



2023 Lent Devotional

Cathy Clark



Director of
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Joel 2: 13

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.

Lent is a season of preparation and repentance during which we anticipate Good Friday and Easter. Just as we carefully prepare for big, life changing events in our personal lives, such as weddings or graduations, the time of Lent invites us to make our hearts ready for remembering Jesus' passion and celebrating Jesus' resurrection.

We are on a journey towards the cross. The booklet you hold in your hand is your companion. Each day there is an assigned reading with a devotion written for you to ponder. My prayer for each of us is that we intentionally slow down this Lenten season and daily experience the darkness. It is only as we experience the darkness that we will appreciate the light of Easter.

Journey with us, O holy God, as we begin our way to the cross. Sharpen our focus, that our attention may center more on you than ourselves. Lead us through the shadows of darkness and prepare our hearts, that we might be a people of prayer, ready to perceive and respond to your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In his name we pray...Amen

February 22



Gwen Bateman

Joel 2: 12-13

¹³ Rend your heart and not your garments.

The awful, frightening Day of the Lord was fast approaching. The sky was darkening, and the sun, moon and stars were losing their light. The people were frightened because they realized they were not ready to meet the Lord. They had been living in sin and they knew it. Even though they knew the Lord was slow to anger and merciful, they were frightened. God told his people that if they would call upon Him, He would give them a chance to redeem themselves. The land had been ravaged by a locust plague, the people were starving and dying of thirst. In the midst of disaster, the true understanding of God is often lost. It is the task of the prophet, in this case Joel, to turn the people away from their sins and wrongdoings to God. Joel is a good prophet and God asked him to use the plague of the locusts as an example for the people and their children to turn back to their God. What do you think today's plague would be? Would it be our love for a comfortable life, good food, electronics, and entertainment instead of helping others? To turn back to God, He asks that they do not rip their clothes, He asks them to rend their hearts, because then He would know that they were truly ready to repent.

Are you growing closer to rending your heart to God?

February 23



Nyameye Maison

Matthew 4: 1-11

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

The devil tried to manipulate Jesus into putting his own needs before God using scripture, but Jesus stayed strong and trusted in God. God sent Jesus to be an example from humble beginnings to grow to save us from our sins, by dying on the cross, and rising from the dead into heaven. Then he sent the Holy Spirit to guide us after Jesus went to heaven. We have to fight the devil's temptations, face challenges, and trust God and let his will be done. By paying attention to scripture, asking the Holy Spirit to grant insight to God's word, and help to live and serve in God's favor we can grow deeper in our faith. Matthew 4:4 says "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God." This can be interpreted by just sitting still and listening to what God is trying to tell and teach us. Our conscience, scripture, and small daily encounters are all ways God can speak to us if we listen. It is important to know that even when the devil tricks us in his different forms, God still forgives us. This Lenten season we can learn from scripture. We should strive to do the right thing, ask God for help and forgiveness, take extra time to listen to God's voice, pray, reflect, help friends and family, help at loaves and fish or a food bank, any opportunity to learn and teach more about God and scripture.

February 24



Julie Rolffs

Psalm 1: 1-3

¹Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, ² but whose delight is in the law of the LORD, and who meditates on his law day and night ³ That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither - whatever they do prospers.

Verse 3 in *The Message* reads: *You're a tree replanted in Eden, bearing fresh fruit every month, never dropping a leaf, always in blossom.*" A tree that is always in blossom, bearing fruit every month - what a beautiful word picture! Wouldn't you love to bear fresh peaches year-round?

"Whatever they do prospers." Let's be one of "them!" *"...the one[s] ... whose delight is in the law of the Lord."* The law of the Lord is God's Word; His words given to about 40 different authors - what we today call The Bible.

Do you ebb and flow in your "delight" in God's Word? You're not alone, but don't give up. My "delight" peaks when a verse from God's Word comes to mind at the right moment, or when a verse is shared that pertains to my life. If we don't know God's Word, we will have trouble "delighting" in it. So for 2023, let's continue our commitment as a church to read the New Testament and to get God's Word in our heads. Because, at the end of the day we want whatever we do for God's purposes to prosper - to bear good fruit always - to be that fresh, sweet peach in the middle of winter to the soul hungry for the sweetness of God! Let us pray ...

Father God, we believe. Lord, help our unbelief. We want to hunger for and to delight in Your Word ALWAYS! Come, Holy Spirit, and feed us with the fruit of the Word, that we might be that fruit for someone else. We pray In Jesus' name, Amen.

February 25



Peggy Cranford

John 3: 1-21

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

This is one of the most well-known passages of the Bible. It begins with the story of Nicodemus, a Pharisee. He came to Jesus at night probably because he was afraid of the what the other Pharisees would do to him. He asked Jesus how a man can be born again. Jesus answered that a man must be born of water and the spirit to enter the kingdom of God. Nicodemus still did not understand. He was confused by the idea of being born a second time. Jesus then goes on to explain that Nicodemus if he does not understand earthly things that he will not be able to understand heavenly things that Jesus was sent to tell him. He goes on to explain that God sent him not to condemn the world but to save it.

What a sacrifice! As a mother, it is impossible for me to understand the huge sacrifice that God gave us as a gift. The idea of losing a child is something I cannot comprehend. Yet God sent his only son to us for that exact purpose. God loves us so much that he made the supreme sacrifice for us. We are all sinners, but God is always giving us another chance to do good things in this world. It is so simple but also so complex. We need to believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that he came into the world to save us all. By believing in him and trying each day to live as he lived, we can be saved. That is a wonderful thing that our God is doing for us. It is a great gift. We only have to accept it.

February 26



Dee Ioder

Hebrews 10: 9-13

⁹Then he (Jesus) added: See, I have come to do your will. He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. ¹⁰And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ¹¹And every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³and since then has been waiting until his enemies would be made a footstool for His feet.

Jesus reminds us that the priests had to make daily sacrifices on the altar to pay for the sins of the people. Every day it had to be repeated. When Christ came, He sacrificed His life to pay for the sins of the world. It was enough to cover all our sins. Then He could take his place at the right hand of God, which is the position of honor. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for us imperfect people. As we confess our sins, we know that His blood has already cleansed us. Good works cannot erase our sins.

His sacrifice was God's plan to pay for our sins once and for all. His enemies will be made the footstool for His feet.

I tend to think in terms of music and hymns. There is a song by Paul Baloche which fits this Scripture called "Once for All."

The words are:

Once for all, you died so we could live again.

Once for all, you washed away our sin.

Streams of mercy and love flowing free forevermore, and your blood ran down,

Once for all.

February 27



Sherry Hayes

Isaiah 55: 1-2

¹Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost? ²Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?

