DEVOTIONAL
2026



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Ash Wednesday, February 18

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” Matt 11:28-30 (NIV)

William Edward Hickson, a 19th Century author and educator, in one of his poems to children, advised: “If at first you don’t succeed, try try again.”

Good advice. But what if you are trying a life independent from our Creator?

What if we are trying to “do it my way” out of pride or because we think the way of Jesus is too hard?

His way involves letting go of “our possessions” and sharing. That’s hard. But harder yet is trying to cling to temporary things.

His way involves forgiving others, and even ourselves. That’s hard. But more difficult still is living with these grudges and uncharitable thoughts.

When “our way” isn’t working, the best advice may be: “If at first you don’t succeed, you’re doing it wrong.”

Jesus offers a better way, giving us rest from the self-imposed burdens that weary us and the heavy yokes of this world. Even Hickson, a Baptist who taught Sunday School, and whose Hymns are still sung, would probably agree.

Prayer:

LORD, our Lord, may the habits we give up this Lent, make more room for Your presence in our lives. Please guide us in the way of trusting and obeying You. Help us lose the pretense of self-sufficiency and take your hand. As William Hickson wrote in one of his hymns:

Our Father and our Friend,
On Thee our hopes depend;
Thy love will never end:
Hallelujah, Amen

Tom Curran

Thursday, February 19

“So they gave a dinner for Him there; Martha was serving them” (John 12:2)

There are many examples of hospitality in the Bible, but perhaps none so interesting as the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10. You remember that Jesus was coming to Bethany with his disciples. When Martha heard about it, she "opened her home to him" (Luke 10:38). Naturally she wanted everything to be just right, so she spent her time bustling around cooking, cleaning, checking the silverware, and sweeping the floor. Meanwhile, her sister Mary was just sitting there—cross-legged on the floor, no doubt—listening to Jesus talk. Martha didn't like it. The more she thought about it, the angrier she got. Finally she interrupted Jesus with a complaint we can all understand. "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" (Luke 10:40)

Jesus' answer has often been construed as a rebuke to Martha's busyness, but that's not exactly right. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken from her" (Luke 10:42). Martha's problem was not that she was bustling around getting things done. No, without Martha the meal would never be served. Jesus and his disciples would starve if they had to depend on dreamy-eyed Mary. Martha's problem was that she forgot why she was doing all the work in the first place. She was "distracted" and "worried" when she should have been glad Jesus had come to her home. We thank God for those dedicated servers who focus on meeting physical needs, especially those who spontaneously and gladly open their homes to others. Who is ready to host a visiting missionary? Who will open their home for a Sunday School class social? Who is glad for the teenagers to come over? Who would make available a spare bedroom for an unwed mother waiting to have her baby? Who is ready to provide a meal on a moment's notice? Maybe the question is not who. Maybe the question is, should it be you?

God bless all the Marthas of the world. Someone has to visit the nursing home, someone has to knit blankets for the new babies, someone has to take a meal to a sick person. When the story is told of Mary pouring oil on Jesus' feet, we rightly focus on her extravagant generosity. But don't forget her sister Martha. Who planned the meal? Martha. Who prepared it? Martha. Who served it? Martha. Who do we remember from that night? Mary. That's how life is sometimes. I'm not sure what Martha thought about her emotionally-expressive sister. Imagine that sometimes she rolled her eyes, and sometimes she felt like saying, "Come back to the kitchen and give me a hand."

Prayer

It takes all kinds to make a world. God bless all the Marthas in our midst. They too are serving the Lord, and without them nothing would get done. Lord Jesus, I pray for eyes to see the needs around me, and I pray for a heart to respond with servant hands, ready to do whatever needs to be done. Amen.

From "Faces Around the Cross", Ray Pritchard

Friday, February 20

"He Chose The Nails"

Scripture Reading: *Isaiah 53:3-5*

The season of Lent calls me to slow down and linger at the foot of the cross, resisting the urge to rush past it. When I truly stop and reflect, I realize there is no way to soften what happened there. The cross is not tidy or gentle. I cannot clean it up, explain it away, or leap ahead to the joy of Easter without first sitting with the agony of Good Friday.

Jesus knew exactly what awaited Him. Nothing was hidden from Him, nothing unexpected. And still, He stepped forward. He did not resist the nails. He chose them. Love held Him there. Obedience carried Him through the suffering. The cross was not an accident or a tragedy that overtook Him. It was a deliberate decision made with full awareness of the cost, for the sake of the world, for my sake.

Every moment of pain was endured with purpose. He knew Judas would betray Him long before the kiss in the garden, yet He still shared bread, offering grace before the silver was claimed. He knew His friends would fall asleep, scatter in fear, and deny Him. He knew the injustice, the mockery, the lashes that would rip His flesh. He knew the cross awaited Him, yet He carried it willingly. Jesus felt every part of His suffering, and none of it surprised Him. He endured it for me.

His suffering went far beyond the physical. He carried the crushing weight of sin He never committed, shame He never earned, and separation He never deserved. He could have walked away. He could have said, "Enough." Instead, He prayed, "Not my will, but Yours be done" (Luke 22:42). It was not weakness that held Him there, not even the nails, but a fierce, unwavering love. This is love in its purest form. A love that does not turn away from suffering if it means saving the beloved.

This is the truth that humbles me most, my sin was not abstract or distant, it was personal. My pride. My impatience. My selfishness. My quiet failures and my obvious ones. I was not standing far away as an observer but an active participant. My sin made the cross necessary. My sin drove the nails into Jesus.

Isaiah 53:5 reminds me, "He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed." That peace came at a great cost. His suffering purchased my salvation. His pain opened the door to my healing. Because He chose the nails, I am no longer defined by my sin but defined by His grace.

As I journey through Lent, I do not want to rush ahead to Easter joy without sitting in Friday's honesty. I want my life to reflect deep gratitude for a Savior who loved me enough to endure the cross, who chose the nails so I could know forgiveness, healing, and new life.

Prayer:

Jesus, I come before You with a humbled heart. When I look at the cross, I recognize that my sin made it necessary, and Your love made it possible. Thank You for loving me all the way to the cross. Let the weight of Your sacrifice truly change me. When I am tempted to turn away from hardship, remind me of Your steadfast love. When I feel alone in my pain, draw me close to You who understands. Teach me to live in gratitude, obedience, and deep love for You. May I never take lightly the price You paid so I could be forgiven and free.

I give You my heart, my life, and my praise.
Amen.

Angel Moran-Sellick

Saturday, February 21

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1

This verse speaks to the power of God’s Word. But the deceiver also uses words. Words have the power to bless and create or to curse and destroy.

I was a volunteer art teacher for my children’s elementary classes. Teaching second grade I was shocked at the number of young children that firmly exclaimed, “I can’t draw.” Where did these words come from? Anyone can draw, just like anyone can sing and anyone can read – it’s a matter of desire, work, and the courage to explore. But the words “I can’t” have the power to stop one from even trying. I was determined to change their minds. When they reached 5th grade I concentrated the entire semester on drawing. For the first class, students looked in a mirror and drew their faces - which I collected and kept. Up against persistent “I can’t draw” claims, we went through traditional drawing methods together and then focused on drawing faces. At the end of the lessons, they drew their own faces again. What a difference! Side by side in every single case the improvement was dramatic. It was a paradigm shift that you could see in their eyes, “I can draw”, and they believed it. A light dawned and it was a privilege to witness.

Is there something you want to try but don’t think you can do it? Are you making assumptions that might not be true? Or are you despairing and can’t find a way out? Open your bible to the Word of God. Fill yourself with knowledge and truth and He will show you the possibilities. Join with brothers and sisters in Christ and help each other.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for speaking to me through Your Word. Help me hold tight and protect me from doubt. Let Your word flow through me like a river and cleanse my soul. Amen

Karen Klinker

1st Sunday of Lent, February 22

The Care of the Soul Versus The Care of Self

Psalm 42

Pastor and author John Ortberg writes: *"In our day, we talk a lot about self-talk...In the Bible, people talk to their souls. The difference between talking to yourself and talking to your soul is that the soul exists in the presence of God. So you will see in the Psalms and elsewhere people speaking to their souls because when you speak to the soul, it naturally turns to prayer because in the soul God is always present"* (Soul Keeping, p. 88).

There was a shift in western society when we began the shift from soul-care to the concept of self-care. As Ortbert points out, there is a difference. The challenge of Lent is a call back to "Soul Care" and that involves "Soul-Talk".

What might it mean to speak to your soul as the scripture encourages this week, like: "Why are you downcast, my soul?" (Psalm 42:12).

Prayer:

God of Life, Grant me the grace to re-orient my life around the Soul you've gifted to me. Give me the curiosity and ability this week to begin 'soul-talk' and communicate deeply with the deepest parts of myself.

Amen

Pastor Rob

Monday, February 23

"Enter by the narrow gate: for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it." Matthew 7:13

The narrow gate is a lifetime of choices, a complete surrender of the sin that works in us. We are willing, but sometimes we don't see it.

As a young tot, I developed a great fear of needles because of a splinter. My dad was a family doctor and I'm the first born. I was six or seven when dad took the four of us to his office for what turned out to be vaccinations. The revelation occurred when we were facing the table where we would each sit for our shot. Terror shot through me as my dad looked at my sisters and cheerfully said, "Just watch how brave Karen is when she gets *her* shot." I

looked at the little faces of my sisters – full of fear and depending on me to save them. I still remember the indescribable feeling.

It was innocent enough, but what I heard was, “My feelings don’t matter. I need to ignore them to help my sisters, It’s OK to let someone use me.” This was the little pebble that started an avalanche of lies I lived by for many years. I carried all this luggage while I was trying to fit through the narrow gate. Saved by grace, certainly. But unaware of the heavy burden Jesus wanted me to surrender.

Do you hold a hidden pebble in your life? Jesus knows how difficult it is, but He gently says, “Come to me...and I will give you rest.” Matt 11:28

Prayer:

Jesus, please reveal to me the lies I may have believed about myself. Let me release them to you so they can cause no more harm to myself or others.
Amen

Karen Klinker

Tuesday, February 24

“...to them belong the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises. To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ...” Romans 9:4-5

This week I came across an expression: “Israel Forgetfulness.” The author used it to describe how, when we share the gospel, we often summarize it in four to seven points—but leave out Israel’s story entirely. That struck me as odd, because the gospel *is* the story of God’s faithfulness to His people, fulfilled through the prophets and carried forward through the covenants given to Israel.

