

Daily Devotions for Lent 2024



Peace Lutheran Church

Lent/Holy Week, 2024

An Invitation to Readers:

Lent marks the 40 days leading up to Jesus' death on a cross and his surprising return to life three days later. It is a practice that began during the 4th century as a way to prepare Christians for the holiest, hardest days of our story.

During Lent, we ask God to show us the world as it is. We begin on Ash Wednesday with the reality of our limitations marked on our foreheads—from dust we were made, to dust we shall return. Then, we walk through that reality in a kind of dress rehearsal. The whole church descends to the depths with Jesus Christ. We tell each other the truth again: life is so good and life is so hard—for everyone.

Of course, the cross isn't the end of the story. But this season acknowledges the reality of Jesus' sacrifice for us. He knew pain and grief and despair, and so do we. Easter is coming, yes. But for Lent and Holy Week, we sit in the ashes of our brokenness, knowing that God sits here with us.

Many people practice Lent by giving something up—alcohol, meat, chocolate, social media. Some take up something new—a new prayer practice or Lenten services. Here's another: reading and praying around devotions written by fellow Peace members. Together we can look at our both hard and wonderful lives as we wait for God's promised future, confirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ on that first Easter morning.

Let's keep Lent together with that hope and promise in our minds and hearts: that while Lent begins with ashes, may there be for us something like Easter at the end; a preview of the power of Christ's resurrection in our lives, a glimpse of God's kingdom that comes in Jesus Christ our Lord.

A blessed Lent to us all!

Grace and Peace,
Pastor Mark Nelson

Ash Wednesday, February 14 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, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. 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; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Sanctify 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?’”

Let me say it right here at the beginning: I’m thinking Lent is, for many, not one of our favorite seasons. Christmas; check. Thanksgiving; check. 4th of July and summer; check. But Lent? Think about it. No one has been crossing off days on the calendar leading up to today. Are little kids going to be asking their parents, “*how much longer until Lent is here?*”? No wonder that each year fewer and fewer churches observe the season. “*Who needs Lent, anyway?*”

And, in spite of our feelings, every year the same answer comes whispering back. “*I do. I need Lent.*” I believe we all need a time, an opportunity, to focus once again on the maker of all things, on just how far God will go to show us that we are loved and valued, even to the point of dying on the cross. So maybe; just maybe Lent is God's gift to a people starved for courage, for comfort, for life.

And so you are invited this Ash Wednesday, and through the whole season of Lent, to intentionally turn to God who has so graciously turned to us in Jesus Christ. And in so doing, to once again rediscover the faith, the peace, the hope and the courage, that each of us so desperately needs. A blessed Lent to us all!

Prayer: Gracious God, as I start down this Lenten path—this path of promise, of hope, and of refreshment, walk with me step-by-step. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

—Pastor Mark Nelson

Thursday, February 15

Genesis 9:8-17

⁸Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹“As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, ¹⁰and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹²God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

This is such a familiar story to all; one of the Bible's greatest hits! God tells Noah to build an ark, to load on a male and a female of each animal, God sends a flood, wipes out everything on earth except for who and what are on the ark. God then creates the rainbow as a sign of their commitment to us and their commitment to never again flood the earth. God loves us and there is a bright side to every storm. On the surface, it's a great story that inspired many a children's Sunday School song...where else do you get to say the word kangaroosies?

However, to understand this story in more depth, we have to go back further into Genesis. Genesis goes quickly from the creation to people sinning; hang on to your hats! Chapters 1 and 2 are the creation stories, Chapter 3 is the serpent and the first sin, and in Chapter 4, Cain murders Abel. Whew! Chapter 5 gives us a brief “sin break” while the lineage from Adam to Noah is recited. Chapter 6 tells us about the heartbreak of God with their creation. Genesis 6: 5-6 states: *“The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great on the earth, and that every inclination of the thought of their hearts was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved his to his heart.”* There is so much sin and disharmony in the world God created. God is not angry; they are truly pained and heartbroken by the state of creation. God decides to bring the flood, not as an act of anger or revenge, but as a way to renew and recreate the world...a creation do-over. The flood happens and, in this passage, God is re-

establishing creation and a making a covenant with Noah and future generations. I think that the implication is that, matter our sin, God will reach out and seek us in ways, short of a flood, to invite us into communion and harmony with God and all of creation.

