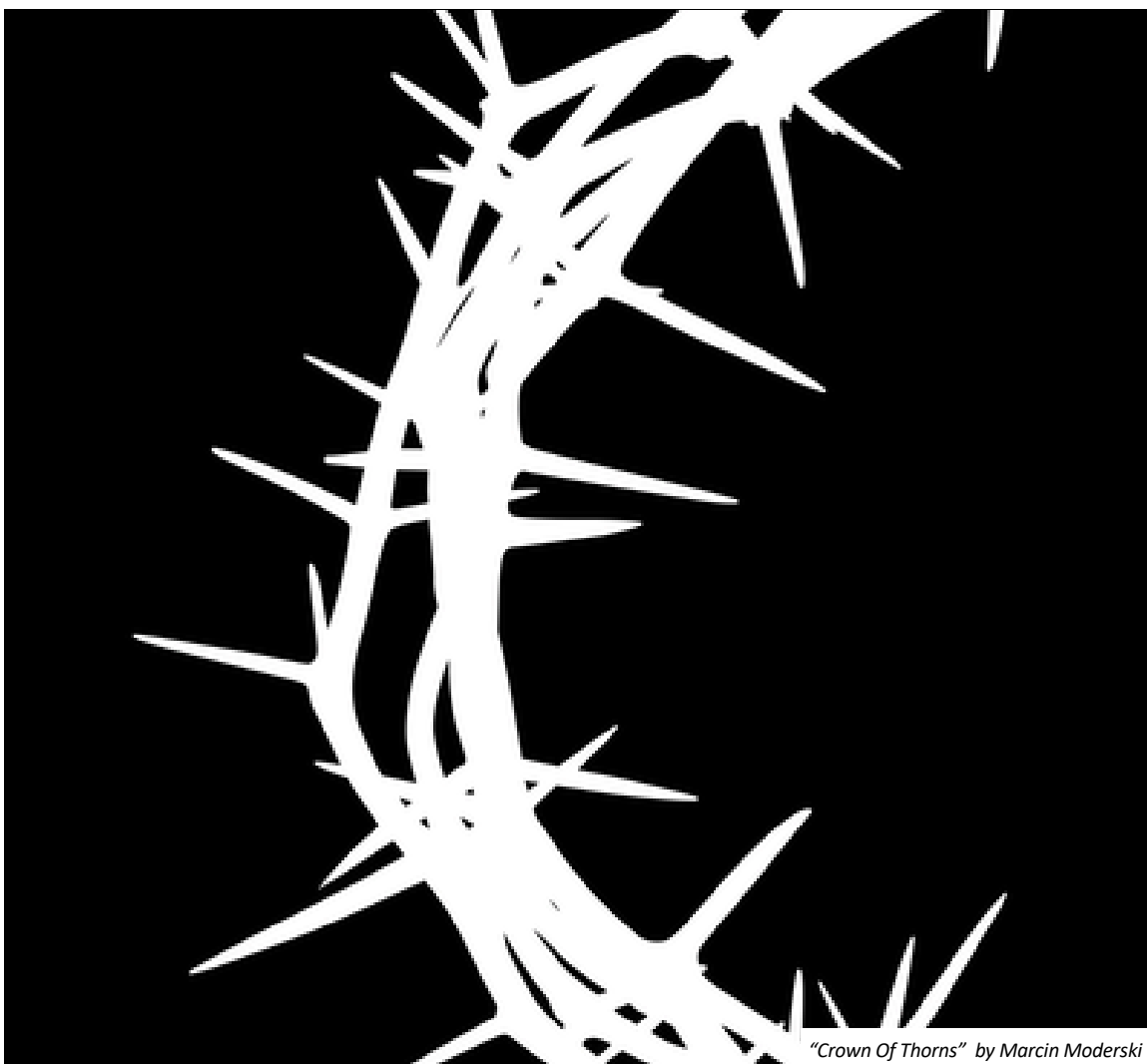


Daily Devotions for Lent 2025



Peace Lutheran Church

Lent, 2025

Dear Friends in Christ,

In a world filled with clutter, noise and hustle, Lent is a good reason to step back and rethink how we go about our lives. These forty days are an opportunity to again be filled with God, with life, with love again.

One holy habit to assist you in doing so, are these devotionals. Your fellow followers of Christ have contributed their insight and experience in the hope that their words may encourage you during Lent. Take time to read the accompanying Scripture; it will bring deeper meaning to the devotions of others. Conclude your reading with prayer.

I pray that these devotions and this Lenten season will strengthen you're your lives, our community of faith, and life in the Holy Spirit to which our Lord has called each of us.

Grace and Peace,

Pastor Mark Nelson

Ash Wednesday, March 5 Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

¹Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near—²a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains, a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. ¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? ¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; consecrate a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Consecrate the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her canopy. ¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar, let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

It's mid-winter and yet there are signs of spring. It's been warm enough to walk outside. The changing path of the sun reveals how dirty the windows are and how grimy the floor is from the winter mud and snow. It's getting time for spring-cleaning.

"Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; gather the people." These words of the prophet Joel are an invitation to new life. Lent is the church's season for spring-cleaning. To begin Lent, ashes will mark our foreheads in the sign of the cross. The gritty ashes recall more than mortality; ashes long have been an ingredient of soap and sometimes can be substituted for soap as a cleansing agent.

We cleanse our hearts the same way we clean our homes. First we have to get all the stuff out in the open and spread it around to see just what we're dealing with. How did this get in *here*? Why are we keeping *that*? Don't need *those* anymore! To hear myself struggle with what needs to stay and needs to be let go of is to begin to hear something not only of who I am but also what I'm becoming and what I'm failing to become. It would be easier to avoid the struggle. It can be uncomfortable; it can hurt.

But there is that call of that trumpet! For we have a God who is *"slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."* I have the forgiveness and grace of God in Jesus Christ. So

blow the trumpet! Call a solemn assembly! It is Ash Wednesday. Lent is here. And, while ashes are at the start of it, something like new life—like Easter!—is at the end.

Prayer: “Gracious God, out of your love and mercy you breathed into dust the breath of life, creating us to serve you and our neighbors. Call forth our prayers and acts of kindness, and strengthen us to face our mortality with confidence in the mercy of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen” —ELW, Page 26

--Pastor Mark Nelson

Thursday, March 6

Psalm 51:1-17

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.

⁴Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

⁵Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me.

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

¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.

¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

¹⁶For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.

¹⁷The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

Psalm 51 is said to have been written by King David. It is a story that "soap operas" are made of—adultery, deceit and murder. And lastly, of repentance.

We have heard of the young boy David slaying the giant Goliath. How he became the

avored one for the next king of the Israelites. As he gathered kingdoms, he added wives, eight are known with 18 children.

One day he spied the lovely Bathsheba while she was bathing. He was smitten and started an adulterous relationship with her. She conceived a child and David tried to cover it up. Unable to do so, he sent Bathsheba's husband, a general of his, off to the front lines of war where he most certainly would be killed.

David was nudged by the prophet Nathan to repent and eventually was full of remorse for his deeds and writes this heartfelt psalm of confession and repentance. He writes "have mercy on me" and "cleanse me from my sin." He says that he was born guilty "a sinner when my mother conceived me." Apparently, either she too conceived him from an adulterous relationship or he is referring to the "Original Sin" of Eve.

Enough of the drama. This psalm tells the story of repentance, love for God and wishes for reconciliation. It is beautifully written. David says "create in me a clean heart, Oh God, and put a right spirit within me. Restore me to the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit". Restore me and I will teach sinners of your abundant forgiveness.

What this psalm is telling us that no matter how badly we fall and we ask for God's forgiveness, God is there to pick us up and to restore us to his Almighty love.

Prayer: Heal us, Oh Lord, for we are all sinners. Give us your love to help guide us and to keep us on the righteous path. And in doing so, may we be an example to others. Amen.