As I reflected on this, I started looking at the names of those covenants. It occurred to me that the entire gospel can actually be told through them:

- The Genesis (Garden) Covenant
- The Noahic Covenant
- The Abrahamic Covenant
- The Mosaic Covenant
- The Land Covenant
- The Davidic Covenant
- And finally, the New Covenant in Jesus—promising salvation, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the forgiveness of sins, and the fulfillment of countless prophecies.

Together, these covenants reveal a continuous story of God's unfolding plan of redemption—from the very beginning to its ultimate fulfillment in Christ.

And because God has kept every promise so far, we can be confident in the ones yet to come.

We truly have so much to look forward to.

Come, Lord Jesus, Come

Prayer:

Faithful God, Thank You for the story You have been writing since the very beginning—a story of covenant, promise, and redemption. Thank You for revealing Your heart through Israel, through the prophets, and ultimately through Jesus, the fulfillment of every promise.

Amen

Sharron Clark

Wednesday, February 25

The Invitation

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10 KJV)

The older I get, the more I love to be comfortable. Comfy chair, comfy socks, comfy routines. No physical discomfort, no uncomfortable conversations, no upsetting thoughts or risky propositions, thank you very much. But I am continuing to learn that Jesus's promises and purposes are infinitely better than mere comfort. Instead, His will for me, for all His children, is abundant life: that we know Him and His love, and in knowing Him, experience eternal life of infinite joy, starting now. That is what Jesus is lovingly and persistently equipping us for. And this equipping is frequently, well, uncomfortable, because of the trouble Jesus warned us we would have in this world, and the effects of sin, and because we all have wounds that need healing.

The Lenten season is an invitation to remember the discomfort Jesus endured *"for the joy set before Him"* (Heb 12:2): to bring about your and my salvation and healing and eternal life with Him. He had no fixed address and little rest from constantly-clamoring crowds of needy people. He was harassed by those in authority and saw His closest friends betray or desert Him. Tortured and then crucified, He endured an unspeakably painful criminal's death. And, bearing on the cross the sin of the world, He bore the excruciating pain of the absence of His Father's presence—something that, thanks to Him, I will never have to experience. We do walk through valleys of shadow—but never alone. Our loving Father and Jesus walk with us, and the Holy Spirit (the Comforter!) equips us to make it through the valley, enjoying more and more, even in discomfort, the abundant life Jesus promises.

During this Lenten season, will I take time daily to thank Jesus for what He did, and is doing, to give me abundant life in Him?

What discomfort or pain am I experiencing right now? Will I trust that Jesus is with me in it, and that He will use it to bring about healing and more abundant life, for me and others?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Thank You for coming so that we might have life—real, abundant, joy-filled life in You. As we enter this Lenten season, open our hearts to remember all You endured for our sake. Teach us to welcome Your loving work in us, even when it feels uncomfortable.

When we walk through valleys, remind us that You are with us, guiding, healing, and making us whole. Give us courage to trust that every hardship can become a place where Your life grows in us. Draw us closer to Your heart, and help us daily thank You for the salvation, hope, and joy You freely give.

Lead us into the fullness of life You promise.

Amen.

Jeanine Lutzenhiser

Thursday, February 26

Jesus Wept, John 11:35

The shortest verse in the King James Bible; one of the most meaningful verses in the Bible. Two little words, nine letters total, and yet, they say so much. In times of trouble, times of trauma, times of weakness, these two little words speak to me. *Jesus wept*, so simple, so comforting. Our Lord is not only God but was also man. He lived a life, a human life. He knows what being human is, we don't need to hide anything from Him. He has seen it all, lived it all, felt it all.

Jesus wept, so that I can weep. I don't have to always be strong, hold my deepest emotions in while my world falls apart around me. I don't have to feel

shame for not having a strong enough faith. I can turn to my Father and weep in His arms. I can tell Him all my troubles, confess all my sins, complain about this world, and even tell Him that I am angry with Him, hurt by Him. I know He has never left me to deal with my troubles alone, yet I complain. I complain to Him, and He lets me, He lets me weep. He comforts me.

At one of my darkest moments, I crawled out of bed, collapsed on the floor, and sobbed. I yelled at my Lord over and over again. "Why Lord, why?" Why won't you deliver me from this evil, save me, save my children, why? As I sobbed, as I complained, my Father comforted me. He reminded me I wasn't alone, He reminded me that His Own Son had wept in His arms, had asked to be delivered, to be saved from the pain He knew He would have to endure. My Lord and Savior wept and was comforted by Our Father. He was given the strength to carry on and to live Our Father's will. He died to save us, to save me, to save my children. As my tears subsided, I drew strength from My Father and knew that I would be delivered, but not in my time, in His.

Here I am, years later, delivered. Thank you Lord.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Thank You that You are the God who weeps with us. Thank You for showing us that tears are not weakness but welcome in Your presence. When our hearts are heavy and our strength is gone, draw us into Your arms. Teach us to bring every fear, every question, every hurt to You without shame.

Comfort us as You comforted Your Son. Remind us that we are never alone, even in our darkest moments, and that Your healing and deliverance come in Your perfect time. Give us the courage to trust You, to rest in You, and to find strength again through Your love.

Thank You for walking with us, weeping with us, and lifting us up.

Amen.

Kathy Wulf

Friday, February 27

“Father, into your hands...”

It was Easter 1975. I was pastoring in the outer islands of the Marshalls and living on Jabor on Jaluit Atoll. The largest portion of the Christian community lived on Jabor, though there was a small community living on Imij. I traditionally celebrated Easter on Jabor and promised each year to visit Imij later in the day for Easter services. Each year, some reason prevented my travel there.

So, this year I was committed to sharing Easter with the community on Imij! Like other years, however, it did not look like that was going to happen. The day before Easter, we received a call from Ebon Atoll. A child was in desperate need of our island doctor. So, we sent the mission schooner, the St. Joseph, off to Ebon with the doctor.

No trip to Imij for Easter. No transportation. But after quick negotiations with one of the islanders, Kaname, who had a little 16' wood motorboat...I provide the gas and he would provide the boat...the trip was on!

After a joyous Easter celebration on Jabor, Kaname and I headed to Imij for an equally joyous Easter celebration. We departed Imij late afternoon with plenty of time to get home.

On the way home to Jabor, we saw a “wunak”...a gathering of birds feeding on fish. We were instantly fishermen. Crossed the reef and surged through the surf. Lines out we were catching tuna over and over again...enough to feed the whole island of Jabor. We were not attentive to the weather and suddenly found ourselves in a fierce storm of wind and waves. We were in trouble. A huge wave hit us and suddenly we were both in the water clinging to some floating 5 gallon containers.

We knew no one would begin to miss us and look for us until tomorrow. We were going to spend the night floating somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. It was a beautiful night with the stars out. It was a horrible night cold and fear

filled. We prayed together and alone. I was initially angry with God. Why me? I was just doing his work. So much anger.

Morning came. By noon my eyes were on fire. My lips were swollen and bleeding. But, then, we saw a seaplane on the horizon. The Navy on Kwajalein had sent out a SAR (Sea Air Rescue) flight. Surely, they were looking for us. Good news. After an hour, they disappeared...and did not return.

By late afternoon, my worst fear...shark fins began to appear around us. More anger on my part with God. I did not want to die eaten by a shark. I even tried a little bargaining with God. Seemed to work. God sent porpoises...hundreds of them...and they chased off the sharks. Temporary relief.

After another terrible night in the Pacific, sun and a new day came. The sun and heat were now blistering our skin. I thought the end was near. We were so weak. And my thoughts turned to Jesus, hanging on the cross with his end near. I thought of his last words...*"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me."* These words were now my mantra. But then, I remembered, they were not his last words. His last words were...*"Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit."* I was good. I was at peace. I was in his hands.

An hour before sunset, I told Kaname I could smell diesel. Could he smell diesel? No. But then I could hear the rhythmic sound of a diesel engine. And, then, there beside was the St. Joseph returning from Ebon.

Kaname built a new little boat. We still fished together occasionally. But we often prayed together. And always, we prayed *"Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit."*

Prayer:

Father, Thank You for being the God who finds us in every storm. When fear rises, when the waves overwhelm, when anger and doubt spill from our hearts, You do not turn away. You stay with us.

Teach us, Lord, to trust You not only in calm waters but in the nights when we cannot see a way forward. Remind us—again and again—that our lives are

held in Your hands. Just as You brought rescue in the ocean's depths, bring rescue in the struggles we face today.

Give us the grace to pray with Jesus, "Father, into Your hands I commend my spirit," and to rest in the peace that comes from knowing we are never abandoned.

Thank You for Your protection, Your presence, and Your faithful love.
Amen.

David Young

Saturday, February 28

"He will be called Wonderful Counselor" Isaiah 9:6

Are you confused? Do you need God's direction?

We all feel that way from time to time. Isaiah 9:6 gives us four names of Christ that describe four aspects of his divine character. The first one speaks to our need for God's guidance. Literally this title means "a wonder of a counselor," speaking of the wisdom of his plan. The word "wonderful" means "astonishing" or "extraordinary." The writers of the Old Testament used it for acts of God which man cannot understand. The word "counselor" means "advisor" or "ideal ruler." This means he is a reliable counselor. Those who come to him will never be led astray. Radio and television are filled with people who make their living giving advice to others. Much of it is good, some not so good. But the Lord goes to no one for advice. And when anyone comes to him, he gives them the counsel they need. He is therefore the perfect teacher and the ultimate counselor. This gives us insight into how he works. His plans are not our plans, his ways not our ways. He will accomplish things beyond human comprehension, and he will do it in ways we cannot fathom. He will do the greatest work ever accomplished, and he will do it successfully. A violent death would not be man's way to victory, but it was God's plan and our Lord carried it out perfectly.