Every January, I go to the doctor's office for blood work and my yearly exam. However, the labs show how poorly I have been eating when my glucose is high, or my cholesterol level has climbed. I know I should eat better throughout the year, but I fill myself with the empty calories of sweets and carbs that do not nourish my body.

It is the same with my intake of social media, the latest streaming series, Hallmark movie, or news program. My viewing habits do not nourish me or satisfy my soul but leave me empty. Instead, I want to hunger for God's word. In each of the Bible studies I have done, I received words or teachings that resonate with me. I want to write those words on my heart instead of having a temporary 'aha' moment.

God calls me to come. Come to worship, come to a women's event, and come to serve. At the recent Women @ First event, I realized how much I have missed fellowship with others. It was wonderful meeting ladies who attend the Renuévo service and reconnecting with old friends I have missed.

What has God put on your heart? Is there something that you feel God has called you to do but you have been putting it off? Is He calling you to visit a friend, volunteer at Loaves and Fish, lead a Bible study, or something else?

Dear Lord, Let us thirst for what you offer that money cannot buy. May we come to you for fulfillment, listen with our ears open, and seek you in all we do.

February 28



Carol Hobin

Romans 5: 12-21

¹²Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way, death came to all people, because all sinned. ²⁰The law was brought in so that the trespass might increase. But where sin increased, grace increased all the more, ²¹so that, just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This scripture tells how God uses Adam's choice to bring sin into the world. Then Paul, the reading's author, tells how Christ's sacrifice removed sin and gave a state of grace to all willing sinners. During Lent, most people work on purifying themselves by praying, fasting, or by giving something up, a small sacrifice compared to Christ's. According to *What is Lent All About and Why Is it Important?*, "doing good things is also a choice for Lent." Doing good things involves a small sacrifice of your time and a large reward for your heart! If you have not done this before, consider adding this to your Lenten activities. Just keep it simple: compliment a coworker, thank the mailman, make the bed for your teenager, clear the dishes even when it's not your turn, pay the bill for the next person in line at the drive-up, say "I love you" one extra time to your spouse/child/pet.....the list goes on.

While doing these daily good works, let us not forget that we cannot earn God's forgiveness through our good deeds or sacrifices-Jesus has already done that for us through His ultimate sacrifice on the cross. We are simply using Lent as a time to purify ourselves and to prepare ourselves to celebrate Easter, the glorious day when Christ rose from the dead!

March 1



Sandy Carver

Genesis 22: 1-14

¹Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied. ²Then God said, “Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.”

This was a BIG ask from God! He is saying, “Yes, I know. I promised you a son, but now you have to give him back.” What???? Yes, Abraham has a long history with God at this point. Abraham has always said “Yes” when God has called. Abraham has learned he can trust God, that His promises are true, but this.....? Yes, this is a story of obedience, trust, and provision, but the bigger story, in my book, is about idols. Abraham LOVED Isaac!!! He and Sarah had waited forever to have a son. But the bigger question is: Does Abraham love Isaac more than God? That’s what God is asking. That’s the part that has consistently tripped me up.... always makes me stop and think: What or who do I love more than God? Who or what stands between me and God? Am I willing to “kill” them for God.....totally let them go....my sons...my bank account... my family... my friends...and the list goes on. Believe me when I say, I have truly wrestled with this question more than once, and it continues to raise its ugly head now and then. But ultimately what I have learned, and sometimes need to relearn is, just like Abraham, there is nothing or no one I can trust more than God, It IS safe to obey Him, even when the request is a BIG ask! His promises are true always, and His blessings/ provisions are without end. God wants us to love Himtotally... fully... without reservation....just like He loves us! That was the BIGGEST ask of Abraham. It is the BIGGEST ask of us.

March 2



Steve Gustafson

Luke 9: 23-27

²³Then He said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me....²⁶If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels...."

In the Old Testament book of Exodus, we were given the Ten Commandments as a guide as to how we should live our lives with others in this world. In the New Testament book of Luke Jesus has given us a guide as to how we are to live for and serve God. We have all heard that we must take up our cross and follow Him. Is He saying that we should constantly seek out situations where we face certain torture of death? Absolutely not, but we are to be prepared to face trials while following Him and acknowledging Him as Lord and Savior in the course of our lives here on earth. This may indeed put our lives in peril as it has so many thousands who have preceded us and many even now in other parts of the world.

We are told that if we deny or are ashamed of knowing Him, surely, He will also be ashamed of knowing us. That should strike fear in every follower and call our own salvation into question knowing that He will not act as our advocate in God's court. Without His taking our part, what chance do we have on our own of eternity in heaven? How is it possible to deny knowledge of Jesus in any arena after His death and resurrection on that first Easter weekend?

March 3



Bill Wuthrich

2 Chronicles 7: 14

...if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from Heaven and forgive their sin and will heal their land.

After Solomon had finished building the temple, God told him, 2 Chronicles 7:12, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place as a temple for sacrifices." You would think that everything is well and good. But God asks for more from Solomon and his people than a building. He is asking them for four things: humility, prayer, to hunger for Him continually and to turn from sinful behavior. He is asking for their acts of obedience.

We experience Lent as a time of rejoicing anticipation, where we prepare our hearts and minds for glorifying Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. How do we prepare? What is God asking of us?

This scripture tells us: Be humble, it is about surrendering to Christ to lead us, not us leading ourselves. It is about prayer. As busy as our lives have become and as precious as time is, it is imperative that we stop and talk to God. 1 Thessalonians 5:17 "pray continually". It is about having a great desire to be in God's presence and will. We find what that is by being in His Word, the Bible. It is about repentance and shunning evil. We are sinners and we desperately need healing that only God can do. He doesn't ask us to pick one of the four conditions, but to embrace all the conditions and comply. In humility, I ask you how are you doing? As a congregation, in today's culture how is our church, God's church doing? All we are and all we have is from God. Let's get ready to meet Him with Joy this Easter.

March 4



Pete Ault

Ephesians 1: 3-8

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴For He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in His sight.

I love to read. One of the reasons for my love of books is the fact that someone has woven a story that is so amazing that I simply cannot comprehend how the author was able to come up with all of the facts, ideas, and wording to bring me into the story in a way that transforms my thinking and widens my knowledge and horizons.

Sometimes I get discouraged in the midst of the story because I do not understand how it will come out, but this almost always makes me want to pursue the ending with a renewed vigor. The fact that I may be discouraged or not able to understand leads me to want to find out the author's plan.

Ephesians tells us that we can trust the author of the universe – our God – who has chosen us to be a part of His story. His ending has been the same from before time. We are part and parcel of His story, and have been, even before our earthly lives. God's goal, and the end of His story, is that, through Christ, we can be holy and blameless. This undeserved gift – grace - available throughout our lives, comes into focus in this Lenten season, when we look to Jesus Christ on the cross.