—*Bev Viken*

Friday, March 7

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

¹"Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven. ²"So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

⁵"And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁶“And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.

¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

In these passages from Matthew 6, Jesus tells us to live true to your faith. Jesus directed his words directly at the religious establishment of the time and the words transcend time, being relevant to Christians today. Growing up in a Lutheran household with Nordic and Swiss roots, these passages were well known to me a young age. To be humble and not call attention to yourself, especially in matters of faith is a typical Lutheran attribute. The world looking at Lutherans, sometimes labels us as stoic and not welcoming. We may have an opposite image problem than the flamboyant evangelicals on TV. However, we cannot label the flamboyant as the modern pharisees and not look at ourselves. No matter how stoic the outside is, it is the inside that counts. It was after college when I attended a mixed age Bible study that I became aware of the deep faith of elder Lutherans. It was seeing faith in action that gave credibility to the thoughtful answers to difficult questions.

We are bombarded with social media moments designed to demonstrate how the public action taken makes the person doing it great. Jesus calls out the hypocritical actions for what they are. This is a lesson for all of us, to live out our faith humbly, not expecting earthly reward.

Now lest we feel our Lutheran stoic heritage exempts us from ego centric actions take a quick look at verse 21. “For where your treasure is, your heart will be also”. Jesus said it perfectly; I can’t add a thing (also just hit Daina’s word count max).

Prayer: Dear Lord inspire me to be your hands and feet here in the world with a humble heart. We know you know the motives of our heart and those actions now benefit those in need and any reward here on earth is but a fleeting moment. Amen

—Mark Pladson

Saturday, March 8

Luke 4:1-13

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. ³The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." ⁴Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'"

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." ⁸Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

⁹Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' ¹¹and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"

¹²Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

There was a history of great biblical figures retreating for solitary fasting and contemplation before embarking on their greatest missions. Similarly, Jesus, just baptized, heads out into the desert. This would not be a debate between God and Satan. This would be a testing of the fully human Jesus. (I had to remind myself; Jesus was not half God and half human, but fully divine and fully human.) After 40 days, He is a weak, hungry human being; highly susceptible to temptation. Satan tempts Jesus to place Himself above His Heavenly Father's wishes ... *"Jesus, You can exploit your power for selfish ends. You can have all the riches you desire, so why not start simply by making yourself comfortable with a nice feast (or at least a loaf of bread). Or perhaps, power is more important to you. Be the greatest earthly king ever known with Israel's enemies avenged and with every nation bowing down to you on the throne of David. What's not to like about that? But hey,"* Satan continues, *"if you insist on going through with this heavenly assignment, let's actually put God to the test. Avoid the cross, and make it easy by revealing your divine nature to all humanity with such miraculous signs that all the world will immediately worship you!"* Jesus prevails, but verse 13 ominously reminds us the devil is coming back. Jesus' resolve is tested again in the garden just before his betrayal. Thanks be to God He prevailed – for us.

Prayer: Lord, Grant us strength sufficient for our temptations. We are humbled that You resisted such great testing, choosing the path of difficulty and suffering to redeem us with Your death and resurrection. Infinitely indebted to you and unworthy of such grace, we give You thanks.

—*Marc Hanson*

Monday, March 10

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

¹“When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance to possess and you possess it and settle in it, ²you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his name. ³You shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘Today I declare to the LORD your God that I have come into the land that the LORD swore to our ancestors to give us.’ ⁴When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, ⁵you shall make this response before the LORD your God: ‘A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. ⁶When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, ⁷we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. ⁸The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; ⁹and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me.’ You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God. ¹¹Then you, together with the Levites and the aliens who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house.

From oppression to promise.

We are people of story. In today's reading we hear of God's promise of deliverance, land, prosperity and growth to the Israelites. A people who endured years of slavery, affliction, toil, and oppression. God was faithful and generous even as they struggled physically, emotionally and spiritually for years in a wilderness, uncertain time.

I am struck by the gratitude practiced, the practice of offering the first fruits, and reading on we learn of their generosity to those with less. The Israelites paused to remember:

where they came (the stories of their ancestors), how they shaped their own story, while remembering whose they were.

Gratitude is a practice that supports our physical, emotional, spiritual, and relational well-being. A practice of pausing to reflect and name what we are grateful for. You might begin each day, or journal at the end of day, or intentionally letting others know our gratitude. An attitude of gratitude builds resistance to stress, negative emotions, and depression. It improves self-worth, fosters stronger relationships, immune systems, supports better sleep and overall hope.

Whatever our story, its built on the shoulders of our ancestors. We have been shaped even through challenging and painful experiences. Whatever your wilderness experience, we belong to a God of promise, generosity, love, compassion and faithfulness. May you be grateful!

Prayer: God of love, peace and justice, strength our hearts, minds and bodies to live with generosity, gratitude and never forget whose we are. Amen

—*Deacon Tammy Devine*

Tuesday, March 11

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

¹You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,

²will say to the LORD, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”

⁹Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place,

¹⁰no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

¹¹For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

¹²On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.

¹³You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot.

¹⁴Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name.

¹⁵When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue them and honor them.

¹⁶With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation.

As a retired pastor/chaplain, pastoral care was an important role. I walked with many after the death of a loved one. At times death was traumatic and life changing. Being present with the family whose 18 year old son wrapped his motorcycle around a tree. Death also felt like a blessing for the 99-year old mother who died after years of dementia.

Psalm 91 is a Wisdom psalm reminding us of God's protection and assurance. You may be familiar with verses of the popular hymn written by Michael Joncas, "On Eagles Wings." It was inspired after the sudden death of a friend's father from a heart attack. The psalm reminds us that God is always with us. God is our refuge, our fortress.

Just a few weeks ago, I watched as the news unfolded after the Delta Flight crash in Toronto. I sat pondering what were the passengers thinking, feeling? Were they praying? I could only imagine the overwhelming fear. Maybe some were comforted by: "For he will command his angels to guard you." "When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue them...."

In this season of Lent may we be comforted by our God who never abandons us.

Prayer: As the cold winter winds blow, hold us close and give us the strength to trust in your words of life and salvation. Amen.

—Mike Carlson

Wednesday, March 12

Romans 10:8b-13

^{8b}"The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim), ⁹because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For one believes with the heart, leading to righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, leading to salvation. ¹¹The scripture says, "No one who believes in him will be put to shame." ¹²For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him. ¹³For "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

I have always enjoyed reading the words of the Apostle, Paul. Paul is a wonderful example of what the Lord can do with people who are willing and able to commit their minds and hearts to the Lord.

This passage is about what is required for salvation. When I was a young boy I felt that I must not swear and try my best to live my life according to the Ten Commandments in order to be saved.

This passage is truly a comfort to me. I understand that faith without works is dead faith. It is a wonderful feeling for me to know that my salvation does not depend on my ability to act in a righteous manner. Rather, I need to confess with my mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe sincerely in my heart that God raised Him from the dead.

Paul makes it clear that one's faith denomination makes absolutely no difference. Paul tells us, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Lord I pray that you would allow me to do what Paul did. I wish to commit my mind and heart to you Lord. I pray that by making this commitment you will share with me your will for my life and that I might do your will each and every day. Amen.

—Charlie Manley

Thursday, March 13

Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18

¹After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ²But Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "You have given me no offspring, so a slave born in my house is to be my heir." ⁴But the word of the Lord came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir." ⁵He brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶And he believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.

⁷Then he said to him, "I am the Lord who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." ⁸But he said, "O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" ⁹He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other, but he did not cut the birds in two. ¹¹And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

¹²As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

¹⁷When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. ¹⁸On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the River Euphrates."

Theologian Tim Keller asserted that Jesus is found in every book of the Bible. In Genesis 15:1,4, the pre-incarnate Christ appeared to Abram as "the word of the Lord." This is affirmed in John 1:1-2, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and

the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning."