As the Wonderful Counselor, he gives wholesome direction to His people. Those who follow him will not walk in darkness but in the blazing light of day. What help do you need today? What guidance do you seek? Trust the one whose name is Wonderful Counselor.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, all the treasures of divine wisdom are found in you. You know what I need for today and tomorrow. Grant me a holy desire to do your will. Amen.

Lord of Glory, Ray Pritchard

2nd Sunday of Lent : March 1

Soul Care: The Soul Needs Rest

Matthew 11:28–30 (NRSV)

28 “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

Our souls need rest and Jesus invites us into places of rest and restoration. John Ortberg writes in *SoulKeeping*: "Have you ever felt that you needed the time and space to let your soul catch up with your body? That's a good indication your soul needs rest"

As you reflect on Jesus' invitation to "come away with me" and to receive rest and restoration for your soul, name the signals, symptoms, and signs that you need rest above all else. And when you go away to rest with Him, remember to leave behind any guilt, shame, or voices telling you to stay burdened and busy.

Prayer:

God of the Sabbath, Grant me the courage, grace, and discipline to break away from this chaotic world and give my soul rest. Invite me Lord Jesus to the place and practices that will allow rest and restoration.

Amen

Monday, March 2

"On a hill far away, stood an old rugged cross..."

Deb Copenhaver was a champion bronc back rider who was inducted in the National Rodeo Hall of Fame:

<https://www.prorodeohalloffame.com/inductees/saddle-bronc-riding/deb-copenhaver/>

For most people he will be remembered for his 'cowboying' and rodeo days fame.

But for me, I will remember him for his gravelly voice singing one of his favorite hymns at one of the many funerals I officiated at during my time in Wilbur, Washington. Whether this local legend sung it in a church or at the graveside, in our Presbyterian church or his home 4 Square congregation across the street mattered little. Everyone who knew Deb Copenhaver and had heard him sing "The Old Rugged Cross" knew he wasn't just singing a hymn, but rather was enraptured in the moment that changed his life forever. Deb was the first to tell you that although it was his rodeo career that people knew him for, he was lost in his wild cowboy lifestyle in those days. No, it was the appeal of an old rugged cross that changed Deb's life and I think he cried every time he sang the hymn.

The old rugged cross means to stand as the defining event in all of our lives. But that is the question isn't it? Is the old rugged cross the defining event of my life or are there lesser things, identities, accomplishments, possessions that define who I am or how I live? Sing through the old hymn now and hopefully you'll hear an old cowboy's gravel voice singing back from heaven.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Thank You for the old rugged cross—the place where Your love met our deepest need and forever changed our story. As we remember those who have gone before us, like Your servant whose voice once trembled with gratitude while singing of that cross, stir our hearts with the same awe and devotion. Help us lay down every lesser identity we cling to, every accomplishment or possession that tries to define us. Let the cross be the center of our lives—the place where we find forgiveness, purpose, and new life. Teach us to cherish what You have done, to carry our own crosses with courage, and to follow You with grateful hearts. May our lives sing the same simple truth: that Your sacrifice has changed us forever.

Amen.

Pastor Rob

Tuesday, March 3

The Light of Christ

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” John 1:1-5

In the summer of 1975, I moved with my parents to Tahoe City, California. As we left our home in Southern California where I had lived my whole life, I looked forward to starting my senior year at the high school in beautiful Lake Tahoe and all the new adventures that awaited me there.

Having been raised in Presbyterian churches, it was a big switch for me and for my parents to find ourselves becoming members of the nearby Lutheran church. I enjoyed the new (to me) traditions of a liturgical church and remember the impact of that first Lenten season there.

The Good Friday Tenebrae service was very impactful for me in my young faith. It was a solemn service with the lights slowly being dimmed and candles one by one being extinguished, until the only lit candle left was the “Christ Candle” on the center of the communion table.

At last, the pastor carried the Christ candle out of the small, vaulted and paneled wood sanctuary. We all followed him out in silence, but I remember lingering in the darkened room, signifying the darkness of the tomb, without the light of Christ to illuminate it. For a moment I felt afraid. For a fleeting moment I imagined a world without the light of Christ.

I imagined the fear, emptiness and sorrow of those first Christ followers as the stone was rolled, sealing the tomb. Of course, we all know how the story turned out and that Christ really IS alive, not dead! We do not need to be afraid, knowing that the light of Christ is ever present, even in the darkest

night. A pandemic. The outbreak of a war. The tragic death of a loved one. These are things that can convince us that the light is gone.

Early that Easter morning at my home, I woke up early, climbed out of bed and stood at the window, watching the sun slowly rise up over the snowy mountains and reflecting on the lake. To say that sunrise was beautiful would be a huge understatement! It took my breath away and filled me with such joy as I was filled with a fresh awareness of God's love for me.

At the Easter service at church that morning, our Pastor carried the Christ candle in, placing it back on the center of the table. The light had been there all along, we just couldn't see it. Keep faith...Christ's light is always with us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus,

Thank You for being the Light that no darkness can overcome. When fear rises and the world feels dim, remind us that Your presence has never left us—even when we cannot see it.

Fill our hearts with the same wonder that greets a sunrise, the quiet assurance that Your love is constant and Your light is stronger than every shadow we face. In moments of doubt, loss, or uncertainty, turn our eyes toward You, the Light of life.

Keep us close to Your truth this season: that the tomb is empty, the light has returned, and You are with us always.

Amen.

Heidi Rose

Wednesday, March 4

Homecoming

*“In Jesus Christ the reality of God entered into the reality of this world.” **

“Welcome home, Son. It’s so good to see you back, although you never really left, did you. Except for that one time.”

“Yes, Father. During my ministry you were with me the entire time. I spoke your words, followed your path and remained true to you to the end.”

“I know, Son. I’m proud of you. Now I need to hear about the bad time that was so painful for both of us.”

“Right. It’s hard to describe. Being scourged, wearing a crown of thorns and being nailed to a tree was painful but bearable, knowing you were there with me. But with my last breath, I felt you leaving me. I felt completely alone for the first time. Darkness enveloped me. A blackness from which there was no return. For the first time, I experienced complete and utter abandonment.

“Yes, I know. The shedding of your blood was necessary. However, to complete your ministry, you had to truly die on the cross. Being separated from me is death. Without your death, your resurrection would be meaningless. So with your death and resurrection, our ministry on earth is complete for now. For with your resurrection, there is hope for mankind.”

“Your word, my Son, has covered this world. So those who believe in the reality of You and Me will never die, but will experience eternal life and a joyful reuniting with us and with those whom they have loved.”

Prayer

Father,

Thank You for the love that sent Your Son into our world, and for the love that welcomed Him home. As we reflect on the mystery of the cross—the pain, the

abandonment, the sacrifice beyond our understanding—open our hearts to grasp more deeply the hope His resurrection brings.

Lord Jesus, You entered the darkest places so that we would never face them alone. Help us trust that because You were forsaken, we are now forever held. Because You died, we may live. Because You rose, we have the promise of home with You.

Let the reality of Your love shape our lives today, and keep us steady in the hope of the joyful reunion You have prepared for all who believe.
Amen.

Kent Lord

**From "Bonhoeffer- Pastor, Martyr, Prophet, Spy." by Eric Metaxas page 469*

Thursday, March 5

A Lenten Season

As a child, Lent always marked the season where we had to give up something. My father would have my sisters and I take time to think about what that would be and whether or not it was appropriate. This was further supported by our CCD classes on Sunday at the Catholic church, where we would complete worksheets or discuss in groups with our classmates the meaning of Lent and what it meant to "give up something."

Sometimes it was chocolate. Sometimes it was soda. Always it was something small and trivial, but in my child mind I felt dutiful. Noble. I was so proud to give up my favorite candy if it meant I was fulfilling my duty as a good Catholic.

Years later I found myself sitting in a new Catholic Church in the middle of the Lenten season. I was young and newly separated from my first husband. I had a toddler in tow. It had been awhile since I had been in church and I knew

tough times were ahead. I was desperate for an anchor. During this particular service though, all I found was sadness. In this period of Lent where I had been taught to think about the things we would give up so that we could bring ourselves closer to God, all I could think about was how much I had lost and would be losing. My marriage, the house we had just bought together, a picture perfect family. By communion time I had come up with the conclusion that I was also losing the Catholic church! Divorce is a sin after all. I remembered learning that a divorced person is technically excommunicated from the church. No longer a Catholic. As soon as I received the body of Christ, we left the church quickly so that I could cry quietly in my car.

Some friends invited me to their church for Easter Sunday. It was a Presbyterian Church, a Korean Church that had recently hired an English speaking pastor to shepherd the adult and teen children of the membership. The service started with lively music, there was a small band playing. I thought the order of service was unstructured, more like a fun class. Listed to a few more songs, and then some welcoming prayer. The Easter service sermon was celebratory. HE IS RISEN. I felt that in my heart, it resonated through me. A weight was lifted off of me. *The spaces where I had felt empty were filled as I realized how naïve I had been to believe there would be any circumstance that God would not welcome me.*

Things got more difficult for me before they got better in that period of my life, but I never forgot this particular season of Lent and remember it as a significant time of reconciliation and renewal. Praise God.

Prayer

Gracious God, Thank You for meeting us in every season of life—our childhood understandings, our heartbreaks, our fears, and our unexpected homecomings. When we feel lost or unworthy, remind us that Your love never turns away. You welcome us not because we have held everything together, but because You hold *us* together.

In this Lenten season, teach us that what You desire is not simply what we give up, but the hearts we bring honestly before You. Heal the places in us marked by loss, fill the spaces emptied by disappointment, and renew our spirits with the hope of resurrection.

Thank You for being the God who receives us, restores us, and calls us Your own.

Amen.

Alane Basco-Yu

Friday, March 6

40 Days of Blessing: A Sacred Trust

The people around us are a gift from God that have been entrusted to us. God desires for us to invest our lives in these people in ways where together we grow into a fuller understanding of who God is and who we are as His beloved children. I find this is easier to do with the people who are similar to me. It is more difficult with the people with whom I don't have a lot in common. Yet with both groups when I get past the surface level of personalities and interests, I discover people -who like me - are in process of discovering all of who God is and who they truly are. Together we do a better job of uncovering life as God intends it to be.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:16-17

Blessed to be on this journey with you,

Prayer:

Gracious God, Thank You for the people You have placed in our lives—each one a sacred trust, each one a reminder of Your generous love. Open our hearts to see others as You see them, not just the ones who feel familiar or easy, but also those who stretch us, challenge us, and reveal more of who You are.