God is the author, and Jesus is the finisher of our faith. God's goal – that we be holy and without blame before Him in love – is brought about by the death of His Son, and we have but to accept the undeserved gift of God through the death of His Son in order to walk with Him forever in eternity.

March 5



Christina Koeppel

Psalm 8

⁴I can't help but wonder why You care about mortals – sons and daughters of men – specks of dust floating about the cosmos.

In *The Magician's Nephew*, C.S. Lewis paints a clever picture of creation. As Aslan roams the empty space, he sings a melody. As his roar pitches higher or lower, the grasses of the meadows and the trees of the forests form, animals of all kinds rise out of the soil fresh with new life, mountains, valleys, and rivers buzz with activity. He transforms a London cabby and his unaware wife into the new king and queen to oversee his new creation.

In Psalm 8, David glorifies God above all creation. He mentions the moon and stars, animals of the field, fish of the sea, birds of the sky, living things of all kinds, all which point back to the magnificence of God. And yet... over all of His creation, He has placed us.

As I look back in my life, I can remember several times where the greatness of God has been impressed on me by nature. I've seen the thumbprint of God in the hexagonal columns of Giant's Causeway in Northern Ireland; or in the Pacific Ocean as you look over the cliffs of Oregon, (I could go on forever, but I think you get my point)...

And yet... God has placed us over all of His creation. "I can't help but wonder why You care about mortals – sons and daughters of men – specks of dust floating about the cosmos." (Psalm 8:4 The Voice) As we continue to travel through this Lenten season, I invite you to dwell upon this great honor and responsibility God has given us. We are "specks of dust floating about the cosmos," and yet God, in all of His wonder and majesty, invites us to the party.

March 6



Connie Duffy

Micah 6: 6-8

⁸And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.

When I reflect on who God is, I find my mind can't begin to get a full understanding of him. I know many things about him, and I'm always learning more. Sometimes I try to imagine standing before him and what it will be like when I meet him face to face. When I do, what comes to mind is that I fall so short. "With what shall I come before the Lord?" Try as I may, no offering I could give would make up for my shortcomings. Thankfully, God loves me (us) so much that he gave his one and only Son to die in my (our) place. Were I asked to do the same, I don't think I could.

So, what can I offer? What does God want from me? I could serve on every committee at church, attend every event the church holds, out-work anyone I know for the Lord. Would that a big enough sacrifice? No. Don't get me wrong, the many ways we serve God are important, but these acts alone fall short. In Micah 6:8 God answers this question, "To act justly, and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God". Often, the simplest things make the biggest difference. Some examples are to think before I speak, offer a smile to someone who may need it, be welcoming to those I encounter, get to know those I haven't met before, give others the mercy and grace God has given me, and introduce them to God's unfathomable love.

March 7



Fatima Gutierrez

Mark 9: 14-15, 17-24

¹⁴When Jesus, Peter, James, and John approached the other disciples, they saw a large crowd surrounding them and legal experts arguing with them. ¹⁵Suddenly the whole crowd caught sight of Jesus. They ran to greet him, overcome with excitement. ¹⁷Someone from the crowd responded, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, since he has a spirit that doesn't allow him to speak.....

In this passage, the bible teaches us three different things: Trust, Faith, and Compassion. Love above it all unites these three and is shown through the father bringing his son to Jesus for his salvation...the same way God sent his own son for the salvation of humanity. The man had faith that Jesus would save his son; he trusted his word and knew Jesus would save him. Jesus showed compassion, and not only that, but also showed what following him and having faith in him and God truly means. “If you can do anything? All things are possible for the one who has faith.” Most of us will not be expelling demons out of others, but through our life we will come across trials and situations where we need to trust and have faith in God to help us move past it. As we grow in life and faith we need to be reminded of God's love and to offer that same love to others. Compassion and love above all else are what we should strive for. Just as Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Matthew 22:39 CEB). Trust and faith in God are something as believers we should always remind ourselves of because no matter what may come, God will always be there. To guide us, love us and protect us, so we may live a life according to his will and love one another as ourselves through his light. Amen.

March 8



Daniel and Jessica Swope

Romans 8: 18-27

¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

On this journey through life, we will experience all the hurts, fears, and frustrations that come with being human. Lovers may go through heartbreak. Couples may struggle to conceive. Family and friends will pass away. Sadly, there's no way to avoid the pain in this world.

But God...

As believers, we know how important it is to maintain our hope. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 13 that hope, along with faith and love, is vital to our walk with Christ. Our Lord loves us so much that He's given us the gift of hope in this life. That hope is a product of the faith we keep in the promises of our resurrected savior, Jesus Christ. Every joy, every praise, every deliverance, every vindication; it all manifested when Jesus left the grave behind. We resurrected with him, and now that glory can be ours. We are free from the bondage of pain and hurt. We will experience them, but our hope keeps us from being overtaken by them. God loves us, Christ saves us, and the Spirit intercedes for us. This gift of hope can't be taken from us. With hope, our present sufferings are nothing compared to the glory that will be revealed!

March 9



Sandi Fell

Philippians 4: 4-9

⁸Finally brothers and sisters whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

We as Christians are called upon to guard what we are thinking about, and God will do his part. By thinking about things that are pleasing to God, we experience personal victory. Paul wants us to concentrate on those positive things in life rather than the negative. Dwelling on the negative may lead us to be upset or discouraged.

As I was pondering what Paul said in his letter to the Philippians, I was contemplating those things that organically find their way into my thoughts: what to fix for dinner, what report needs to be created ... well you get the drift. However, this day I was sitting at my desk in the FUMC office, reflecting on my day-to-day assignments, and I was enjoying the sounds of around 600 young people singing in the church. Suddenly, as my thoughts shifted to my sister and her recent devastating diagnosis, I was treated to the beautiful tones of young men singing "Hey Jude, don't make it bad; Take a sad song and make it better." It was as though they were talking to me. I had been hearing beautiful voices for two days, and hearing those words helped me switch my thoughts to something positive. These young people were working together, playing together, eating together, using their God-given talents to create a sound that would be pleasing to the Lord. And it was wonderful having the church full of their 'noises'. Why did it take me until that moment to realize that this is what is true and honorable, good and praiseworthy? Stop thinking about the negative things and replace them with positive things. These are the things to think about. Can't wait until next year!

March 10



Donna Totton

Psalm 51

As I read Psalm 51, I am reminded how much of a sinner I am, and yet, God continues to love me. This thought gives me great comfort! That being said, the part of this Psalm that sticks out to me needs to become my daily prayer:

¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

If we focus on the sin that David admits, or the sins that we all have committed, we are focusing on our humanness. If we focus on, and ask God for a pure heart, the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, and help us to be sustained by a willing spirit and the joy of our salvation, we must focus on God! If we continually focus on God, and not on the humanness of this world, we can find the joy that only He can provide.