Abram was around 85 years old, anxious because he had no heirs. The Lord told him his descendants would be as countless as the stars, and reminded Abram that he was speaking to God who brought him from Ur of the Chaldeans to possess Canaan. Abram believed, but expressed doubt, so the Lord cut a blood covenant with him.

God commanded Abram to bring prime animals, not for sacrifice, but for a covenant ritual. Abram cut them in two, except for the birds, and lined the pieces up, leaving a path between them. (The parties of a covenant would walk down the aisle lined with the animal pieces to ratify it, meaning, "May it be so done to me if I don't keep my oath and pledge.") Abram fell asleep. While he was sleeping, a smoking firepot and a blazing torch (evidence of God's presence) passed between the pieces of the animals. God was faithful to His promises and obligated to fulfill them without any pledge from Abram. Similarly, Jesus alone paid the price for our sins.

Prayer: Lord God, we know you are faithful to your promises. Even though we may be afraid, have doubts and ask questions, you credit our faith as righteousness and erase our sins. Thank you for Jesus, our shield and our Savior. Amen

—Anita Platt

Friday, March 14

Philippians 3:17-4:1

¹⁷Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us. ¹⁸For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is the belly, and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ²¹He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself. ¹Therefore, my brothers and sisters, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved.

This is part of Paul and Timothy's letter to the Philippians. According to the *Lutheran Study Bible*, this is Paul's most joyful letter; a letter of thanks to the Philippians for supporting Paul's ministry. But the letter comes with a warning...

In this letter, Paul stresses that the Philippians, though living in a favored city of the Roman Empire, have a higher citizenship in heaven. The "enemies of the cross of Christ" are

people who call themselves Christians, but allow their Christian freedom to *justify any behavior* they desire. Paul writes that “their god is the belly.” What controls their lives are their desires. What controls their lives are their impulses. They do what they want to do.

When you do what you want to do *rather than what God has called you to do*, you are an enemy of the cross of Christ. This means getting back to basics such as what we are doing this Lenten season: studying scripture, praying, sharing the gospel with others, gathering with other Christians.

Prayer: Dear God, strengthen us to live humble, self-sacrificing lives because we belong to you, our Lord and God. Amen.

—*Daina Sivanich*

Saturday, March 15

Luke 13:31-35

³¹At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” ³²He said to them, “Go and tell that fox for me, ‘Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. ³³Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.’ ³⁴Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! ³⁵See, your house is left to you. And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”

Jesus is still in Galilee and has more work to do there – he’s a man on a mission. The Pharisees are telling him that (Herod) the same guy that had John the Baptist killed is going to kill him next – whether to scare him in or out of Galilee is not clear, but Jesus is NOT going anywhere on their schedule. He’s still on his mission to drive out demons, call for disciples and heal the sick until he’s good and ready to sacrifice himself on the third day in Jerusalem, where all prophets go to die. Jerusalem sure has its legacy on this point ... and, Jesus knows this ... and he still goes to Jerusalem to do his Father’s will, and to save all of us! The final verse “you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord,’” to me, further affirms we are only saved by our faith in Christ.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us continue to build upon our faith in you, your works, and your Word, so that we may be worthy of your love and continuing blessings.

—*Jim Thomson*

March 17

Psalm 27

¹The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

²When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh—my adversaries and foes—they shall stumble and fall.

³Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident.

⁴One thing I asked of the Lord; this I seek: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock.

⁶Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord.

⁷Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud; be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸“Come,” my heart says, “seek his face!” Your face, Lord, do I seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off; do not forsake me, O God of my salvation!

¹⁰If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up.

¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies.

¹²Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence.

¹³I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.

¹⁴Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

In writing this Psalm, David goes from expressing trust in the Lord (verses 1 through 6), to doubting (verses 7 through 12), to his ending statement of hope. I think many of us go through similar thoughts when we are faced with very serious situations. We first tell ourselves that God is with us, that He loves us and that He won't let anything tragic happen to us. Then we find doubts creeping into our thoughts: “Why are we in this situation?”, “Why hasn't God acted already to resolve whatever we're facing?” and “God, have you turned away from me?” Hopefully, we get to a point where we remember how God has been with us in the past and we regain our confidence that God will again walk with us through whatever we are facing.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us remember how you have been with us in the past and help us be confident that you will be with us once again no matter what we are facing. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

—Gary Vig

Tuesday, March 18

Isaiah 55:1-9

¹Hear, everyone who thirsts; come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ²Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread and your earnings for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. ³Incline your ear, and come to me; listen, so that you may live. I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. ⁴See, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. ⁵Now you shall call nations that you do not know, and nations that do not know you shall run to you, because of the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. ⁶Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; ⁷let the wicked forsake their way and the unrighteous their thoughts; let them return to the Lord, that he may have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. ⁸For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. ⁹For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

Thank God—literally—that God’s ways are bigger and better than our ways. God wants people to listen because his ways lead to life. On the other hand, the ways of the world lead to suffering and death. But even though we always fall back into those ways, however toxic and terrible they might be, God has made a covenant—a promise that lasts forever—to bless us with love and mercy. That’s another way that God’s ways are above us: unlike us, God never breaks promises, and God shows mercy and love where we act with violence and resentment. That’s a gift that we can’t take for granted and are called to share with others, to the best of our abilities. And when we fall short, we must remind ourselves and others that God has also blessed us with forgiveness.

Prayer: Good and Gracious God, thank you for your promise to bless us with everlasting mercy and unconditional love. Give us strength and boldness to share the love and mercy with others through our words and our actions in our everyday lives—in Jesus’ name. Amen.

—2024/2025 Confirmation Students

Wednesday, March 19

Psalm 63:1-8

¹O God, you are my God; I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.

²So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.

³Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.

⁴So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

⁵My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips

⁶when I think of you on my bed and meditate on you in the watches of the night,

⁷for you have been my help, and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.

⁸My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.

One of the classic hymns of the church, “Beneath the Cross of Jesus,” reminds me of this psalm: “Beneath the cross of Jesus I long to take my stand; the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land. A home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way, from the burning of the noontide heat and burdens of the day.” (ELW, 338)

Psalm 63 speaks the same way. The psalmist is lonely, looking for God, and feels the pain of God’s absence in “soul” and “flesh”—in his entire being. The writer describes what farmers know well. When there is no rain, when the sun beats down week after week, and the loss of crops and income is at stake, we can understand what the psalmist means by comparing the dryness of life to drought in the fields. We have all been there.

What do we do when we are exhausted and weary? Notice what the Psalmist does. Instead of cutting himself off from community and living in loneliness, the psalmist goes where worshipers are and joins in praising God (“in the sanctuary...my lips will praise you... I will bless you...and call on your name.”).

The Psalmist also does some remembering. While lying in bed at night, tossing and turning with worry, this person looks back at a lifetime, putting the current problems in the perspective of months or years. Then the writer can say, “You have been my help.”

The sense here is the same as the children’s prayer, “Now I lay me down to sleep.” When a child, or a parent, continues, “I pray the Lord my soul to keep,” the one praying knows that this is asking that God cares for one’s whole life. And, indeed, God does.

Prayer: “Eternal God, your kingdom has broken into our troubled world through the life, death, and resurrection of your Son. Help us to hear your word and your promises for our lives. In Jesus’ name, Amen.”

--Pastor Mark Nelson

Thursday, March 20

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

¹I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, ²and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, ³and all ate the same spiritual food, ⁴and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. ⁵Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

⁶Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷Do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." ⁸We must not engage in sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰And do not complain, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

Paul was born a Roman citizen and a "Jew's Jew" but after his conversion, became a follower of Jesus. He wrote this from Ephesus to his church in Corinth. Corinth was predominantly Gentile and most of its citizens were of a lesser means and lower social standing. They were also prone to following false prophets.

Paul reminds them of how the Israelites under Moses had strayed from their faith and didn't want his church in Corinth to do the same. He also reminded them that God would never give them more than they could endure.