Fill our community with the message of Christ, dwelling richly among us as we teach, encourage, and worship together. Shape our words and deeds so that in everything we do, we reflect the name of Jesus with gratitude.

Bless us on this journey of discovery, Lord—learning You, learning one another, and learning who we truly are as Your beloved children.

Amen.

Pastor Tom Dabasinskas

Saturday, March 7

“Moses reported to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and hard labour.”

Exodus 6:9 (NIV)

Harsh labour

When I was training for the ministry, I had a series of summer jobs. Not only did this provide me with much-needed spare cash for another year in college, but it took me out of the “ivory tower” of training and rooted me in the “real” world.

One summer, I worked in a factory in the “general labouring squad”. One part of that was to work with the gardener – grass-cutting, window-boxes, weeding, and the like. The gardener, “old Donald”, was one of the most overtly Christian, and, at the same time, most depressing men I’ve ever met. And the depth of his faith was at the root of his depressive attitude to life.

As we walked through the factory floor, he would berate a random worker with, "You're a sinner! Give yourself to the Lord!", regularly responded to with "industrial language" and frequent two-fingered salutes. On wet days, when we potted in the greenhouse, he would sit with his head in his hands and bemoan the sins of the world.

There was no grace in old Donald. He was weighed down with the "harsh labour" of being a devout Christian. And, as a result, he was always discouraged and deeply depressed.

When Moses was being guided by God in facing the Egyptian oppressors, he knew he had a commission to follow and a God who promised deliverance for his people. But when he reported this to the Israelites, they didn't listen, "because of their discouragement and hard labour". Their burdens were so great and their labour so hard that they couldn't even hear the promises of God's constancy Moses was conveying to them. As a result, they couldn't hear God's voice.

My granny had a take on this. "Don't be *hauden doon* by your faith, son." In other words, don't be burdened by the weight of responsibility of being a Christian. God's promises are real. It's not all on your shoulders. Are God's grace and mercy not designed to lift you from your "discouragement and hard labour"?

Prayer:

God, whose promises are true and whose Word is constant, as I lay down my burdens before you, enlighten me with your Grace, dispel my discouragement, and let my labour with you be a partnership of Love. Amen.

Tom Gordon

3rd Sunday of Lent: March 8

The Soul Needs Blessing

"The Lord bless you and keep you; The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace" Numbers 6:24-26

John Ortberg writes in SoulKeeping: "We are creatures with wills, and in every encounter with other people we will do what is good for them, or we fail to do so: we will do what is bad. We cannot help ourselves. Blessing is not just a word. Blessing is the projection of good into the life of another. We must think it, and feel it, and will it. We communicate it with our bodies. Blessing is kind of like an ancient dance of Hokey-Pokey; before you finish you have to "put your whole self in". Blessing is done by the soul.

From whom have you received a blessing that transformed your life? Who is in your life today that needs to receive a blessing from you? Blessing is done by your soul. Go forth and bless.

Prayer:

God of the Blessing, we ask that you bless us and keep us so that we may bless and keep up the dignity of others you've placed in our lives. As you bless me today, make me a blessing to others. Amen

Monday, March 9

Carry My Cross

"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." Luke 9:23

As a child, when I heard this verse, I imagined myself literally carrying a cross to follow Jesus. If not literal, what did it mean? Today, as I think about these famous words in Luke 9:23, I find myself pondering the cross itself. From the

viewpoint of heaven, what is the cross that Jesus is talking about? How does a Christ follower like me carry my cross?

What happened on the cross is regarded as the pivotal event in all of human history, one that triggered earthquakes, ripped temple curtains, divided time and changed hearts. But this particular cross derives its power from the person who was nailed to it. Perfect, blameless...completely innocent and full of light. This God-man came to show the disparity between God's ideal in the person of Jesus and man's depravity in habitually choosing self. Does carrying my cross mean denying myself and striving to live my life in such a way that showcases what Jesus is like; selfless, blameless and full of beautiful life-sustaining light?

In John 3:16, Jesus said "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son..." The New Testament is full of verses that cite the demonstration of God's unfathomable love as the reason for the cross. The cross was terrifying, painful and excruciatingly lonely. Crucifixion is still considered one of the most barbaric ways to execute people, yet it is the brutality and public shame of it that put God's great love on display. One could say carrying my cross means actively seeking ways to exercise extreme love to those around me, even to those who don't deserve it and even when it is at great personal cost to me.

Suffering from the cross, Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Embedded in the Father's heart of extreme love is the merciful act of radical forgiveness. Only God's special brand of love can forgive those who knowingly betray, hurt and even kill. It is an otherworldly selfless forgiveness that is beyond human ability to understand. How do I waive my "right" to seek punishment for those who have hurt or wronged me? How do I go a step further and agree to carry the consequences of that wrong without malice and hate? The cross stands alone as a symbol of radical forgiveness. Carrying my cross means forgiving with no strings attached.

As we celebrate this season of Lenten, I must ask myself... am I one of the innocent ones, blameless in a world of pointing fingers and raised fists? In the heat of injustice toward me, do I whisper, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do?" Do I stand silent before my accusers as Jesus did? Do I give up all "rights" to my life, comfort and personal plans to allow the Holy Spirit to produce in me extreme love for all, even those who hurt me or use me, forgiving them by letting those wrongs go and humbly bearing the consequences of their choices as part of showing God's extreme love?

God has promised to deal with all injustice in His time. In His perfect wisdom, He did not assign me with that task. Instead, He designed me as a vessel through which He can pour His pure life-giving light, extreme love and radical forgiveness. May it be so.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Thank You for the cross—its beauty, its mystery, its costly love. Teach us what it truly means to follow You: to lay down our rights, to deny ourselves, and to carry the cross You place before us with humility and grace.

Fill us with Your selfless love, the kind that reaches even toward those who wound us. Make us willing to forgive as You forgave, to love as You loved, and to let Your light shine through our lives in every moment of surrender.

Shape our hearts this Lenten season, Lord. Calm our desire for comfort, soften our instinct to cling to ourselves, and lead us into the radical, life-changing way of the cross. May Your Spirit form in us a love, a mercy, and a forgiveness that can only come from You.

Amen.

Sharon Pegany

Tuesday, March 10

One of my favorite parts of the Easter story is after the resurrection, when Jesus is asking Peter if Peter loves him. I can relate to Peter here because I, too, am quick to say yes, and slow to grasp the meaning of loving Jesus. At night, when I pray to God, asking him what role I should take in some situation facing me, I have received the same feedback Peter does in John 21. "Feed my sheep." And so I set to counting sheep. Who are my sheep in this situation? What kind of food do they need? These answers usually lead me in charting a course of action. My sheep are those people God has placed in my life that day. Their needs are typically not hard to figure out. And Jesus stands behind me imploring me to feed. And yes, Jesus, I love you. So off I go to feed. And if we all feed just one sheep today, won't we have a happy flock!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Thank You for asking us the same tender question You asked Peter: *Do you love Me?* Teach us that loving You is more than words—it is the willingness to care for the people You place in our path each day.

Open our eyes to see our "sheep"—the ones who need encouragement, kindness, patience, or simply someone to notice them. Give us hearts ready to serve and hands ready to share the nourishment of Your love.

As we follow You, help us feed even one sheep today with grace and compassion. And may the flock around us grow healthier, happier, and closer to You because of the love You pour through us.

Amen.

Camille Cooper

Wednesday, March 11

Sharron Clark

The first time I was single, it seemed right and normal. Then for many reasons, I became divorced, then being single was painful, lonely and very vulnerable. It took a long time to see Single as a Title. Over the years we have all experienced titles. There are few titles or situations that are permanent. Lent is a season of reflection: I found the following to be reliable and trustworthy statements of who WE are.

I am complete in Him Who is the head over all rule and authority—of every angelic and earthly power (Colossians 2:10).

I am alive with Christ (Ephesians 2:5).

I am free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2).

I am far from oppression and will not live in fear (Isaiah 54:14).

I am born of God, and the evil one does not touch me (1 John 5:18).

I am holy, without blame before Him in love (Ephesians 1:4; 1 Peter 1:16).

I have the mind of Christ (1 Corinthians 2:16; Philippians 2:5).

I have the peace of God that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:7).

The Spirit of God, who is greater than enemies, lives in me (1 John 4:4).

I have received abundant grace and the gift of righteousness and reign in life through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:17).

I have received the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Jesus, the eyes of my heart enlightened, so that I know the hope of having life in Christ (Ephesians 1:17-18).

I have received the power of the Holy Spirit and He can do miraculous things through me. I have authority and power over the enemy in this world (Mark 16:17-18; Luke 10:17-19).

I am renewed in the knowledge of God and no longer want to live in my old ways or nature before I accepted Christ (Colossians 3:9-10).

Prayer

Gracious Father, Thank You that our truest identity is found not in any earthly title, but in who You say we are. When seasons of life leave us feeling alone, unwanted, or uncertain, remind us that in Christ we are complete, loved, protected, and made new.

Let the truths of Scripture settle deeply into our hearts—truths that declare we are alive with Christ, free from fear, covered by grace, strengthened by Your Spirit, and renewed day by day. Help us receive these promises as our foundation, especially when other labels feel heavy or painful.

Lord, during this season of Lent, teach us to rest in the identity You have given us and to walk confidently in the life You are forming within us. Thank You for being faithful in every chapter of our story.

Amen.

Sharron Clark

Thursday, March 12

Prince of Peace “He will be called . . . Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

Will there ever be peace on earth? Most days the answer seems to be no. But this name brings good news with it. The phrase literally means “the prince whose coming brings peace.” It is the climax of all that has gone before. The word “prince” means something like “General of the Army.” It speaks of his high position. The word “peace” speaks of his basic nature. All over the globe there are ethnic conflicts and tribal wars. As I write these words there is turmoil in Syria, Egypt, Iran, Yemen, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Chechnya, Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Pakistan, Libya, the India-China border, the Republic of Georgia, Dagestan, and in the East China Sea. We’re almost immune to violence because we live in a violent world. Isaiah 9:6 tells us that God’s plan for world peace focuses on a baby asleep in a manger in Bethlehem. He is the ultimate Prince of Peace. • In the past, his coming made peace with God. • In the present, those who trust in him find peace in their hearts when Christ comes in. • In the future, his second coming will usher in a kingdom of peace.