As we focus on Jesus' life and resurrection this Lenten season, let us continue to remind ourselves that only God can grant us true joy!

Wishing you all a joy-filled Lenten season

March 11



Chloe Zangara

Lamentations 3: 21-26

²²Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

The book of Lamentations, derived from the Old Testament, is written by the prophet Jeremiah. It narrates in essence the story of Jeremiah and his survival during the siege of Jerusalem, the destruction of the Temple, and subsequent captivity at the hands of Babylon.

Jeremiah recounts the moments where he felt betrayed and oppressed by the Lord. After further reflection, Jeremiah recalls this moment in his life and gives praise and gratitude for what the Lord had done. On the days we're faced with darkness and hopelessness, who can we place our hope, trust, and future in the hands of? It can often feel like the Lord is absent in the chaos of life. Lamentations 3 is a reminder of the hope of restoration when our eyes are set on the one who can make all things new. Even when circumstances and situations of life are constantly changing, the Lord demonstrates time and time again that He is unchanging. By fully trusting and putting our hope in the Lord, we can allow ourselves to be open to the promises of His unfailing compassion, love, and peace that conquers any trial or tribulation we might face.

Heavenly Father, we lift our joys and concerns to You today. When we're struggling to know You're here, remind us of Your presence. Help us not to be influenced by the circumstances of our lives or the imperfections of the World, but rather help us to keep the eyes of our hearts on You, knowing that Your plans and purposes are perfect. May we continue to be in union with others and with You and find hope in Your salvation. In Your name we pray, Amen.

March 12



Gary Fell

Ephesians 2: 1-10

⁸For it is by faith you have been saved, through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God - ⁹not by works, so that no one can boast.

What does having faith mean? It is having complete trust in God that what he has promised will come true. In some cases, it is the Holy Spirit that lives in all of us, that talks to us and directs us.

My family and I were on the way home from vacation in California and were camping each night when we stopped. We were planning on stopping in Nebraska for the night. We decided to not stop, (Holy Spirit talking to us) drive through the night and stop in Des Moines, Iowa. When we got to Des Moines, we heard on the news of a major storm that hit the campground where we were going to stop. Several people lost their lives. Without the Holy Spirit nudging us to keep driving we might not be here today.

Our faith that we should drive through the night may have saved us. Being obedient to the word brings us closer to God.

God's Grace Be with You!

March 13



Patti Overcash

Psalm 42

¹As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God...¹¹Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior, and my God.

Lent is a time to examine our hearts in preparation for Resurrection Day. Who do we love and prioritize? How does that play out in our lives? We hold our lives in contrast to God's will for us, see where we may be lacking and ask the Holy Spirit to convict and transform us. God has placed boundaries in our lives to protect us and enable abundant life (John 3:19-21).

In Psalm 42, David is in turmoil. He desperately seeks God. He questions whether he can worship wholeheartedly, let alone lead others in worship because he suffers in his soul... to his very marrow. When he seeks God passionately, he experiences His Presence. Twice in the Psalm he declares that his Hope lies in God from whom his salvation comes. His trust is solid like Abraham's. Abraham knew his lineage would continue through Isaac because God told him it would, and he knew God keeps His promises (Gen 17:19 & 22:5).

As we examine ourselves these weeks, may we look desperately to God to become the people He sees in us, repent of what the Holy Spirit shows us, and know He will transform us as He promises (Romans 12:2).

Lord, we don't want to be like the churches in Sardis and Laodicea... dead and complacent (Rev 3). Make us desperate for You because Your Ways are Perfect. Don't let us be satisfied by our own desires... align our desires with Yours. Transform us and this church into a church after Your own heart. Praying in the Name of Jesus. Amen.

March 14



Rodney Nelson

John 15: 1-8

¹I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ²He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. ³You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸This is to my Father's glory that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

Reading this passage brought a number of things to mind for me. God likens our relationship with him to a grape vine with many branches. We cannot bear anything good and God-like without a sincere faith in the Father. Similarly, a branch cannot bear any fruit by itself without the rest of the vine. God is the vine and we are the branches. This passage brings up the importance of the branches to the vine. If we follow God with love and sincerity, we will bear much fruit. If we chose to not follow God we will not bear fruit and consequently the joys of God's love.

March 15



Walt and Joyce Ely

Isaiah 53: 1-6

¹Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?

We have all heard these passages with each Easter celebration. It is we who have strayed, we who have disobeyed, we who should be condemned. Isaiah was a prophet - one of God's own spokespeople. Here, Isaiah is telling us, as much as the people of his own generation, that the One who was despised and rejected by His people will carry our burdens for us.

Multiple generations were spaced between the life and writings of Isaiah, and the birth and death of Christ. In these verses, the prophet is telling us that God is taking care of us. This must have been a beautiful means of consoling the Israelites as they battled the attackers, both from within their walls and from the other countries.

From the New Testament we know that Jesus was born in humble surroundings (a stable in a faraway city). As Isaiah declared, "a young plant, with no beauty or majesty about Him. *We esteemed Him not.* And throughout his earthly life, He maintained no position of political, financial, nor religious power. At the end of His earthly life, Isaiah's words show us the magnitude of the sacrifice Christ would give for us. He was forced to carry His own cross, was humiliated, wounded, and pierced with a sword. Yet the greatest of the burdens He bore were *our* sins against the Father. He proceeded quietly to the hill of Golgotha as sheep being brought to slaughter, except He knew the burdens He would carry the following day. It was not the physical death causing Him to sweat "drops of blood" but *the iniquity of us all* which the LORD had laid upon Him, carrying our sins to Hades to purify our souls, to bring us Peace.

March 16



Julie Bell

Romans 12: 1-2

²Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking. Instead, fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it.

Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you.

Is holy living necessary today? As a Christian is it ok to look like the world, dress like the world, and act like the world?

Have you ever said, "Don't be a copycat!" To be alive in and pleasing to God, we should not copy the world's behavior and customs. Being a sacrifice for God means that we will not be copycats of this world but be transformed; not to allow the world's pressures to change us but to radically be changed by God.

Paul points out that when we renew our minds, we will be able to test what is the will of God. We will understand what God wants of us and we will put it into practice. When we are renewing our minds we will discern and know what is the good, well-pleasing, and perfect will of God. When we have worldly minds we try to bend God's will and distort His words to fit what we want to do. We no longer are trying to discover God's will and do it, we are trying to do what we want, and we try to make God support our selfish ways. There must be a mind renewal if we are going to be alive to God, holy to God, and pleasing to God. We will seek what God wants and we will do it. We will not seek our answers, but God's answers.

God's will is good, acceptable, and perfect and the renewed mind will desire to obey that will.