We all face testing of some sort every day, but it is a comfort to know that through Jesus we have one who walks with us. It is uncanny what was true 2000+ years ago, is still true today. We just need to stay focused on Jesus and do what he calls us to do.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to see and listen and have the courage to do your will.

—Nancy Dynneson

Friday, March 21

Psalm 19

¹The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.

²Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.

³There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard;

⁴yet their voice goes out through all the earth and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens and its circuit to the end of them, and nothing is hid from its heat.

⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple;

⁸the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes;

⁹the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether.

¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.

¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.

¹²But who can detect one's own errors? Clear me from hidden faults.

¹³Keep back your servant also from the insolent; do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless and innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Our beautiful world is filled with big, stunning places where God's creation is majestically on display. It might be colossal mountains in Colorado or Switzerland. It might be waterfalls in northern Minnesota or Iceland. Mystical rock formations in Arizona or South Dakota. Or it might be catching a glorious sunrise or sunset from your kitchen window when the sky is painted with pinks, oranges, reds, and purples.

You just read Psalm 19....now reread it, slowly, one more time. This beautiful psalm is a "creation" psalm—a psalm that praises God as creator of heaven and earth. Feast your eyes on the beautiful language that talks of God's glory in creation and the law.

Verses 1-4 proclaim God's glory for his creation and praise God. "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork"

Verses 7-10 are about the perfect law of the Lord and his instructions for us. Instructions that revive our souls and make people wise. “More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.”

Verses 11-12 explain that God’s law works in two ways. It teaches us how to live in the world, and, it warns us when we don’t follow the law, to ask for forgiveness.

As I’ve been writing this devotion, the hymn sung on a recent Sunday keeps playing in my head:

All creatures, worship God most high! Sound ev’ry voice in earth and sky: Alleluia!
Alleluia! Sing, brother sun in splendor bright; sing, sister moon and stars of night:
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

We’ll use verse 14 as today’s prayer:

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen.

—*Daina Sivanich*

Saturday, March 22

Luke 13:1-9

¹At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. ²He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? ³No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. ⁴Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the other people living in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did.”

⁶Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. ⁷So he said to the man working the vineyard, ‘See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?’ ⁸He replied, ‘Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. ⁹If it bears fruit next year, well and good, but if not, you can cut it down.’”

This passage is in the middle of a section of several parables in which Jesus issues warnings, and calls for repentance. The warnings are often that the end will come as a surprise, and this passage starts with two sudden disasters that must have been well-

known at the time. The point seems to be “Don’t wait to get right with God, as you may be done tomorrow.”

The parable of the fig tree puts some specifics on what repentance is. It is not just paying lip service to the Lord. Rather, it involves fruits, which is surely an analogy for good deeds. Of course there are many examples in the gospels of what Jesus thought were good and bad deeds; some of them are in the passages that come immediately before and after this passage. The Lord will apparently give someone a second chance to repent and bear good fruit; but he will apparently not wait forever.

This raises that old question of faith vs. works. Which makes us right with God? Here I am guided by some very good sermons Pastor Mark recently gave. As we learn in Romans, it is faith in the triune God that reconciles us to him. But that reconciliation, that faith, should naturally and simultaneously spur us to do good. It doesn’t all happen at once. As faith grows, so does the impulse to do good. That faith gives us the golden rule, a commandment that other people matter as much as we do.

Prayer: Lord God, have mercy upon us. Faith is a gift—but we can ask for it, and we do. Let our hearts be good soil, so that our faith is not sterile, and our lives become a living gift for others, and for you. Amen.

—Max Fritzier

Monday, March 24

Joshua 5:9-12

⁹The Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt.” And so that place is called Gilgal to this day.

¹⁰While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal, they kept the Passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. ¹¹On the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and roasted grain. ¹²The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.

Whenever I hear or think about Joshua I am reminded of a battle. Throughout our lives each of us observes or experiences some type of battle. And there is always hope in rescue or salvation. As in this passage, the Israelites had safely crossed over the Jordan and out of Egypt. They were able to safely live in this new to them land and practice their customs. Experiences as described here are still happening today. Whether we are dealing with battles within ourselves or around us, may be remember that God will protect us and guide us as we cross over into safety.

Prayer: Protecting Father, guide our journey as we cross over to safety.

—Mary Kautto

Tuesday, March 25

Psalm 32

¹Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

²Happy are those to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

³While I kept silent, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.

⁴For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah*

⁵Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. *Selah*

⁶Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.

⁷You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. *Selah*

⁸I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.

⁹Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding, whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.

¹⁰Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD.

¹¹Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.

Psalm 32 is one of seven penitential psalms, also known as Psalms of Confession. These psalms are especially useful during the 40 days of Lent, when it's part of our Christian practice to more intently think about our sinfulness, and to ask for God's forgiveness.

The psalmist seems to know our human nature to sin, and of our wanting to hide our faults, and wanting to keep our guilt secret. But, by not owning up to our wrongs, to ourselves, or others, or even thinking that we can hide them from God, sin will inevitably weigh us down, drain our strength, eating away at our very core of body, spirit, and life.

But oh, the cleansing relief that can be ours, if we make our confessions to God, this Lent, or better yet as a regular practice. Then, as we embrace His faithful, loving response of grace and complete forgiveness, we'll receive even more of His gifts of freedom, joy, and real happiness! Then praises to God will flow out of us as gratitude for His perfect love,

mercy and goodness!

Psalm 32 includes three times the word "Selah", of which there is multiple meanings, including: to pause, and to consider what God is doing; or a time to reflect on what has just been said or sung, it can also mean to give praise to God. Each of these meanings are so appropriate for us during Lent and can enrich our Lenten experience, and our relationship with the Lord for all of our days.

Prayer: Lord God, During this time of Lent, and in the days that follow, may we take the time to consider You, and your many wondrous and loving works on our behalf. Help us to open our hearts and lives more fully to you. In the Name of Jesus our Savior we pray. Amen.

—Rhonda Grunwald

Wednesday, March 26

2 Corinthians 5:16-21

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we no longer know him in that way. ¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; look, new things have come into being! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

In *"The Message"* by Eugene Peterson, he writes, "The Corinthian Christians gave their founding pastor, Paul, more trouble than all the other churches put together." In his first letter, he tried to turn them away from their "sinful and pagan" practices and live moral lives. But over time, false teachers came and tried to turn them away from the truth. So in this letter, he tried to set his people straight and get them back on the right path once again.

What is the truth? Paul states that in Christ, we are part of a new creation; our old life is gone. All this is from God, and through His spirit, we are reconciled, made right, with God. He goes on to say that as 'ambassadors for Christ,' we are commissioned to live and share this news with everyone around us.

What does that mean for us? We have work to do. Living a life for Christ is not a spectator sport. We are to actively engage in sharing our faith. As Eugene says, "We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We are speaking for Christ himself now." In Christ, we can and must do this.

Prayer: In your spirit, we have been given the power to share your love with all those around us. Help us to do that daily, in your name.

--Dave Dynneson

Thursday, March 27

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

The feeling that this passage sparks for me is one of complete peace and comfort. What a vision- walking alongside a loving shepherd who safeguards me through all of the dark times. He restores my weary soul and gives me rest. He showers me with so much undeserved goodness and mercy. And at the end of this journey on earth, He will take me to live in His house forever. What a comforting reminder of real peace in this fast-paced, material world.

It is easy to see why this beloved passage is often read at funerals. It was part of my dad's funeral six years ago and I remember the comfort it gave me then. As I walked through a dark valley, he was right there beside me, offering his loving hand and guiding me to the still waters. He knew my pain and carried me through it.

In this season of Lent, may we find comfort in the constant presence of our Shepherd. With Him, we lack nothing. His unwavering love sustains us and his amazing grace restores us. He promises that his goodness and mercy will follow us all the days of our life. May we remember these loving promises during the dark valleys and carry this vision of complete peace and comfort in our good Shepherd.