We live in a world marked by strife and bloodshed. He is not a failure. We are. God’s ultimate plan for peace rests not in treaties or education or material prosperity. God’s plan for peace is the Maker of Peace, Jesus Christ. To know him is to know blessing and happiness. To live without him means a life that is restless and miserable. He came to bring peace. He did. He does. He will. Will you do what makes for peace? Is there someone you need to make peace with? You can do it because Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. Lord Jesus, you came to bring peace to a world torn by sin and suffering.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Prince of Peace, we thank You that in a world overflowing with conflict, fear, and division, You remain the One whose very presence brings peace. When the nations rage and our own hearts feel unsettled, remind us that You have already made peace through the cross, that You offer peace to us today, and that You will one day establish perfect peace forever.

Teach us to be agents of Your peace—to seek reconciliation, to forgive freely, and to reflect Your gentle strength in the places You have put us. Where there is unrest, bring Your calm. Where there is hatred, sow Your love. Where there is brokenness, shine Your healing light.

Make us instruments of Your peace, Lord, for You are the One who came to bring peace—You did, You do, and You will.

Amen.

Lord of Glory, Ray Pritchard

Friday, March 13

Everyone knows the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet. But let us revisit this scene. The narrative starts out with *“Jesus knowing that His hour had come....having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end.”* He is near the end and will be cruelly and unjustly put to death. He IS fully God, but He is ALSO fully man. Paul tells us in Phil. 2:6-7 that Jesus set aside His prerogative as God and lived as a full human. As a full and healthy human I would be in terror thinking I was soon to die. But instead of focusing on fear, Jesus was all about loving the men He had been given to love and teach. Everything was for them, but He would no longer be physically present everyday. The high calling of loving each other was primary on His mind. He had already seen how they could be torn apart by petty jealousies and selfishness.

Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel He girded Himself about. Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples feet, and to wipe them with which He was girded.....And when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, *“Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord,*

and you are right, for so I am. If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you." (John 13)

The washing of feet was necessary in this day whenever one entered a home (very dusty or muddy roads with only sandals on!), but it was done by servants or slaves, not the Lord and Teacher. But this kind of servanthood and love was quintessential to Jesus's life and message.

When I first read this story I was 16. To me the lowliest job around was the cleaning of the commode in the bathroom. I did everything possible to avoid that. Did Jesus mean this? Couldn't be. Yet, I was starting to love Jesus at that time and the Holy Spirit was definitely telling me that it included cleaning the commode. That was the first of many lessons in serving others where He spoke to me about doing the hard thing. I am still learning about doing the hard thing (the least of them is cleaning the commode), since Jesus did the most hard thing for His disciples and for us. It's that kind of love that changes the world.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Thank You for showing us what love looks like—not from a distance, but kneeling on the floor with a towel in Your hands. In the face of fear, betrayal, and suffering, You chose compassion. You chose humility. You chose to serve. Teach us to follow Your example in the everyday places of our lives. Give us willing hearts to do the hard things—the unseen, unglamorous acts of love that honor You. Help us to set aside pride, impatience, and self-protection so we can love others with the same gentleness and courage You showed Your disciples. As You washed their feet, wash our hearts, Lord. Make us servants who reflect Your love to a world that desperately needs it.

Amen.

Jann Stimac

Saturday, March 14

Every year on Maundy Thursday, our family has a special “Last Supper” Dinner. Each year, after dinner, we read John 13 and then take turns washing each other’s feet and sharing things we love and appreciate about the person whose feet we just washed. It’s the same ritual every year, but I’m always struck by the rich meaning of this moment. Even if our kids had just gotten into a sibling squabble, they encourage one another and wash those feet like they are serving someone VERY special. And especially when they get chosen to wash the “parents feet”, they consider this the biggest honor of all. I love how this ritual reminds our kids that Mom and Dad equally need Jesus to wash our feet and cleanse our hearts. And I love how it reminds them that they too have the power to serve and encourage one another just like Jesus did for those who knew Him best, and often showed Him their very worst.

As I look back on pictures each year of our kids washing one another’s feet, I am reminded of what Jesus spoke into His disciples lives as He wrapped the towel around His waist and knelt down to touch His dirty friends. The theme of Grace: Jesus had absolutely no business touching something so dirty and disgusting with His holy hands- but He didn’t hesitate to give them not just His presence, but His touch. The theme of community: Jesus could have done this in private, one disciple at a time, but instead He chose to do this around a communal table exposing both their collective need for a Savior, and His collective offering of Himself to anyone who would allow His healing touch- even Judas.

And the theme of authenticity: I am sure that the disciples had many moments of hiding in their three years together and, like all families, I’m sure they struggled to be authentic and honest even as they lived beside Someone who knew them inside and out. But as they sat around that table, having one of the dirtiest parts of their bodies touched by Holy hands, the Savior of the world exposed not just their filth, but His acceptance of them just as they were. They didn’t have to hide or posture, or make jokes and tell stories (which had probably filled so much of their three years in ministry

together) all they had to do was sit there as they really were...and let Jesus love them.

As we prepare for another "Last Supper Dinner," that is what I long for most for my kids, not just from this night, but from their childhood as a whole: That our children would look back on their years in this imperfect house, with their sinful and imperfect parents, who had a front row seat to their equally sinful and imperfect little hearts, and know that because of who Jesus is, as the God of the basin and the towel, we saw them and heard them and lived in the mess that fills each of our foot basins, and loved them still. And that they would know that Jesus...who knows them even better...loves them most.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for kneeling before Your friends and showing us that real love is found in humble service. As we remember Your basin and towel, teach us to receive Your grace with honesty and to offer that same grace to one another. Fill our homes and our hearts with the kind of love that sees, hears, and embraces each person just as they are. Help us serve one another with joy, knowing that You love us most and love us still.

Amen.

Misty Zeller

4th Sunday of Lent: March 15

The Soul Needs A Center

James 1:6–8 (NRSV)

6 But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; 7 for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.

James 4:8 (NRSV)

8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.

John Ortberg writes in *SoulKeeping* about the importance of a soul having one center and not being "double-minded". He writes: "A classic (person) in scripture (who is double-minded) is Pontius Pilate. He struggles with the decision of what to do with Jesus. He tries to talk Jesus into saying what will allow Pilate to free him. He pesters the religious leaders without making the decision that his authority would have allowed. He asks the crowd to let him off the hook, but they opt for Barabbas. When the world is not centered, one is never sure what temptations are worth resisting or what sacrifices are worth making."

Prayer:

God of the Center, may I have the courage, strength, and faith to center my life upon You and Your ways today. Cast out all my temptations to be double-minded and allow me to follow you with my whole heart, will, and soul.

Amen

Pastor Rob

Monday, March 16

Our Lord Jesus: "...made himself nothing
by taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.
And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death—
even death on a cross! (Phil 2: 7-8)

God reveals His grace throughout the Bible. The earliest Books of the Hebrew Scriptures record God giving humanity a second chance after our rebellion in the garden. God even instructed Jonah to witness to those awful Ninevites so they might be saved! The Psalmist recognized: "If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness..." (Ps.130: 3-4); and praised our Lord as "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love." (Ps. 103:8).

God displayed His grace to the world even before Christ's incarnation. God also blessed and continues to bless us with examples in this world of people who give others a second chance, seek reconciliation and who love even their enemies.

However, there has never been anything like His sacrificial grace revealed on Calvary. It's unlikely that there are enough days in Lent for me to get my mind around the Son of God's offering on the Cross, or to get my heart aligned with Lamb of God's Love for all of us. But what a blessing to have these 40 days to draw closer to Him and then an eternity to live in His grace!

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, please prepare my heart and my mind during this season of Lent. Make me like your Apostle Paul, who desired, more than anything, "to know you —yes, to know the power of your resurrection and participation in your sufferings, becoming like you in your death, and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead." (Phil. 3:10)

Amen.

Tom Curran

Tuesday, March 17

“Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.” Matthew 7:15

We all have them. We have all met them. We have all followed them. And perhaps you still are. False Prophets! Certainly, Jesus is speaking here about his common foes, the Scribes and Pharisees? Matthew records the words for the early Christian community because there were many false prophets in the 1st century (and beyond). It is also likely that he is speaking beyond that culture and time to the many False Prophets that have risen and fallen for the last 2000 years. They have come in all forms: from pastors to politicians; from men to women; from our hometowns to lands half way around the world. False Prophets are those who cloak themselves as people who can speak for God and claim to lead others to the Kingdom of God... but cannot. Perhaps it is stretching Jesus’ words too far, but could it also be that a “False Prophet” could also include ‘anything that promises us everything and delivers nothing’. Could a False Prophet include “something that claims to point us to the ultimate but in reality, leads us to emptiness”. Dressed in sheep’s clothing, these things can and may be at first glance and in moderation good. But underneath that clothing there is a desire to command and control our attention, our emotions, our bodies, our minds, and eventually our souls. That is because a False Prophet is ravenous to be fed. And our time, energy, and resources are its favorite foods.

In this broader definition, a false prophet is any addictive substance that promises to fulfill us but will eventually destroy us. In this broader definition, a false prophet may be technology which promises to save us time but leaves us fragmented and distracted because it became like a ravenous wolf. In this broader definition, a false prophet is an idol that we set our hearts on only to discover it wasn’t worthy of our heart’s true value. So, we are back to where we started: Jesus says “Beware of the False Prophets!” We all have them. We have all met them. We have all followed them. And perhaps you still are. Take a moment to reflect upon what False Prophets you have followed in the past? Take a moment to write down which False Prophets you are still following today? Name the ways your False Prophets entice you on the one hand and become ravenous on the other?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You are the true Shepherd who leads us into life. Open our eyes to recognize the false prophets—people, desires, habits, and idols—that disguise themselves as good but ultimately steal our peace and devotion. Give us courage to name these things honestly and the strength to turn away from anything that consumes our hearts. Draw us back to You, the One who alone is worthy of our trust, our worship, and our whole lives.
Amen.