March 17



Larry Krigbaum

PSALM 130

²O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

A home that we had owned on and off for over 30 years recently sold. We had left it 35 years ago, and that house is the one our children remember growing up in. We have so many great memories connected to living there for 13 years. When our son Kevin passed away nearly three years ago, our daughter Dena gave us an electronic picture frame in which she included many photos of Kevin, and many shots of Kevin and Dena growing up in that house.

As I reflect on our time there, I recall that I spent so much time remodeling and repairing things that I did not spend as much time with our children. I remember my mother telling me that the kids had told her that I was so busy doing things around the house that I didn't have time for them.

Our children are now grown and Kevin is no longer here. How important was all that time spent working on the house?

Pay attention to what is really important to you. May God forgive us for our mistakes.

March 18



Kirsten Tharp

Colossians 3: 12-17

¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. ¹⁴And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Several years ago on Sunday nights, you could find me tuned into PBS watching the show “Downton Abbey”. I enjoyed the drama, the characters, and I even began watching the show with a cup of hot tea because it just felt right. During an interview, an actress on the show shared how putting on the period costumes caused her posture to improve and her speech to become more refined. The costume helped her be in character.

Is it like that for a Christian? Is there a certain costume we can put on to make us not only recognizable as a follower of Christ, but also help our actions become more Christ-like? In Colossians 3:12-15 Paul tells Christians to “clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience”.

Just like drinking tea on a Sunday evening while watching a British period drama did not make me British, a Christian can't just put on an item of clothing so everyone will know they are a follower of Christ. Instead, people will know we are Christians by our love and the way we care for others. In life's many situations and in interactions with others, approach them in a Christ-like way. Let's follow Paul's challenge to share Christ's attributes of humility, gentleness, forgiveness, and most importantly love with those we encounter today and let Christ's peace rule in our hearts. Then let's do it all over again tomorrow.

March 19



Gabby Koeppel

John 15: 9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

In this piece of scripture, it may seem as though God's love is commanding. Like He is telling you that you have to be one way and have to do things a certain way. But this passage truly is just God telling us how much He loves us; all of us in the same way and unconditionally.

If he is able to love us to unfathomable amounts then why should we not be expected to love others the same? If we are to follow God who loves all and yet we cannot do the same, are we really following Him or just saying that we are?

I think we need to follow His command. If we are to be true followers of Christ then we need to practice what we preach. We need to love everyone the same regardless of differences. So, during this season of Lent recognize the importance of loving those around you and make the choice to adopt that idea into your life.

March 20



Jeremy Garrett

Hebrews 4: 14-16

¹⁴Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we possess. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. ¹⁶Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

What a comfort to know that Jesus can sympathize with our human weaknesses. He was tempted just as we are tempted, but He did not sin. We need to *remember* promises of God to help us in our daily walk. One of Satan's tricks is that he tries to make us forget God's promises when we are tempted. We must *remember* to seek Jesus' help when we are tempted. His Word tells us that, "...God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." (1 Corinthians 10:13). However, when we do fall let us not sit and wallow, let us *remember* the promises of 1 John 1:9, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. We have a Savior who IS ALIVE! He left His exalted heavenly position to come to earth as a man—to serve and not to be served, was tempted but did not sin, and then bore the sins of all mankind on the cross. Let us seek to worship Him with our lives as we *remember* all that He has done for us.

March 21



Charles Bush

Psalm 15

¹Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain?... ⁵Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

The missing verses (2-4) above describe several personal attributes that King David ascribes to persons worthy of living in God's holiness. They are similar to the "Be Attitudes" outlined in Matthew 5:1-12. Both Old and New Testaments exhort us to be who God wants us to be and how he wants us to live. Faith and works are critical to our salvation, but God has a personal standard set for our participation in kingdom living. This psalm is a perfect complement to Micah 6.8 (What does the Lord require of you? To live justly, to love mercy and walk humbly with your God.")

Reading Psalm 15 two words come to mind: integrity and "mensch". Mensch is a Yiddish word describing a person of integrity, morality, dignity and sense of what is right and wrong. The Yiddish language was developed long after King David's time, yet with its Jewish roots it seems plausible that the king was describing a mensch. I wish we had a comparable one word in English that means the same. "Saint" is a bit unachievable.

My daily prayer for Peoria Police officers includes an "ask" that they are aligned with God's Holy Spirit and living a life of integrity (in their private as well as public lives), respectful of others and holding no prejudices. In my own life, especially with the challenges of helping to lead the discernment process, I focus on the words of Psalm 15 and strive to achieve integrity; yes - to be a mensch.

March 22



Leticia Figueroa

James 1: 12-18

¹²Blessed is the man who endures temptation.

In this passage, James speaks to the twelve tribes that have been scattered throughout the world. Not only did they acknowledge suffering such diverse trials, they faced them with encouragement, perseverance, and by resisting temptation.

We too face diverse trials today, and struggle with the sinful tendency of our flesh.

I am reminded my own condition when I met my Savior. I was dead in sin, driven by my own ill desires, blinded to the fact that my sins begot more sin. There, spiritually dead, the Lord found me. He rescued me and showed me that all good gifts can only come from Him. God, in whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

By his Word he led me to be born again, and it is by the same Word, he encourages me to continue resisting temptation and to remain in course. For he has indeed promised a crown of life to those who love him.

Help us, oh Lord, to stand firm in your promises, to resist temptation, and to abide in your word, Amen.

March 23



Barb Bedford

Romans 12: 9-21

¹¹Don't burn out, keep yourselves fueled and aflame. ¹²Be ALERT servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder.

¹³Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.

I read these words and ponder how to live a Christ centered life. God designed me to be like a ketchup bottle. When standing on its head it appears to be upside down...but it's not. By design, the tomato spiced liquid can best be poured out from this position. We have all observed someone slapping on the bottom of a ketchup bottle that the person ahead of us inadvertently has left standing upright. The ketchup from that bottle is not pouring freely, but I don't like standing on my head! My sinful nature naturally says: "I want to be in control!"

God says: "Be expectant, trust me, be ALERT. I won't let you topple over. Trust me... then I can pour out your life for my glory." When my world gets complicated and doesn't make sense, my early reaction is: "Lord, I have nothing to give." God says: "Stay upside down, I want to help you use what you have; so, don't quit." God quiets my heart, as I pray all the harder, by reminding me I am never out of his grip.

LORD, help us to "be ALERT servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant"... so we can be poured out for you today. Amen

March 24



Susana Torres

1 Peter 2: 1-10

¹Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, . . . ²crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation...

God's people, we must rid of things that hinder. Like babes desperately craving for milk, we too must crave God's pure Word, and goodness.

God's people, let us approach Jesus, our living stone. Christ is salvation for those who accept him, but judgment and condemnation to those who reject him. If we don't draw near to him, we can't be part of his kingdom.

As God's people, we are living stones, bricks shaping his Church growing in the faith of Jesus, our organic structure. We must become a family in Christ, to join his Church. We are created by the power of God to expand his kingdom. Interlocking living stones, cannot afford isolation.