Prayer: Dear Lord and Shepherd, thank you for the comfort of your constant presence and guidance. Thank you for loving us and always walking beside us. We look forward to the day when you will gently take us by the hand and guide us to the ultimate pasture in heaven, where we live with you forever.

—Rachel Kylo

Friday, March 28

Ephesians 5:8-14

⁸For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, ⁹for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. ¹⁰Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. ¹²For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, ¹³but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, ¹⁴for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Light is mentioned many times in the Bible. God’s first creation was to say “Let there be light, and there was light.” (Genesis 1:3-4) Light and darkness are often used as metaphors for good and evil. Before knowing Christ, all of us are in “darkness.” Darkness produces unfruitful works.

Darkness can never dispel light. Light always wins. This particular example brings me joy and hope. Even the smallest ray of light shines in the darkness. When you’re in a completely dark room, you may see light in the crack at the bottom of the door. When you’re camping in a tent, the moonlight shines through the canvas. If you’re feeling down, a hug from a friend, a favorite song on the radio, a smile from a passer by can begin to turn your mood around and provide some light.

The last verse of this text in Ephesians references Christ’s resurrection. As Jesus rose from the dead, this verse calls Christians to awaken from their spiritually dormant state and promises when they do, “Christ will shine on you”. Christ will illuminate their pathway and give them what they need.

Prayer: Dear Father, thank you for the lights you provide for me every day. Thank you for the light of Jesus Christ in my life. Amen.

—Venita Ditlevson

Saturday, March 29

Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

¹Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. ²And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” ³So he told them this parable:

^{11b}“There was a man who had two sons. ¹²The younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of the wealth that will belong to me.’ So he divided his assets between them. ¹³A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant region, and there he squandered his wealth in dissolute living. ¹⁴When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that region, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷But when he came to his senses he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands.” ²⁰So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²²But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, ²⁴for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ And they began to celebrate.

²⁵“Now his elder son was in the field, and as he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. ²⁷He replied, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf because he has got him back safe and sound.’ ²⁸Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. ²⁹But he answered his father, ‘Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command, yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. ³⁰But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your assets with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!’ ³¹Then the father said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. ³²But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.’”

This passage from Luke is often referred to as the Parable of the Prodigal Son. Most of us have heard sermons preached on this text many times. Typically, the sermon casts us in the role of the younger son, the prodigal, and reminds us that God (the father in this story) welcomes us back when we repent of our actions. But I remember one sermon, that I think Pastor Mark preached, that cast each of us in the role of the elder brother. I'm not doing it justice, but the gist was that we aren't willing to accept a repentant brother, we don't really honor our father on a daily basis and we think of ourselves as much more deserving than we likely are.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see ourselves as you see us; all of us in need of your grace. Help us to be more humble and willing to serve rather than to be expecting to be served by you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

—Gary Vig

Monday, March 31

Psalm 130

¹Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD.

²Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

³If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

⁴But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

⁵I wait for the LORD; my soul waits, and in his word I hope;

⁶my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

⁸It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

Sometimes we have situations in life that can seem helpless and overwhelming. Sometimes we make mistakes and have regrets, and we wonder how God, or others, could ever possibly forgive us.

But thankfully, we have hope in the Lord, who is full of mercy and unfailing love, and who grants us complete redemption. And so we can have patience and trust in God, knowing that God forgives us of our sins—not because of any good things that we do, but because God is good and loves us always, forever, and no matter what.

Prayer: Good and Gracious God, hear us when we cry out to you, forgive us when we make mistakes, and redeem us when we fall into sin. Bless us with hope, that we can trust in your love and mercy, and that you are with us through all of life's joys and challenges. Amen.

—2024/2025 Confirmation Students

Tuesday, April 1

Isaiah 43:16-21

¹⁶Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, ¹⁷who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down; they cannot rise; they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: ¹⁸Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. ¹⁹I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. ²⁰The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, ²¹the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

Isaiah lived in a time of great unrest. (Sound familiar?) His nation had become divided literally into two nations, Israel in the north, and Judah in the south.

In these verses, God's people are reminded of how he rescued the Israelites from the pursuit of the Egyptian chariots, parting the sea and making a path to safety.

Just as this example is given, the people are instructed not to remember the past, but to look ahead. Yes, they are still in the desert, but God promises to make a way through the dry wilderness, providing rivers to give drink to his chosen people. Why? So they can declare praise to God.

When all seems lost, a new thing, beyond our imagination, springs up, renewing hope for our futures.

Prayer: As we remember your faithful presence in our past, give us courage to look ahead, to things unseen, so that we can perceive what we couldn't imagine; springs in our desert. May we ever declare your praise.

—Loey Nordsletten Soderstrom

Wednesday, April 2

Psalm 126

¹When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream.

²Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The LORD has done great things for them."

³The LORD has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.

⁴Restore our fortunes, O LORD, like the watercourses in the Negeb.

⁵May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy.

⁶Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

I love a good rainbow.

Psalm 126 is about those exiled from Jerusalem suddenly being able to return to their homeland after 70 years in Babylon. This is about hope, God's enduring love, that there will once again be laughter and joy. There is also validation of the suffering and sorrow during that time of trial and waiting. Psalm 126 reminds us that faith is a worthy partner in the waiting.

This is so central to my Christian faith and the needed reminder when going through the hardest times of life, the scariest, the most unknown times. The times when we will return to ourselves—that home is always home and never the same. But God's love and promise are always the same. Things will get better. Suffering will end. While there be no guarantee on time, there is guarantee on love, joy, and safety.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your grace with us while we struggle to believe that we will laugh again and keep the embers of hope aglow in our hearts. In Jesus name we pray for all, Amen.

—Sarah Oman

Thursday, April 3

Philippians 3:4b-14

^{4b}If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: ⁵circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

⁷Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. ⁸More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as

rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. ¹⁰I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, ¹¹if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

¹²Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal, but I press on to lay hold of that for which Christ has laid hold of me. ¹³Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it, but one thing I have laid hold of: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

This passage invites us to reflect on what **we value most**. For Paul, it was Christ and Christ alone.

Paul was “head of his class” as a Pharisee. He was a Jew’s Jew until that fateful ride to Damascus. He had all the credentials and followed the “law of Moses” like no other. He was proud of that, and never felt guilty for being one. But, in meeting Jesus, he found something far greater. All that he achieved before then he now considered “rubbish,” in the Greek, “Dung.”

Paul loved his church in Philippi and wanted them to see what he saw in Christ, and value that above all other.

As I sat with friend Milt in his dying days, we talked of his 100+ years on this earth and how grateful he was for his life. He was most grateful for Vi and the church she invited him to....our church! He loved our church and the people in it. “If I had a million dollars I would give it to the church” he once told me. He was generous and always, always grateful. He lived a life of gratitude. He “**valued**” the faith he had in Christ and eagerly looked for his great reunion in Heaven. He faced death with incredible confidence and grace. I pray that I can face death as he did when my time comes.

Prayer: Lord help us to be more like Milt and walk with Jesus as he did, and value that above all else. In Jesus name, Amen.

--Dave Dynneson

Friday, April 4

Ezekiel 37:1-14

¹The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. ²He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. ³He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know." ⁴Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

⁷So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them. ⁹Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophecy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord GOD: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

¹¹Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' ¹²Therefore prophecy and say to them: Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. ¹³And you shall know that I am the LORD when I open your graves and bring you up from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act, says the LORD."

This passage reminds us of God's power to help us overcome even the most hopeless situations. It offers hope in our darkest moments.

Consider the difficult task given to the prophet Ezekiel. The Israelites, exiled in Babylon, had lost everything—their homeland, their king, their temple, and their faith. In the previous chapter, God told Ezekiel to prophesy of Israel's rebirth, which must have seemed an unimaginable task given the peoples' current condition of despair. God then presents Ezekiel with a vision of a valley of dry bones, telling him to prophesy and bring the bones to life. The bones come together, are covered with flesh, and come to life, symbolizing the rebirth of Israel which had long been considered dead.