Wednesday, March 18

Temptation, the Cross, and the Empty Tomb -- [Hebrews 2:14-18](#)

When Jesus took on the constraints of a body, He also opened Himself to the endless downward pull of temptation – more sinister than gravity, but just as much a characteristic of life on planet Earth. The writer of Hebrews painted it in realistic colors, too: “He . . . *suffered* when He was being tempted,” (NIV).

We also feel the ache of it, the hopeless gnaw of repeat offenses, the falling short.

We see in our own sin tendencies a small shadow of Jesus’ temptation in the wilderness at the outset of His ministry. Knowing full well what His Father had called Him to, Jesus resisted Satan’s enticement toward more drama, more visible power, and more public appreciation for His divine prerogatives. His God-given work would include hours of sitting in silent prayer, days of washing feet and touching lepers, and years of trudging over the back roads to find people who would rather be lost. He did not cave in to the greed of doing “more.”

Riding the bucking bronco of temptation to its mastery, Jesus felt its full force. Most of us will never know the full degree of temptation simply because . . . we cave. John Owen, a 17th-century English Puritan, wrote an entire book about “killing sin” based on Romans 8:13b:

“If by the Spirit, you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

As children of the age of self-help books, 12-step programs, and “Everything-Under-the-Sun for Dummies,” we come to the Word of God looking for a method, a sin-killing strategy that we can execute and then move on. What we find in the Word of God is not mechanical, but relationship-oriented. Fight temptation, hate your sin, take the Spirit’s power, and do it as if your life depends upon it. It does.

Therefore, while we have holidays that celebrate what Jesus did for us through the manger, the cross, and the empty tomb, we must not overlook the benefit we receive from His having lived a perfect life in the midst of family conflict, criticism from every side, physical weakness caused by hunger and thirst, and the day-to-day annoyance of life with twelve power-grabbing, hot-headed followers. Having entered into our situation “in every way, in order that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest,” we know that when we cry out to Him for help in overcoming sin, we are coming to a sympathetic – and empathetic – conqueror who “knows our frame. He remembers that we are dust,” but who is also able to empower us in the battle against temptation.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You know the weight of temptation and the ache of our frailty, for You have walked this path before us. Strengthen us by Your Spirit to resist sin, to hate what harms our souls, and to cling to the help You freely give. Thank You that You meet us with mercy and power every time we cry out to You.

Amen.

Thursday, March 19

Your INVITATION to REST -- [Mark 4:33-41](#)

For my entrance to the season of Lent, I want to give up the huge magnifying glass I've been using to scrutinize my spiritual practices—and pretty much everything I do. Rather than experiencing Lent and the days leading up to Easter as a season of deprivation, what if we embraced it as an experience of rest?

What if we rested from the unhelpful ruts we've dug and began to make room for God to do a new work in our hearts? A posture of rest leaves room for life-giving rhythms, habits of holiness, a daily meeting with God for the sole purpose of enjoying God!

When we rest from the hurry-up and hustle, we stop asking, "Did I do enough today?" We find grace to receive prayer as a relationship without worrying that we did it "right." We name our sins in the same breath with which we thank God for his forgiveness.

If this sounds subversive to you, you're not alone, and you're not the first. When Jesus drew back from the crowds for restorative rest, his disciples all but scolded him, and they interpreted his nap in the stern of a pitching boat on stormy waves as apathy: "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38)

Rest in the life of Christ came with a whiff of rebellion. Likewise, when you receive God's invitation to slow down, you may bump into the expectations of people who enjoyed your productivity or who mean well, but simply don't understand the specific call of God upon your life.

Remember, God is not opposed to working, only to earning. We may be called to do hard things, but never for the purpose of earning God's love. All true acts of righteousness come as a response to his great love.

So if you sense a call to fast from some activity during Lent, receive it as an invitation to rest from it, to clear the decks, and to make room for something better. If God calls you to give up a meal or a particular food as an act of worship, thank him for the opportunity to rest your body and to focus on feeding your spirit instead.

Prayer:

Gracious God, teach us to rest in Your presence and to lay down the burdens of striving and self-scrutiny. Quiet our spirits so we can receive Your love without earning it and make room for the new work You long to grow in us. Help us embrace this season as an invitation to slow down, trust You, and simply enjoy being with You.

Amen.

Come Close to the Story, Lenten and Easter Devotionals, Michele Morin

Friday, March 20

“On one of those days, as he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there, who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with him to heal. And behold, some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, but finding no way to bring him in, Because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.” LUKE 5:17-19 (ESV)

Pastor Nadia Bolz-Weber describes how she understood the truth of our interdependence most fully when she began practicing the uncomfortable honesty demanded by Alcoholics Anonymous. “Recovery is hard to do on your own,” she observed. “You have to do it with a group of other people who are messed up in the same way but have found some light in their darkness.”³⁴ They nicknamed this sort of community “The Rowing Club.” They were all in the same boat. And they would have to take turns pulling on the oar. At times, each person would have to be willing to be carried.

Some days we can be the one who gives, and other days we need to receive. Which is it for you today?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for the friends and community who carry us to You when we cannot walk on our own. Give us the humility to receive help when we need it and the compassion to lift others when we are strong. Make us faithful “buttresses” for one another so that, upheld by Your love, we can stand with courage and hope.

Amen.

“The Insight of Outsiders,” Nadia Bolz Weber

Saturday, March 21

Be Thou My Vision

A favorite hymn Be Thou My Vision, which comes from an Irish poem written by Dallan Forgaill, points my heart to the victory already won for us through the cross. He is faithful to provide all that we need when we keep our eyes on Jesus Christ.

Be Thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best Thought, by day or by night,
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.
Be Thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.
Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.
High King of Heaven, my victory won,
May I reach Heaven's joys, O bright Heaven's Sun!
Heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
Still be my Vision, O Ruler of all.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, be our vision and the steady light that guides our hearts in every season. Turn our eyes from lesser things so we may rest in the victory You have already won and trust Your faithful provision each day. Fill us with Your wisdom and keep us close to You, our true Treasure and High King of Heaven. Amen.

Jann Stimac

5th Sunday of Lent: March 22

The Soul Needs Satisfaction

Read Psalm 131.

A part of this Psalm reads: "My heart is not proud, O Lord. My eyes are not haughty...I have stilled and quieted my soul; like a weaned child with his mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me".

John Ortberge writes in SoulKeeping: "Whenever you're disappointed, whenever you don't get your way, take that disappointment as a chance to practice soul-satisfaction in God". He also writes: "The paradox of soul-satisfaction is this: when I die to myself, my soul comes alive"

Prayer:

God, may I be satisfied in You today. May You be enough for me. Help me ward off my cravings for more: more stuff, more success, more ego, more victories so that I may experience what it means to be satisfied in You. And as I die to myself, may my soul come alive.

Amen

Pastor Rob

Monday, March 23

"Do not judge so that you will not be judged. 2 "For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you. 3 "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? 4 "Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' and behold, the log is in your own eye? 5 "You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye." Matthew 7:1-5 1

I once preached a sermon series called 'the humor of Jesus'. It is noteworthy that nowhere in the gospels is Jesus said to be laughing. Some have taken this to mean he never did, and further did not have a sense of humor. One such person met me in the line going out of the sanctuary and said in a disgusted tone: 'well, I hope your next sermon series is on the WRATH of God'! I laughed...internally of course. Jesus' illustration in these verses demonstrates his ability to use metaphor as humor. The picture of a man with a 'log' in their eye who believes they can help someone else with a speck is both ludicrous

and ready made for an old-time comedy skit. But humor aside, Jesus is concerned about the wrath we can bring onto others when we judge.

Judging of others, in other words, is no laughing matter but carries serious consequences. 'Do not Judge' is a well-worn statement but it must be said, often taken out of context. Jesus is not saying that a person should not judge at all in the sense of discernment (which takes judgement). But he is drawing attention to our proclivity to judge others caustically, unjustly, and too often with malice, even though we may lead with the phrase, 'bless their heart'. Jesus' teaching here is clear and concise and aims to teach on hypocrisy: before we judge outwards, look inward. Before we condemn another and denigrate their reputation, we are asked to confess our own faults and acknowledge our own need to repair ourselves. In my example, it is important for me to examine my own need for Jesus to possess a sense of humor as much as it is to be aware of my parishioners need to have a God of justice.

Perhaps she is right, and I am wrong. Perhaps she had done unto her a horrible sin or an experience of great darkness which God's wrath is needed to handle. Or more than likely, we are both right and no judgement is needed for the other person. God is God. God is complex and sovereign. God can be a 'God of Joy' and 'God of Justice' at the same time. In fact, don't these verses show us precisely that. On this Lenten Journey, where is God calling out our 'judgmental' spirit and actions? What 'logs' can we name that necessitate divine surgery? What 'specks' in other's eyes annoy me and cause me to judge in ways Jesus warns me against?

Pastor Rob

Tuesday, March 24

A King on a Donkey

Matthew 21:1-11

It was Sunday, the day we now call palm Sunday. Without a doubt, this wasn't Jesus' first visit to Jerusalem. As a devout Jew, he would have gone to the city every year for the three great feasts (Luke 2:41-42; John 2:13; 5:1). In the past three years, Christ had also ministered and taught in Jerusalem. But this Sunday His coming into the city was radically different.

By riding a young donkey into Jerusalem at a time when thousands of worshipers were coming into the city, Jesus was the center of attention (Matthew 21:9–11). Why would He take the place of prominence before thousands of people went for the past three years He had deliberately kept a low profile? Why would He accept the People's proclamation that He was king just five days before His death?

Matthew says that this took place to fulfill a 500 year old prophecy (Matthew 21:4–5) that God's chosen king would come into Jerusalem "righteous and victorious [yet] lowly and riding on a donkey" (Zechariah 9:9, see also Genesis 49:10–11).

This was a truly unusual way for a triumphant king to enter a city. Conquering kings normally rode on mighty stallions. But Jesus didn't come riding a war horse. This reveals what kind of king Jesus is. He came in meekness and lowliness. Jesus came not for war, but for peace, establishing peace between God and us (Acts 10:36; Colossians 1:20).