We are chosen, bound by a covenant relationship with an unchanging God. Nothing can separate us from his love. Once Jesus becomes our Lord and Savior we are privileged with a new life of intimacy with God. We are his friends, called to serve him, our King of Kings, living with hope, and kindness.

Lord when the world tempts us to leave our faith, help us to hold tight to your word. Remind us you've chosen and redeemed us by your precious blood. We belong to a faith family that supports our walk.

March 25



Farrell Davies

Psalm 19

¹³Keep back your servant from willful sins; may they not rule over me. Then I will be blameless, innocent of treat transgressions. ¹⁴May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock, and my Redeemer.”

Declining church membership among young people throughout our nation is of concern for many reasons. “Why are they not coming to church?” we ask ourselves. One of the reasons often cited by younger people for not attending church is the hypocrisy of church members. They say they see church members say one thing before God and do something different before man. Everywhere they turn, they feel they see examples of Christians’ willful sins.

In this Psalm, David is urging us to avoid this hypocrisy by knowing ourselves with the help of God. We can know ourselves by connecting with God’s glorious world that speaks to us daily through nature and by learning from His Word in the Bible. By listening to God and developing a clearer understanding of God’s glory, we can better understand ourselves and live more humbly, thus helping us avoid hypocrisy.

To connect with God’s glorious world, we can take a walk, watch documentaries about nature, read books, attend lectures, go to museums, and view online programs. We are incredibly blessed with opportunities all around us to see God’s glory!

To better know God, we can join in our church’s current study of the New Testament, attend church services and Sunday School or Bible studies, read daily devotionals, listen to radio programs, stream podcasts, and read the Bible.

May our mouths and our hearts reflect God’s glory.

March 26



Amy Krumpe

Hebrews 12: 1-6

¹Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ²We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.

The language and wording utilized in Hebrews 12 points to the dedication and perseverance required to continue the Christian walk throughout a lifetime. The words “surrounded”, “crowd”, “witnesses”, “run with endurance”, “race” and “champion” all direct our thoughts to visualizing the marathon-model of a life lived for the Lord. In order to be ready to run this race, and continue running the race each day, we are instructed to actively remove sinful thoughts, attitudes and behaviors. We cannot do this on our own. We need God’s help, guidance, and direction. In addition, we are advised to fix our eyes on Jesus and keep them focused on Christ.

God has provided me with strong spiritual mentors, effective bible study teachers, loving sisters in Christ, and treasured prayer partners over the years and through seasons of married life, mothering, and my work in the field of education. I have been strengthened and encouraged within our faith community through worship, service, and leadership opportunities. The small groups that keep me connected to the Word have offered a true and real living expression of Matthew 18:20; “for where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” All-church calls to read scripture or daily SOAPY journal writings have challenged me to participate in on-going study, reflection and prayer. All of these connections remind me that I am a vital part of the body of Christ, and I belong.

March 27



Lisa Wilson

Psalm 121

¹I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my help come from? ²My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Psalm 121 is one of the Songs of Ascent (Pilgrim Song) that the Jewish people would sing as they traveled on the uphill road to Jerusalem for one of the main annual Jewish festivals. While this psalm is only eight verses, its power and application to our lives is remarkable. When our world turns dark and our journey is rugged, where do we turn for help? Where is our source of confidence when we need to face the headwinds of life?

The confidence expressed in Psalm 121 is rooted in the beautiful vision of God---the Maker of heaven and earth. The psalmist lifts his eyes to the hills above and sees the God who is not only the destination of the journey but also the strength for every step of it.

I tend to be a worrier because I cannot be in complete control of everything. So many things are uncertain in our world as we look at how institutions, families and workplaces are out of balance and may disappoint us. Psalm 121 is a clear reminder that our focus and devotion needs to remain steadfast on God. God knows you and I intimately, and He desires that we trust Him with every situation we encounter and decisions that we are required to make. Will you vow to lift your heart, mind, and eyes to Him in all situations?

Father, help each of us to find our identity in You and keep our eyes focused on You as we grow in your knowledge and truth and meet others where they are in their journey. May we extend grace, mercy, and love to those we encounter as You have taught us. Amen.

March 28



Anabetty Rodríguez
de Cerrato

John 14: 15-21

¹⁵If you love me, keep my commands.

Loving Christ must certainly be accomplished through obedience, in exercising His commandments.

I say, Lord, as I observe your gift of life, I'm in awe of your great blessings. You have provided for my every need. Your grace allows me to reach goals. And for situations that have not yet transpired, I choose to wait on you for the perfect time. One of my dear blessings is that you have allowed me to be a mother of two sons despite a doctor's devastating diagnosis. I was barren due to a car accident, but you oh Lord, are a merciful God.

Thank you God, for loving my family.

This passage in the Bible reminds us how our heavenly Father never forsakes us. The presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives reassures us. We are not alone, therefore, we must bear abundance of fruit, of which, the greatest is love.

If we love God, we love our neighbor. He desires our unity as community, and church, walking as ONE with our brothers in Christ, helping one another.

Lord, I wholeheartedly ask, that I may always stand firm, trusting your power. May I always trust you, holding me with your loving hand, leading me in the good path. Amen.

March 29



Diane Broe

Isaiah 40: 28-31

³⁰Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall; ³¹but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

This season of Lent let's *SLOW* down our pace to feel more deeply God's love and His grace. That's when we'll best feel the Spirit's prod to Seek, Listen, Obey, and Worship our God.

Seek God sincerely in all as you ponder reading His word & experiencing His wonder. Within all of scripture He reveals his stature and throughout this world His beauty in nature.

Listen to God as He has much to say in order to keep us from going astray. He loves us so much - with all His might and sent us His Son, through whom we're made right.

Obey God in all your thought, word, and deed His Spirit will guide us in all that we need. For without the Father, the Son, and the Spirit we cannot go deeper or wider in true fellowship.

Worship God with your whole heart, mind, and soul for throughout our lives there is no greater goal. While our life on this earth can be full of turmoil, through Christ's death and resurrection we will become whole.

As we *SLOW* down and experience God's grace His love, peace, and mercy throughout our days, we become more of who He designed us to be...There's no greater joy on this earth - agree?!

March 30



Fatima Urbina de Fragoso

1 John 1: 5-10

⁷But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.

One morning while preparing a meal in the kitchen, I was struck by a rainbow of colors displayed all over the wall. This came from a small plastic figure shaped like a prism. This little figure took the sunlight and projected it in a multicolor display.

This plain plastic figure, without the sun's rays, is just another object in the house. It cannot reflect anything unless it merges with the sunlight, but once it becomes one with the light, the results are breathtaking! It attracts, captivates, and enhances the environment on which it is displayed.