Today, we find comfort in this passage, knowing that even in our own valleys of dry bones, we can look to God and the Holy Spirit for renewal and guidance. Yes, the seemingly impossible becomes possible through faith.

The well-known spiritual "Dem Bones," based on this passage, has inspired a community that has long faced adversity, offering hope when we "hear the word of the Lord." I encourage you to listen to it on YouTube or your favorite music source; I assure you; its melody will stick in your head the remainder of the day. And to Bruce, our beloved Music Director at Peace—I challenge you to let our choir bring this spiritual to life in an upcoming service!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we place our trust in Your mighty power to bring life and hope to even our most hopeless situations. Guide us through our darkest valleys, revive our faith, and renew our spirits through the power of Your Holy Spirit. Amen.

—Gene Cross

Saturday, April 5

John 12:1-8

¹Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

There have been times in my life and work when people want to know what I believe. Do you *believe* in the virgin birth? Do you *believe* in the resurrection? Do you *believe* Jesus is the only son of God? Do you *believe* every word of the Bible is true? But *believing* in John's Gospel is far more often a verb, not a noun. No one "*has*" belief in John's Gospel. No one "*has*" faith. For John, believing in Jesus means trusting that he comes from God.

So what does love look like when it's a verb and not a noun? It's a week before Passover, John says, Mary and Martha have decided to give a dinner for Jesus. Brother Lazarus is there, though he does not say a word. Judas Iscariot is there. After supper, Mary takes a pound of perfume, pours it on Jesus' feet, and wipes his feet with her hair.

Whatever anyone else in the room thought about what Mary was doing, Jesus knew it could mean only one thing. The only man who had his feet anointed was a dead man, and Jesus knew it. "Leave her alone," he said, "just leave her alone and let her do her job."

Writing the scene down so long afterward, John chose the verb "wipe" to describe what Mary did with her hair. And when it came time, on the night before Jesus died, to choose the verb for what Jesus did to his disciples' feet, John chose the same verb, "Jesus wiped." "You don't know what I'm doing," he said to his disciples that night. But later... you will understand." Here, the doing comes first. The understanding comes later. The love comes first. The belief follows.

Here is a good Lenten reminder: if you're still waiting for complete understanding to come (and aren't we all?), if you're not sure what you believe, take heart. You have plenty of company, and you know what? There's plenty to do. Feed my sheep. Wash one another's feet. Receive whom I send. Love one another as I have loved you. Mary got the message. It's a good word for us.

Prayer: "Eternal God, open our hearts to be transformed by the new thing you are doing, that our lives may proclaim the goodness of your love. In Jesus' name, Amen."

--Pastor Mark Nelson

Monday, April 7

Psalm 31:9-16

⁹Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.

¹⁰For my life is spent with sorrow and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.

¹¹I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors, an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.

¹²I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.

¹³For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.

¹⁴But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God."

¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.

¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

In this passage, we find the psalmist, David, suffering in the midst of a great crisis. We might, in fact, say he finds himself in a hot mess! So why is this happening to him? Elsewhere we find David owning up to the fact that his own iniquity, likely with Bathsheba,

brought God's chastening — and that chastening never left his house to the day of his death. Now his own son Absalom is entering into Jerusalem, leading a national revolt intent on killing his father. David naturally feels scorned, persecuted, and hated by friends, neighbors, family and all around him. His sorrow, fear, terror, and brokenness in body and mind bring him to this precipice of despair. "**BUT** (and that's a huge word) I trust in you, O Lord... You are my God."

[FULL STOP! We the readers take a breathe at this point and reread v. 14.]

In this seemingly abrupt change David cries out to the Lord, remembering that his life is fully in God's hands and that God will deliver him from his persecutors. He declares himself a servant of God, upheld and protected in God's steadfast love.

Though we ourselves may not be terrorized and persecuted by enemies, admittedly there's not one among us who hasn't found him/herself in a "hot mess" many times over. As humans, yes, we screw up. May we, like David, know that we are sinners AND that our Lord and Savior is always present with an outstretched hand. Like David we can confidently cry out "Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love."

Prayer: Merciful Savior, I praise you for offering me your loving hand, over and over again, as I learn to move ahead, out of the abyss of my own grief and sadness. Lord, please let your face shine upon all your servants, and save us with your steadfast love. Amen.

—*Sally Sawyer*

Tuesday, April 8

Isaiah 50:4-9a

⁴The Lord God has given me a trained tongue, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens, wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord God has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I did not turn backward. ⁶I gave my back to those who struck me and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand in court together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ^{9a}It is the Lord God who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

Isaiah, a prophet who lived about 700 years before Christ, began each day in the presence of God. "He wakens me morning by morning; wakens my ear to listen." Oh that we would have that mindset when we awaken an hour before we want or need to! Yet, Isaiah is trained for this, and the privilege, opportunity, and joy is there for us as well.

But, there is a cost for obedience to God's will; Isaiah is mocked, spat upon, beaten - certainly a prophecy of what Jesus experienced before Pilate. Jesus said that any who follow and obey Him will be persecuted as well.

Isaiah did not back down, "Because the Sovereign Lord helps me, I will not be disgraced...I will not be put to shame...He who vindicates me is near." Paul declared, "I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes." Rom.4:16.

Prayer: Lord, may we, like Isaiah and Jesus, set our faces like flint, knowing we will not be put to shame for obeying you, living our lives serving you. And, may we be reminded, "Morning by morning, new mercies I see...Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord unto me." Amen.

—*Ric Soderstrom*

Wednesday, April 9

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness. And being found in appearance as a human, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God exalted him even more highly and gave him the name that is above every other name, ¹⁰so that at the name given to Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

It's estimated that there are between 200 billion and 2 trillion galaxies in the universe, and that there are roughly 200 billion trillion stars in those galaxies—numbers beyond our comprehension. We know all these were created through Jesus when we read Colossians 1:16 which says "... all things were created through him and for him."

So when today's scripture says that Jesus, the channel of all creation, took the form of a human and humbled himself to the point of death, we also cannot comprehend the enormity of this example of humility. And because he humbled himself, God exalted him with a name that is above every other name. Jesus was the epitome of humility, which is probably why he preached humility—both Matthew and Luke talk about those who exalt themselves being humbled, and those who humble themselves being exalted.

Why all this emphasis on humility? Better minds than mine have addressed this (how's

that for humility), but I suspect we operate on a spectrum with humility on one end and pride on the other end—and here I’m not talking about pride used rightly, but a pride that is overly focused on ourselves. When we get too close to the pride end, we get too full of ourselves, and it becomes impossible for us to go beyond ourselves and express love for one another and service towards another. Humility is therefore not weakness, but rather our channel to fully comprehend and express God in our lives.

Prayer: Father, let us always have the mind of Christ, and always be humble in our dealings with one another, that we may fully comprehend and fulfill the purpose you have for each of us in this life and the next. Amen.

—Tom Tisthammer

Thursday, April 10

John 12:12-16

¹²The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!”

¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵“Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

Wow, the difference five days can bring! The crowd went from cheering Jesus and recognizing him as the king of Israel on Palm Sunday to the shouts of “Crucify him” on Good Friday! How fickle and foolish we can be. He may not have fit their vision of a king, as he didn’t ride in on mighty white stallion, clothed in velvet robes. Initially they accepted him as such, showing reverence and asking him to “save us” with their shouts of Hosanna.

What if the crowd would have continued to demonstrate their love for Jesus? What if this had played out like a Disney or Hallmark movie, with everyone living happily ever after rather than the events progressing more like a Steven Spielberg script? Would we humans have gotten God’s message? Would we have truly recognized Jesus as the Son of God and lived as his teachings instructed for all our earthly days? Would we have realized his immense love for us? Would the disciplines have grasped the depth of who Jesus really was and his purpose? Would it have fulfilled scripture? Simple answer, NO!