What kind of king is Jesus to you today? How can you honor Him as your king?

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for coming into Jerusalem to reveal your mighty and humble ways. Fill my heart with your peace.

Amen.

Bob Reister

Wednesday, March 25

Lion of the Tribe of Judah “See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . . has triumphed” (Revelation 5:5).

C. S. Lewis understood. When he wanted to symbolize Jesus in the Chronicles of Narnia, Lewis created Aslan the lion. And not just any lion. He’s the King of Beasts and the real ruler of Narnia. Mostly unseen because he is always on the move, Aslan is powerful and yet kind, gentle but fierce. He is to be feared and revered and honored and trusted. In one of the most famous bits of conversation in the whole series, Lucy asks the beavers, “Is he safe?” “If there’s anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking,” Mrs. Beaver replies, “they’re either braver than most or else just silly.” “So he isn’t safe?” asks Lucy. To which Mr. Beaver replies, “Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.” That’s the whole point of this image. Lions aren’t safe, but it matters greatly whether or not they are good. Satan himself is called a “roaring lion” who prowls the earth looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). He’s not safe and he’s definitely not good.

But Jesus is good and that changes everything. He came from the tribe of Judah just as Jacob had predicted almost two thousand years earlier (Genesis 49:10). In his first coming he arrived as a helpless baby in the manger. But before long he confounded his teachers, baffled his parents, enraged the power brokers, challenged the hypocrites, and at the same time he welcomed little children, touched the lepers, healed the sick, cast out demons, calmed the storms, cured the blind, and he even raised the dead. As he was dying, he uttered words of forgiveness for his murderers. The Bible sums up his life by saying he “went around doing good” (Acts 10:38). The Lamb who died is the Lion who prevailed over death. But that is not the end of the story. He came the first time as the Lamb of God. He will come again as the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. He is the Lamb who is a Lion, the compassionate Savior who will one day rule the world. Let us learn from this what it means to follow Jesus. Put on the meekness of the Lamb and you will have the strength of the Lion. Follow the Lamb and the Lion will protect you from all your foes.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, without you we can do nothing. Unless you help us, we are bound to fail. May your mighty strength may flow through us today. Amen.

Lord of Glory, Ray Pritchard

Thursday, March 26

I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you. — John 17:20-21a

In this text, Jesus continues his prayer, the longest of all his prayers in the Gospels, and asks God for an intimate closeness between him and all believers “that they may all be one.” It is always fascinating to me that in that time and place, the Messiah did not come as a king or a great warrior. He didn’t speak of power and war and the conquering of enemies. He came to earth as a poor man who spoke about compassion and relationship, which are things modern minds find familiar, but ancient minds may have found confusing. If this Messiah has come to save us, they may have thought, then how does he expect to overthrow the Roman Empire with only talk of love and connection?

In 2001, the Community of St. John Baptist helped found an orphanage in Cameroon, West Africa, called the Good Shepherd Home. The motto of the home, which cares for more than a hundred children on a regular basis, is “May we all be one.” You can see that motto all around the home on plaques and painted on walls. A sign above the main door features these words with a painting of Jesus holding little children on his lap.

Jesus’ prayer shows us what God wants from us. His words and actions in the Gospels make it clear that God yearns for us to live in peace as one human family, loving one another as he loves us. Episcopal Relief & Development’s work is grounded in interfaith and intercultural collaboration. They work with core Episcopal and Anglican partners, in addition to other faith-based and secular partners, using an approach that is grounded in compassion and respectful of the dignity of all human beings. Transcending theological and political differences builds a stronger force of change than division and exclusion ever could.

Can you picture a world in which divisions have ceased and we consider every human to be our family member?

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, You prayed that we would be one, united in love just as You are one with the Father. Help us lay down the divisions that separate us and see every person as part of the family You are creating. Make us instruments of Your peace so that Your prayer for unity may take root in us and in our world. Amen.

Sister Monica Clare, Lenten Meditations

Friday, March 27

“Jesus answered him, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.’ Nico demus said to him, ‘How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?’ Jesus answered, ‘Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.’” —JOHN 3:3-5 (NRSVUE)

When my son turned two, I had just been diagnosed with cancer, and thought that was the last birthday I would get to spend with him. So I decided to throw him an absolutely absurd farm party. So recently, when he turned nine, I decided to celebrate again with another huge farm themed birthday because I couldn’t believe that I was still here with him. I went all out. We couldn’t just sit on chairs, we had to sit on bales of hay. We couldn’t just have desserts, we had rice crispy cake that looked like—more hay. I invited anyone who I have ever known and so there were herds of children running around like wild things. At one point I looked around and I could see my kid delirious with joy, and he ran up to me and asked, “Is this the day that I’m born again?” I thought yes, that is exactly how I feel about it. Being born again is like this reset button. God loves to make us new. We can be in the muck of all kinds of things—health, bad things we’ve done, bad things done to us, anything—and suddenly be free to start again. Or move on. Or feel the wild joy of zooming around hay bales for no reason except the calendar has declared that you are suddenly new.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You that by Your Spirit we can be made new again and again, no matter what we carry or where we’ve been. Wash us with Your grace today and help us receive the gift of a fresh start—hope renewed, joy restored, and courage to begin again. May we walk in the light of what You have already finished for us.

Amen.

The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days

Saturday, March 28

“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Philippians 2:5–8 (NIV)

As someone from an unchurched background who has spent most of her Christian life in less-formal Protestant settings, I have very little experience with Lent. Last year, for the first time, Mark and I dipped our toes in the water with Lenten devotional readings. And this year, with some trepidation, we decided to also give something up for the 40 days before Easter. We knew we didn’t want it to be legalistic, and we haven’t talked about it much except with each other. But we trusted that God would work in our hearts through this small gesture, the meaning of which we only imperfectly understood. And now, several weeks in, I think I’m beginning to see the point. When I have thought about that small thing which I enjoy but have chosen to mostly go without, my thoughts have often turned to what Jesus chose to forego, and undergo, for my sake. He traded the glory of His Father’s presence for messy and painful human life. He underwent unimaginable physical, emotional, and spiritual torment to make me, and you, members of His family for all eternity. Observing this ancient practice has deepened my gratitude and my love for Him. In a wonderful way, it has also made me feel connected to our brothers and sisters throughout the centuries who have followed a similar path to remember Jesus’s sacrifice and grow in Him.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you for what you gave up to give us eternal life. Please deepen my understanding of your sacrifice. And please let my gratitude show itself in greater love for those around me.

Amen.

Jeanine Lutzenhiser

6th Sunday of Lent: March 29

The Soul Needs Freedom

The cry of the crowd on the first Palm Sunday was "Hosanna". The word shouted out was a cry for freedom: free us Lord. Of course, we know now that the crowds were asking for a different kind of freedom than Jesus was going to offer us. They wanted political freedom, national freedom, religious freedom. Jesus wants to free our souls.

John Ortberg writes in SoulKeeping: "The enslaved soul is sick and needs reviving. In the early centuries of the church, people began to speak of the "cure of the soul". One of the early church fathers wrote, "For the cure (sometimes translated care) of the soul, the most variable and manifold of creatures, seems to me in very deed to be the art of arts and science of sciences. He goes on to say that the cure/care of souls is harder work, more important than healing bodies. Sometimes when we use a therapeutic word like healing, it can sound as if we're only talking about the wounds and the scars and the hurts we carry around. We do all have those. It's good to be open about them, but at the core, the disease that really threatens our souls is sin. I am complicit in the sickness of my soul in a different way than in diseases that attack my body. I say yes to greed and lust in a way I don't say yes to colds and strep throat."

What are you desiring to be set free from? What sin most enslaves you?
What sin are you most complicit in? Cry out to Jesus: Hosanna.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, Hosanna. Save me from myself and my disordered drives. By your grace and mercy, re-align my heart longings and soul ordering so that I may experience a curing of my soul during this Holy of Weeks.

Amen

Pastor Rob

Monday, March 30

Loving and Giving – John 13:31-35

Our son sawed lumber, hammered nails, and used a paintbrush dipped in Mediterranean Olive green to create custom-made doors for our bathroom closet. There are any number of things a twenty-year-old guy could do with his Saturday. He chose to give his away.

When Jesus gathered in the Upper Room for the last time with his disciples, he was clear about two things:

1. He was going to leave them physically, but physical separation did not mean spiritual separation.
2. They were to love one another with the same kind of love Jesus had demonstrated for them.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.” (John 13:34, 35)

Shortly, he would provide the greatest possible illustration of that love, a self-giving that seeks the good of its object at any cost.

Confronted with this quality and degree of love for fellow sinners, a love that transcended natural affinity, geography, and even cultural differences, the world came to recognize that the disciples had “been with Jesus.” (Acts 4:13)

There were any number of things Jesus could have done with his life here on Earth. He chose to give it away.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for showing us a love that gives itself away for the good of others. Teach us to love with the same generosity and humility, so that our actions reflect Your heart to the people around us. May others see in us the unmistakable mark of having been with You.

Amen.

Come Close to the Story, Lenten and Easter Devotionals, Michele Morin

Tuesday, March 31

Who Is God Calling Me to Love? -- [1 Corinthians 13](#)

The love Jesus put on display was characterized by sacrifice, the embodiment of a selfless my-life-for-yours. Viewed through this lens, Lent becomes a participation in sacrificial love. The question, “What should I give up for Lent?” is no longer an equation of earning; it’s a response of gratitude. We don’t give up chocolate or Netflix or social media to earn more of God’s love or favor. God’s love is already given in full measure.

What if, instead, we all entered our Lenten celebration with the question, “Who is God calling me to love?”

God’s love is based on strong promises that have been recorded in His Word, and God’s covenant with us, His people, is firmly based upon grace. Rather than giving up on us in our stubborn disobedience, He perseveres in relationship with us and makes stunning promises:

“I will put my laws in their mind and write them on their hearts.” ([Hebrews 8:10](#)) This is a promise of internal change. Since God’s commands were written on tablets of stone, any attempts to uphold the law in our own

strength will only leave us crushed and without hope. However, in Christ, the standard is written with love on the lining of our hearts, and the Holy Spirit directs us toward true righteousness.