This reminds me of the words of the Apostle John. He is inviting us to persevere in our fellowship with God, intimately. He wants us to live in his light instead of darkness. We too become a reflection of his light, by transmitting the sun's rays from within, just like that prism figure... touching everything around it. If our life fails to reflect his true light everywhere, it means we are fake.

When we are with God, we spend time in prayer, and the meditating of His word. Our inner "Me" is transforming. It merges through life commitment, the practice of truth, and fellowship to reflect his love, everywhere.

March 31



Gail and Mike Illuzzi

Psalm 24

⁷Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. ⁸Who is the King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. ⁹Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. ¹⁰Who is King of glory? The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.

Did you start singing along? Psalm 24 is one of many Bible passages that have been set to music. Verses 7-10 were used by George Frederick Handel in his Messiah.

While the Messiah is sung primarily at Christmas, it is also sung at Easter because many of the musical numbers refer to the resurrection of Christ. The 300-member Oratorio Society of Bethany College (enrollment 805), located in Lindsborg, Kansas (population 3,776), has performed the Messiah every Easter since 1882.

Psalm 24 asks us to let the strong and mighty King of glory come into our lives. As we prepare for Easter and the resurrection of Jesus, it is a perfect time to read Psalm 24 and open our hearts and minds to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

May the resurrected King of glory be with you in strong and mighty ways in every “battle” of life.

April 1



Joni Coe

John 11: 17-44

²⁵I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live.

On March 26th of 1990 I flew home to England after receiving word that my Dad was critically ill and not expected to live. It was no surprise to me that he died while I was en route. I just knew! Prior to that date the Lord let me know that on my birthday (March 30th) something significant was going to happen. My father's funeral was that day. I'll never forget seeing that small wooden box being lifted out of the hearse. Walking behind it up the path to the church with my family the sun was shining, the birds were singing, and daffodils were in full bloom. It was such a profound moment of closeness to the Lord. I knew my Dad's soul was with the Lord. How did I know? My father had phoned me three months earlier to tell me he had terminal cancer. He asked me to pray for the "forgiveness of my sins so I can go to heaven." My Dad believed in my relationship with the Lord. He was not unlike Martha who believed that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had been there earlier. She also believed that God would grant whatever Jesus asked of Him. My father believed that Jesus would forgive his sins if he was prayed for by a believer. He died with the assurance of Jesus's words "I am the resurrection and the life. He, though he die, he shall live. And whoever believes in Me shall never die." My father believed those words even if it was through a phone call to his daughter. Belief is everything.

April 2



John Orfe

Mark 11: 1-11

¹¹Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple courts. He looked around at everything, but since it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the Twelve.

The last week of Jesus' earthly ministry begins with Jesus having arranged use of the colt of a donkey. Significantly, the animal never labored or had a rider (10:2), making it ceremonially clean. Jesus fulfills Zechariah 9:9, a ruler coming in peace. By contrast, Jesus will return on a white horse at the Last Judgment (Revelation 19:11-16), symbolizing military might and triumph.

The Palm Sunday crowd comes to Jesus to lavish honor and praise, not to receive healing or validation. "Hosanna!" in Hebrew (translit. "hoshi'a na") means "Pray, save us!" The crowds are also pleading for deliverance. No agent of the Roman Empire would have considered a Galilean peasant on a donkey a "triumphal entry."

The cheering throng seems to have dispersed by the time Jesus enters the temple grounds. Only Mark's Gospel records that Jesus takes in "everything," literally "all" in the Greek. "Everything" would have included the operations of commerce, the moneylending tables, the seats of the dove-sellers, ...everything. At evening, Jesus and the Twelve returned to Bethany, a 40-minute walk. Jesus appears to have slept on righteous anger all night. The next day He curses a barren fig tree, walks the 40 minutes back to Jerusalem and enacts the most violent behavior of His earthly ministry.

Some takeaways: Ministry requires preparation. Jesus will equip us for the work He asks of us. Ministry requires faithful follow-through. Jesus leads by example in taking the form of a humble servant. Let us join the Palm Sunday crowds in recognizing Jesus as Lord and deliverer. When Jesus looks into our hearts, he sees everything.

April 3



Diane Pflederer

Mark 14: 1-9

³While he was in Bethany reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. ⁴Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? ⁵It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly. ⁶“Leave her alone,” said Jesus. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.

Simon the Leper was hosting a meal for Jesus and his disciples. Simon had been healed of his leprosy during Jesus’ ministry. The woman’s extravagant gift of anointing Jesus with her gift was her way of worshipping him. The costly perfume was worth about one year’s average wages. She apparently sensed that her days with Jesus would soon be over. The other guests were shocked at her extravagance and saw her gift as wasteful. They thought of other things that she could have done with the money if she had sold the perfume. The woman took a very valuable possession and gave it to Jesus as an act of devotion. What seemed like it was a waste to some of the guests, Jesus was honored by it.

The 40 days during Lent are a time for us to reflect on what it means to be a follower of Jesus. The essence of worshipping Christ is to regard him with utmost love, respect, and devotion, and to be willing to sacrifice what we have that is most precious to us. That sacrifice could be our time, our talents, or our finances. This story challenges us to not only notice the opportunities we have to care for others in need but to follow through without hesitation by generously giving to them.

O Lord, as we reflect on the sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross, help us become more willing to eagerly sacrifice our time, our talents and our finances to people in need.

April 4



Lori Herold

Luke 22: 39-46

*⁴¹He withdrew about a stone's throw beyond them, knelt down, and prayed,
⁴²"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours
be done."*

I wonder if the temptation Jesus warns the disciples about in this reading is to think that his arrest, agony, and death were the result of terrible misfortune. That Jesus got “caught” unaware when He was arrested.

Our culture is catapulting toward a belief that there are multiple paths to God. But, if this is true, isn't the obvious question being ignored? If God is truly a God of love, why didn't he rescue his beloved son?

Even Jesus, knowing what he was about to face, questioned his Father in a prayer, paraphrased by me: “Father, I know your great desire to reconcile people to yourself. But is there a Plan B? I'm not too crazy about Plan A. But if Plan A is the only one, I will do whatever you ask.” At least one disciple, “about a stone's throw away” had good hearing and reported this prayer to Luke.

We worship a God who has made the way of reconciliation to himself only through the sacrificial death of his son, Jesus. Not a god with a Plan B who snatched his son out of the hands of his enemies before he could suffer. Nor a god of a capricious and cruel nature who would say to his son, “Son, there are other ways but go and suffer anyway.”

This Lent, I pray you will reflect on the cross and the great work that was done there on your behalf and the Church. Let us never make the mistake of diminishing it.

April 5



Mike Clark

Luke 22: 54-62

⁶⁰At that moment, the Lord turned and looked at Peter and then Peter remembered that the Lord had said: “Before the rooster crows tomorrow morning, you will deny me three times.