As humans, we are often foolish in our shallowness, thoughts and actions. Just like the disciples, we may not always understand God's plan immediately, but over time we start to see him and his plans for us more clearly. Thankfully, Jesus was obedient to God's divine plan and the fulfillment of prophecy was revealed.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending your son Jesus into this broken world that we may understand the depth of your love for us which was made clear to us through his life, death and resurrection. Amen.

—*Deb Cross*

Friday, April 11

Hebrews 5:5-10

⁵So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed by the one who said to him,

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

⁶as he says also in another place,

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

⁷In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The writer of the book of Hebrews proclaims that Jesus is our great high priest, “a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Who is Melchizedek? Just after the flood, in the Book of Genesis, Abram (later “Abraham”) meets a man named Melchizedek, who is both a king and a priest. Melchizedek goes out to meet Abram. And Melchizedek takes with him bread and wine. Melchizedek blesses the bread and the wine, and he gives it to Abram, saying, “*bless be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth, and blessed be God Most High (14:19).*”

And there in the valley, with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah behind him, Abram takes the bread and the wine. And he eats the bread and he drinks the wine. And he tastes and sees the promise of the blessing of the Most High God. Abram grabs hold of it in his hands.

Christ Jesus is a priest like Melchizedek, says the book of Hebrews. Like Melchizedek, Christ comes down and meets us in the valley of the shadow of death, and Christ gives us wine and bread and gives us a promise we can hold on to in the here and now that, as my seminary professor Gerhard Forde said, “the one who runs the whole show is *for you*.”

God is not waiting around for you to clean up your act and find your way to him; God is here—one-way love—waiting for you to receive him. In Holy Communion, the true and living God says, “You are mine! The one who runs the whole show is *for you!*”

Prayer: “*Eternal God, in your Son you offer your life for the world. Gather us around the cross of Christ, we pray. In Jesus’ name, Amen.*”

--Pastor Mark Nelson

Saturday, April 12

Luke 19:28-40

²⁸After he had said this, he went on ahead, going up to Jerusalem. ²⁹When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, ³⁰saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. ³¹If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’ ” ³²So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. ³³As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” ³⁴They said, “The Lord needs it.” ³⁵Then they brought it to Jesus, and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. ³⁶As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. ³⁷Now as he was approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, ³⁸saying,

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!”

³⁹Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.”

⁴⁰He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”

Luke tells us what the crowd looked like that day. They were a lot like those stones that John the Baptist talked about there by the river Jordan. It looked like those stones had come alive. It looked like all those invited to the wedding banquet in Jesus’ parable: “*Go out into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.*” It kind of looked like a lot of those stones had come to life on this road to Jerusalem and were praising God for all the “deeds of power” they had seen. The scene was glorious!

It was also scary; scary because a lot of people wanted the stones to just stay where they were. So one of the Pharisees said, "Teacher, order your disciples to stop" but Jesus will do no such thing.

This is a word for us. Will we listen to those stones? There is so much for Christians and the church to do. So many priorities, so many worries. It is very, very hard to listen to the people Jesus calls us to, and he doesn't leave us guessing who might it be—the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.

Each one of us could listen to somebody this week. We could listen to somebody who is poor; somebody who is disabled and can't get a job; somebody who is outside of our usual circle of friends. We may not know how to begin but we do have Jesus saying this Palm Sunday: "Once again, I tell you, people of God, if these are silent, the stones themselves will shout." Oh, how I pray that we will all begin to listen.

Prayer: *"Eternal God, give us listening ears when we don't know how to hear. And help us to know we never do it alone but follow in the path of Jesus Christ, your son, our Lord. Amen."*

--Pastor Mark Nelson

Monday in Holy Week, April 14

John 12:1-11

¹Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

⁹When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

I hate to admit that when I first read this passage, I found myself agreeing with Judas; setting aside the part about him stealing the money! Being a very practical person, I thought that selling the nard perfume and giving the money to the poor would be a better thing to do. Doesn't Jesus teach about taking care of the poor? Isn't this what Jesus would do? Isn't it a selfish thing to waste all this on one person?

For me, the answer to these questions was articulated in a sermon by Watchman Nee. He states that the gospel is "to bring each one of us to a true estimate of His (Jesus') worth." Jesus is worth devoting everything you are and everything you have to him. It is not a waste to devote yourself and your life to Jesus.

In this passage, we see this play out between the selflessness of Mary's act and the selfishness of Judas and the chief priests. Judas wants to steal the money therefore, he doesn't want Mary to use it on Jesus. The chief priests want to put Jesus and Lazarus to death. Because of Jesus acts, including raising Lazarus from death, the chief priests see Jesus is a threat to their power. Mary on the other hand, has a deeper spiritual understanding and knew that Jesus was worthy of all that is given to him. She is not held back by the scorn and judgement of others. She has the vision to see that Jesus is worthy of all her honor, praise, prayer and devotion and then she has the courage to act on that vision.

Prayer: Jesus, help me to be as selfless as Mary, even at the cost of others judgements, to give all that I have to you because you are worth it.

—Lori Thomson

Tuesday in Holy Week, April 15

John 12:30-36

³⁰Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴The crowd answered him, "We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?" ³⁵Jesus said to them, "The light is in you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Imagine you're in a cave 200 ft below the surface – no light, complete darkness. How do you navigate your way out, when every step is treacherous and may lead to your death! Suddenly, a light appears in front of you...it completely illuminates your pathway forward, leading you from darkness to light.

A complete game changer, having a trustworthy light to follow all the days of your life, helping you navigate the darkness, avoid treacherous pathways, turn in the right direction at the crossroads you'll encounter along the way...so it is with Jesus, the Son of Man, whose light will lead you down the pathway to salvation and eternal life. He's the trustworthy light, the one that will never flicker or be extinguished...on that you can trust!

Verse 46: Jesus states – "I've come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."

The gift of life is miraculous, the journey from infancy to seniority is ever winding...there will be times of much joy and satisfaction, but mixed in will be times of disappointment and great sadness...that's when you need to look harder for the light...it's always there, right in front of you.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your son, the light of the world...not to condemn us but to save us from darkness. May his light continue to shine brightly in all our hearts and souls, may we reflect his light to those around us, causing others to seek and find the game changing light of our lives! Amen.

—Ken Cryer

Wednesday in Holy Week, April 16

John 13:21-32

²¹After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²²The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining close to his heart; ²⁴Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” ²⁸Now no one knew why he said this to him. ²⁹Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival,” or that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night.

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.

Jesus is troubled, who wouldn't be knowing that soon they would be facing torture and death? However, in this passage, I think Jesus is less troubled by his upcoming fate and more troubled by his betrayal by a loved one. Just before this passage, in an act of love, Jesus washed Judas' feet. Throughout his ministry, Jesus had given freely of himself and his love to his disciples, including Judas. In this case, not only was this a loved one, but this was a CHOSEN person, one of only twelve that Jesus trusted with the care of himself and his ministry. This is what makes the betrayal more painful. Would Jesus have been crucified without Judas'...probably. He was breaking Mosaic law, questioning authority, questioning tradition, calling on a higher authority than the ruling Romans...I think it was just a matter of time before the troublemaker was dealt with. So, why Judas, why a betrayal?

I think the story of Judas points out to us that we are all beloved of Jesus and we are all betrayers of Jesus (remember that soon it will be Peter who denies and betrays Jesus). We all receive the bread that he had dipped in the dish...not just Judas. The point is that our betrayal, does not stop his love, his forgiveness and care for us. Jesus loves us as we are, beloved and betrayer.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as we read of Jesus' foreknowledge of betrayal, we pray for the strength to remain faithful even when faced with disappointment and treachery. Amen.