“I will forgive and remember their sins no more.” (Hebrews 8:11, 12) On the basis of grace and mercy, God “forgives and forgets” our failures – not because of any deficiency in God’s memory, but because He chooses not to hold them against us any longer. Given that experience of having been forgiven, it is possible for me to uphold my promise to “forgive and forget” in my relationship with my husband and to extend grace to my children when they are the repeat offenders, for certainly this is what I have experienced from the hand of our forgiving God.

Furthermore, the love of our covenant-keeping God which never fails has made possible a relationship like no other. Throughout history and around the world, humanity seeks the divine. In the search for meaning or significance, there is a struggle to transcend the mortal “box” somehow and to commune with the higher power.

By contrast, the truth of the Bible is that the God of the universe has already entered our “box,” becoming like us through the incarnation. Then, rather than demanding our obedience through fear and threats of punishment, He has offered to write His law – not merely on our doorposts, or on our Sunday-morning smiles — but on our hearts. We follow Him and live in obedience out of love and gratitude – not because we are looking for a way to heaven.

This is a love like no other. Amy Carmichael said it well: “Love of all loves, in Thee I know Love Divine.”

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You for the love that You poured out so freely and completely for us. Write Your law of love on our hearts and open our eyes to the people You are calling us to love today. Let our sacrifices this season flow not from earning, but from gratitude for Your grace. Amen.

Wednesday, April 1

Rest as an Act of Faith

Isaiah delivered a wistful invitation from God to his restless people:

For thus said the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel,

“In returning [or repentance] and rest you shall be saved;

in quietness and in trust shall be your strength.” (*Isaiah 30:15*)

Resting in the reality of God’s faithful protection and his plan for their future was just too big of an assignment for Israel. God said “rest,” and they would not, preferring instead to take matters into their own hands.

Are you willing to rest in God’s love for you, to trust in the effectiveness of his salvation? Does YOUR plan of salvation require props that you provide—work that you alone can do? Does it require affirmation from the right people and places?

Hear the word of the Lord:

“Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you,
and therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you.

For the Lord is a God of justice;

blessed are all those who wait for him.” (*Isaiah 30:18*)

Blessings to you as you rest in God’s great provision and delight in his means of grace.

Prayer:

Lord God, teach us to rest in Your love and trust in the salvation You alone provide. Quiet our striving hearts and help us release the plans and props we cling to, so we may find strength in returning to You. Make us willing to wait for Your grace, knowing You are always faithful to protect, guide, and show mercy.

Amen.

Come Close to the Story, Lenten and Easter Devotionals, Michele Morin

Maundy Thursday, April 2

Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand." Matthew 26: 36-41 (NRSV)

Of all of the days in the Christian year, the next three days are perhaps the most important and sobering. We Christians call these next three days the Holy Triduum (the Three Days)—Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday. These three days give us a glimpse into both the best and the worst aspects of being a living, breathing, feeling human. The church sets these days aside so to invite us to enter into the Passion—the suffering and death—of Jesus Christ.

Today, Maundy Thursday, we stand at the threshold of joy and sorrow, covenant and betrayal, life and death. There is perhaps no more day so aligned with our human reality and complications—and our liturgy proves it. As soon as we finish feasting at the Lord's Table, we hear the haunting clank of soldiers' boots on the garden's path and face the looming trauma and pain of the cross. The lights dim. The candles extinguish. The organ wanes. And we scatter in silence with no benediction for our liturgy continues through the Great Vigil.

At the onset of these days, Jesus asks his disciples—he asks us—to stay awake, to watch, to keep vigil, and quite honestly, that's hard. The next three days we will encounter the very rawness of life and death. Through word and song, bread and cup, rising and falling, we will enter into the very depths of this Christian life and face the reality of pain, betrayal, and death. It would be easier to look away or to escape into slumber. But to enter the glory of these days, to sit and watch, is to enter the heart of Christian faith. In doing so, we prepare ourselves to face anew the reality of this life—with all of its pain and sorrow—but also to wait for the hope and joy found in the life to come.

Prayer:

Almighty God, whose Son went not up to joy but first suffered pain, grant that we, being watchful, may live into these days fully facing the mystery of death so to ready us for the mystery of life eternal through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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Good Friday, April 3

"Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother. 'This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, but he will be a blessing to many others. He had been sent as a sign from God but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul'" Luke 2:33-35

At the church I attended with my family before moving to Poulsbo, the different events of Lent were observed. We would go to the Ash Wednesday service, the Maundy Thursday service, the Good Friday service, and the celebration of Easter Sunday.

The Good Friday service was a somber experience as the story of Christ's death upon the cross was revisited. As the service drew to a close and Christ's final words were spoken, the lights were lowered and we were asked to leave the service without speaking. It was always a moving experience.

One year as we left, each family was given a large spike with a red ribbon attached. It had a message that directed us to keep it and hang it on our Christmas tree every year, so we would relate the birth of our Savior to His sacrifice at the end of His ministry. At the end of Easter, I put the spike away with our Christmas ornaments.

The following Christmas season as we decorated our tree, I found the large spike with the red ribbon. I recalled that Good Friday service and told my kids how the birthday we were celebrating on Christmas was the beginning of Christ's journey in this world. He would teach us to live and care for each other and offer us salvation, if we had faith in Him. That spike with the red ribbon continues to remind us every year that Easter begins with the Christmas story.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank You that from Your first breath in Bethlehem to Your final breath on the cross, Your life was a gift of love for us. As we remember both the cradle and the cross, help us hold the wonder of Your birth together with the weight of Your sacrifice. Let the story of Your coming fill us with gratitude, deepen our faith, and shape the way we live and love each day.

Amen.

Cathy McVicker

Saturday, April 4

“For I know the plans I have for you” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity”. Jeremiah 29:11-14

I think all of us can relate to moments when we struggle to trust in the Lord’s plan. Sometimes it’s the small disruptions that throw off our day—losing a wallet, getting a flat tire, or stubbing a toe. Other times, it’s the life-altering events that shake us to our core—an injury, a lost job, or the passing of someone we love. In those moments, we’ve all found ourselves wondering, Is this truly what the Lord has planned for me?

Over the past several months, I’ve been reflecting deeply on my own journey with the Lord, especially as I feel myself entering a new season of discovering who I am and who He is calling me to become. My life has been marked by significant change. As a child, I moved across the country to an unfamiliar place. I graduated college in the middle of a global pandemic. I was called to serve in a town very different from the one I grew up in. And even now, I’m still learning, still growing, still seeking clarity about who I am meant to be.

I felt led to write this devotional to share with our church community what I've come to understand so far about walking in the Lord's plan. I've learned that change can be frightening, unsettling, and deeply uncomfortable. His plan is not always clear, nor is it linear. It's a journey that sometimes places us in the depths of the mud and, at other times, lifts us to the mountaintops. As someone who naturally loves to plan and strives to reach goals as quickly as possible, I've had to learn that life with the Lord is not a sprint to the finish line—it's a marathon. It requires endurance, trust, patience, and faith that every step, even the difficult ones, are shaping us into who He created us to be.

In this season of growth and uncertainty, Jeremiah 29:11–14 has spoken to me in a powerful way. As I read it for the first time, it felt like a direct reminder of something my heart has been learning all along—to trust and have faith in His plan, even when I cannot fully understand it.

These verses reassure me that He desires what is good for me and what is best for me. They remind me that the path ahead is not accidental, but intentionally crafted. The lessons I face—whether joyful or difficult—are not random moments, but purposeful steps meant to shape and refine me.

In a life that often feels uncertain and constantly changing, this promise brings peace: that His plans are filled with hope, His direction is meaningful, and His heart toward me is always good.

Prayer:

Lord, help us to trust in Your plan, even when the path feels uncertain or unclear. Strengthen our faith to believe that Your intentions for us are good, and that every season is shaping us according to Your purpose. Teach us to walk with patience, courage, and confidence in the hope You promise. Amen

Marlon Basco

Easter Sunday, April 5

He is not here; for he has risen...—Matthew 28:6

Only a week had passed since that triumphant Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem—but what a difference in the little procession that set out now! No cheering crowds, no waving branches. Just a few silent women setting out in the gray dawn to perform the last sad rites at the tomb.

The day that changed human history was not a public occasion but a private one. The day when everlasting life broke into earthly time began not with celebration but with tears.

This is still the way Easter breaks into our lives—when we least expect it, when all seems lost. That's when the stone rolls away and the angel speaks and “death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Corinthians 15:54)

If it seems too good to be true, this joy that invades our hearts, it seemed so on the first Easter morning too. Mary Magdalene could not believe what her eyes were telling her; she took Jesus to be a gardener at work early among the graves. Preoccupied with her loss, she barely glanced at the figure standing before her on the path. She had a mournful task to fulfill and—

“Mary.”

There in the first light of dawn, Mary stood still. That voice...that tone of loving involvement. This was the moment, the moment when Jesus called her by name, that Easter broke like the sunrise into her heart. It is how we recognize Him still. The risen Jesus calls us so personally, comes into our lives to individually, that with Mary Magdalene, we cry out in glad recognition.

And then we do what the women did on that first Easter Sunday. Dropping their spices and ointments, the burdens of their sad errand, they rushed to tell the others. They set the pattern, these women who were first at the empty tomb, the two-fold pattern of the Christian faith newborn that Easter morning. They met the living Jesus. And they brought the good news to those who grieved.

That's always our role, when it's Easter in our lives; to tell someone else that He is risen.

I've found that during the hardest, heaviest seasons, I need a release valve. For me, that usually involves visiting a world's largest or world's tiniest. Like seeing the Giant Mosquito in Komarno, Manitoba. Sometimes we see the wild, beautiful things of life to remind us that absurdity can live here too. We are not all one thing. We can experience pain and fear and loss AND joy and laughter and courage too.

Prayer:

Blessed are we who long to awake.

May we find the places where
beauty and love can reach us.

We're ready for something new.

Amen.

Kate Bowler and Jessica Richie. "For Waking Up to Life Again" in The Lives We Actually Have: 100 Blessings for Imperfect Days.