As I read the above passage, especially during this Lenten season, I am reminded of how many times I have denied Christ in my life. Growing up, my parents encouraged me to attend Sunday School at the local Methodist church. At the age of twelve, I decided I was old enough to make my own decisions, so I stopped attending. As I look back, I realize I had denied Christ with my decision to walk away.

For the next forty years, I was absent from the church except for attending a wedding or a funeral. I am sure during those years I denied Christ many times.

It was 1994 when I decided that I could no longer ‘do’ life in my own strength. Working long hours, stress, unrealistic expectations, and countless disappointments led me to my knees. I prayed to God for help and guidance in my life. I renewed by faith in God and began to attend the local Methodist church weekly.

My life began to take on a new purpose and focus. I still had challenges in life, but they were easier to manage with God beside me. Over the next few years, I became more involved in the church and met my wife, Cathy. Together, we continue to seek God’s guidance and grow closer together as we grow deeper in our relationship with Jesus.

God is waiting to welcome us all back in spite of the many times we have denied Him. The Lenten season is a time to intentionally reflect on our relationship with God. Just as Christ used Peter as “the rock” of His church, you could be put into service for Christ and be used as “the rock” to bring someone else closer to God.

April 6



Melinda Huisenga

Luke 23: 26-34

²⁸Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children.

This scripture is smack-dab in the middle of the journey to the cross. Jesus, whose scourged, bloody body could no longer carry the weight of the beam, who must have struggled every step of the way, turned for this encounter with mourners along the road. It's a segment of scripture I'd normally gloss over. But I noticed this account of the 'wailing women' is only found in Luke's gospel. So, it makes me wonder why?

Some have said this is Jesus, compassionate to the end for those who are grieving in spite of his own suffering. Others that Jesus is giving a final warning about the coming destruction of Jerusalem 40 years into the future. Both may be true, but maybe there's more.

"Do not weep for me" ... do not grieve for me; weep and grieve ... mourn for yourselves. This takes me to "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." (Matthew 5:4) The Amplified Bible says it this way: "Blessed (forgiven, refreshed by God's grace) are those who mourn (over their sins and repent), for they will be comforted (when the burden of sin is lifted). When we get to the place where we truly mourn – not the loss of someone or something, but acknowledge before God and mourn our sin ... sin that led Jesus to the cross, then God's grace and mercy take hold. Isn't this Jesus' deepest desire for us – that we come to God in repentance and acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord? Might that be what he was saying? Weep; mourn for yourselves ... drawing people to the Father to the very end.

Are you mourning your sin during this season of Lent? Be assured, you will be blessed as you do it.

April 7



Max Prusak

Luke 23: 35-46

³⁵The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Christ of God, the Chosen One.

Imagine being present at the crucifixion of Jesus. Luke describes four groups present: rulers, soldiers, two criminals and the people watching. The rulers scoff, jeer, and mock Jesus' claim to be the Christ of God, his Chosen One. The soldiers ridicule both the rulers and Jesus concerning Jesus being the King of the Jews. An unrepentant criminal derided Jesus' ability to save people.

The repentant criminal demonstrated his faith and acceptance of Jesus as his savior. All the other people mentioned in this passage failed to demonstrate faith in Jesus.

As you meditate on this passage, ask yourself "Who am I in this scenario?"

I am reminded of an old African American spiritual hymn, "*Were you there when they crucified my Lord.*" When I hear this hymn, "*sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble*".

Jesus, I repent of my sins. I know that you died for my sins, arose from the dead and are the Son of God, the Messiah, Thank you for your grace and mercy.

April 8



Mary Walters

Psalm 22: 1

My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from helping me, and from the words of my groaning?

Have you ever felt forsaken by God? The real question is: Who hasn't? In every believer's life it sometimes feels as if God has turned away. There can be many reasons for that feeling of abandonment, but the fact is, it is just a feeling. It's not the truth. The truth is, He never leaves us nor forsakes us (Deuteronomy 31:8). So how do we reconcile that feeling of abandonment with the truth that He hasn't turned away?

In Psalm 22 you'll see that King David confronted that feeling of abandonment by praising the Lord. It seems like a counterintuitive thing to do. When you are feeling helpless and afraid, why on earth would you want to praise the Lord? But the Kingdom of God is not like the world. Praising God in the midst of trials gets the focus off of your problems and on to your Father who created you, who sees you and knows how to help you. In verse 3 David says: "Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the one Israel praises." Then he looks at how God worked in the past: "In you our ancestors put their trust; thy trusted and you delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in you they trusted and were not put to shame." Praising God when you don't feel like it is like preaching truth to yourself. It builds your spiritual muscles. With God we are more than conquerors. Read Psalm 22 and be encouraged.

April 9



Pastor Tim Ozment

Luke 24: 1-12

¹On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words.

⁹When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹²Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.



Two days earlier Jesus had been crucified in the morning but had not died until late in the afternoon just as the sun was setting. Most often this would not be a problem. However, in the Jewish faith, the next day begins at sunset, and the next day was the Sabbath. Not wishing the body of Jesus to be left on the cross or simply laid on the ground and covered over, they hurriedly wrapped Jesus in linens and place him in a borrowed tomb. Proper preparations for burial would have to wait until Sunday.

Isn't it amazing? Isn't it fitting? Isn't it a gift that these women would be the first to arrive at the empty tomb, and the first to proclaim the amazing-good-news that Jesus had risen from the dead? These women had cared for the disciples out of their own pocket. They had cooked meals for Jesus, anointed his head with oil, washed his feet with their tears, most likely did his laundry, and any number of other tasks assigned to women. Here they were, coming to do what they could to care for Jesus even in his death.

I believe, because they had cared for Jesus in so many ways throughout his life, and now even in his death, they were given the gift of being the first witnesses to the resurrection. Jesus had said, "The last shall be first. And the greatest shall be a servant to all." Certainly, these women had been seen as the least and the last. But in the end, they become the first and the prominent witness of the good news to the rest of the disciples. Isn't that just like Jesus to turn things on their head? May we become a humble servant to all; and in doing so, may God let us bear witness to God's mercy and grace.

Lent and Easter at First

Ash Wednesday Worship

Wednesday, February 22. • 6PM • Sanctuary

Lent Bible Study - Every Wednesday through Lent

(March 1, 8, 15, 22, 29)

10AM • Worship Center

Holy Thursday Worship

Thursday, April 6 • 7PM • Worship Center

Good Friday Worship

Friday, April 7 • 7PM • Sanctuary

Easter Sunday Worship. April 9

7AM • Sunrise • Worship Center

8:30 & 11:15AM • Traditional • Sanctuary

9:45AM • Renew • Worship Center

11:15AM • Traditional • Sanctuary

11:15AM • Renuévo (Bilingual) • Worship Center



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