—Lori Thomson

Maundy Thursday, April 17

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already decided that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

^{31b}Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Last year's Maundy Thursday passage was from Pastor Mark, and I was so caught up sharing my experiences of participating as a Communion assistant and all that went into the preparation of the bread and wine. However, what I missed was the point of the story which is that the evening was all about LOVE. So, I requested this day again to focus on that.

This year the passage is from the Gospel of John where the verses say more about love. Early on it says he loved them to the end. Jesus showed love to the disciples and us by washing their dusty, dirty feet. He demonstrated humility and met their basic needs. Each of us has these same basic needs and none of us is better than another. To digress for a moment, when one goes into a Finnish sauna all titles are left at the door. No one is better or higher than another. And may we remember that Jesus left them with a new commandment which was to love one another just as he loved them.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for loving us to the end and may we keep your commandment and do the same for others.

—*Mary Kautto*

Good Friday, April 18

Hebrews 10:16-25

¹⁶"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds," ¹⁷and he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." ¹⁸Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin. ¹⁹Therefore, my brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Good Friday! Jeremiah declares, "The day is coming..." and the writer of Hebrews says, "...after those days." Before Good Friday, and after. And in both Jeremiah 31 and Hebrews we hear the same message, God will make a new covenant with His people. His law will be in their minds, and in their hearts. Because of the sacrifice of Christ, there will no longer need to be another sacrifice for man's sins, even the sins of the world. "After that time." What a day in history! To those who believe, all sins are forgiven, indeed, all forgotten!

Yet, there is more! "Our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience;" our entire being "washed with pure water."

And now, "after that day," a believer can enter into the temple, the holy of holies, the very presence of God. "Let us draw near to God."

As horrendous as the crucifixion of Christ was, it was the only sacrifice that could accomplish so much, and for all. Jesus prayed that there might be another way, that this "cup might pass," as he languished in the Garden of Gethsemane - but there was no other way. For God so loved us, even the world, "that He gave His only Son."

"What wondrous love is this!"

Prayer: Lord, I'm thankful for our church, where we can meet together, worship our amazing God, encourage one another, be reminded of your great love for us, and your purpose for us as we go back out into the world, until we meet again. Amen.

—Ric Soderstrom

Holy Saturday, April 19

Psalm 31:1-5

¹In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; do not let me ever be put to shame; in your righteousness deliver me.

²Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily. Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.

³You are indeed my rock and my fortress; for your name's sake lead me and guide me;

⁴take me out of the net that is hidden for me, for you are my refuge.

⁵Into your hand I commit my spirit; you have redeemed me, O Lord, faithful God.

According to Luke's account, the last words that Jesus spoke before dying were from this psalm: "*Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit."* Having said this, he breathed his last (Luke 23:46 and Psalm 3:5)."

On Holy Saturday we live with this truth: Jesus died. The theologian Chris E.W. Green jokes about how not long ago, someone asked him what he thought Jesus was doing while he was dead. "I knew what the questioner expected me to say," Chris writes, "of course I knew the answer he wanted to hear. But the right answer is that Jesus wasn't doing anything while he was dead. That's what it means to say he was dead!"

"...he suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried," the Apostles' Creed says plainly. Make no mistake, Jesus's story ended on Good Friday. He is dead. His death was final, conclusive, definitive—as yours will be, and mine.

Is it possible that this is good news? Not only is Jesus *for* you but Jesus is *before* you. You are safe in Christ's death your sins forgiven. But even more so, you will be safe in death because Christ had entered death. And even there—even *there*—Christ had hallowed out a place where he may be found.

Prayer: "*Into your hands O Lord, I commend my life and my death. I am in your hands. Amen.*"

--Pastor Mark Nelson

Easter Sunday, April 20

Luke 24:1-12

¹But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they went to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared. ²They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³but when they went in they did not find the body. ⁴While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them. ⁵The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen. ⁶Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, ⁷that the Son of Man must be handed over to the hands of sinners and be crucified and on the third day rise again.” ⁸Then they remembered his words, ⁹and returning from the tomb they told all this to the eleven and to all the rest. ¹⁰Now it was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the other women with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹But these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them. ¹²But Peter got up and ran to the tomb; stooping and looking in, he saw the linen cloths by themselves; then he went home, amazed at what had happened.

Of all the Gospel accounts of Easter, Luke’s is the only one that tells us when the women came to the tomb there were two men—angels—dressed in dazzling clothes who asked them a question. They said, “*Why do you look for the living among the dead?*” It was a rhetorical question. It wasn’t looking for information. It was trying to push them. It was trying to show the women who Jesus really was and what he really came to do. The question was joyful, it was loving, and it was out to give life and newness.

The women came believing the tomb would be full. They didn’t expect the miracle of the resurrection. They had no idea it was going to happen. They believed Jesus Christ was dead among the other dead. Neither did the disciples, thinking the report of a risen Jesus was “*an idle tale.*” It was nonsense! But they soon discovered it was true! Jesus has been raised from the dead!

And what does that mean for you and for all? Among other things, Easter is the “first fruit” of God’s work “to be all in all”; it is about all things living with the life of God. The promise of Easter is that “one day all sad things *will be made* untrue through the life-giving spirit that is the body of the Risen Christ.” God is at work in Jesus Christ to heal everything and everyone that is broken—all of it will be undone. And, last of all, resurrection will happen, not just to dead bodies but to all things, not just in the future but backwards, to all of time so that all things will be as full with the glory of God! Happy Easter!

—Pastor Mark Nelson

“Pain Seeking Understanding”

2025 Lenten Wednesday Worship

Ellen Charry teaches theology at Princeton Seminary. In her commentary on the Book of Psalms, she suggests that the subtitle for the book of Psalms could be, “Pain Seeking Understanding.”

This subtitle came from her own experience. Her husband Dana, a psychiatrist, died of lung cancer in 2003. Never a smoker, his diagnosis was sudden and his decline quick. After his death, Charry published an essay entitled on lament. In the essay, as what she called “a case-study in trust and lament,” Charry included some of the letters her husband wrote to family and friends as he navigated “the vale of death’s shadow.”

What’s helpful about his letters is how even as he documents his ongoing frustration and grief that his prayers have not been answered in the manner he hoped. Even so, Dana Charry nonetheless experienced a new awareness of the faithfulness and life with Jesus Christ.

Our primary text in this series will be the well-known and well-loved Psalm 23 but we will also venture into other Biblical texts and stories, all in an effort to deepen our prayer life, our faith in Jesus Christ, and—as Charry named it—deepen understanding in our pain.

Join us on Wednesday nights, 6:30-7:15pm on March 12, 19, 26, April 2, and 9. Our evening worship will use the Holden Evening Prayer setting.

—*Pastor Mark Nelson*

Note: A Lenten supper will precede midweek worship starting March 12, 2025 and will be served from 5:30-6:15pm. \$5/person or \$15/family.

LENT 2025

For centuries, Lent has been a time of renewal and refreshment for God's people. Come join us for worship, fellowship, and growth in faith throughout the season.

WEDNESDAYS DURING LENT

- 5:30pm Lenten Supper, starting March 12
- 6:30pm Worship, Holden Evening Prayer, starting March 12
Please turn to the previous page for a description of the Lenten sermon series, "Pain Seeking Understanding"
- 7:15pm Peace Choir Rehearsal; Confirmation

SUNDAYS DURING LENT

- 9:30am Worship
- 10:45am Adult Education; Sunday School

HOLY WEEK

SUNDAY, APRIL 13 – *Passion/Palm Sunday*

- 9:30am Worship
- 10:45am Education Hour

THURSDAY, APRIL 17 – *Maundy Thursday*

- 7:00pm Worship

FRIDAY, APRIL 18 – *Good Friday*

- 7:00pm Worship

SUNDAY, APRIL 20 – *EASTER SUNDAY/RESURRECTION OF OUR LORD*

- 9:30am Worship
- 11:15am Worship

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