Prayer: Lord, Help me to be in harmony with all that you have created.

—Lori Thomson

Friday, February 16

1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water.

²¹And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

The season of Lent, whether we're ready to hear it or not, reminds us of our mortality and our propensity to sin. Each and every one of us fall into this tendency; we make mistakes, we hurt others, we act in our own self-interest instead of the well-being of all. This happens on an individual level, but also on a communal and corporate level.

And despite our best intentions and efforts, our own righteousness will never bring us into right relationship with God. We are not able to remove the dirt from our own bodies.

Thankfully, we are not reliant on our own righteousness to receive God's love and our salvation in heaven. Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, secures this for us. And it's through God's goodness and in our baptisms that we are washed clean in water and Word, sealed with the cross of Christ forever. Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Merciful God, you know our suffering because you suffered yourself. And while we see our sin within ourselves, you see your Spirit. Proclaim your good news to us through this season, that we would cling to the gift, promise, and hope that you grant to us through our baptisms. In Jesus' name. Amen.

—Pastor Joe Orner

Saturday, February 17

Mark 1:9-15

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Mark is not a gospel writer to waste time. "Immediately," "suddenly," "and then," and other similar phrases are constant throughout the book. In a perfect example, right after the book's prologue concludes, Jesus is baptized in the presence of God the Creator and the Holy Spirit. In the span of two verses, Jesus is tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, then begins his ministry in Galilee. If you want a fast-paced version of Jesus' life and ministry, this is the gospel for you.

And while that might seem overwhelming, if we slow down and take the whole passage into perspective, we see three primary events: Jesus is baptized, tempted, and sent.

Sure, Jesus' version happened in a much more magnificent fashion, but our experience as Christians is not so different. We are baptized, blessed with the gift and promise of the Holy Spirit and God's unconditional love. But life doesn't change or become any easier just because we are people of faith—we still face struggles and sufferings, just like everyone else does and just like Jesus did too.

And yet, in the midst of that, we are united in faith and mission to share God's love through word and deed, to the glory of God and God's Kingdom come near. Baptized, tempted, sent. Claimed, challenged, called.

Prayer: Gracious God, through all the challenges we face in life, reassure us of your promise and equip us to share your good news. Remind us, just as you did with Jesus, that we are your beloved. Amen.

—Pastor Joe Orner

Monday, February 19

Genesis 12:1-9

¹Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's

house to the land that I will show you. ²I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

⁴So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵Abram took his wife Sarai and his brother’s son Lot, and all the possessions that they had gathered, and the persons whom they had acquired in Haran; and they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan,

⁶Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built there an altar to the LORD, who had appeared to him. ⁸From there he moved on to the hill country on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and invoked the name of the LORD. ⁹And Abram journeyed on by stages toward the Negeb.

In ancient Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), about 2,000 B.C., there were many tribes of people with different languages and polytheistic religions who took turns conquering each other.

Abram’s birthplace (which Ur?) and family work in Mesopotamia are uncertain. Ancient non-Biblical writings suggest that the family was prosperous in Haran (present-day southeast Turkey) but unpopular, primarily because of Abram’s religious beliefs. Abram adopted his nephew, Lot, after Abram’s brother died under suspicious circumstances. Getting out of town seems like a good idea for Abram, but why was he sent 500 miles south to Canaan?

The Canaanites were polytheistic, but they had a supreme god called El, so they may have been more accepting of Abram’s growing belief in one god. Bethel, where Abram lived several times, was Beth (“the house of”) – El (“god”). Also at Bethel, Abram’s grandson Jacob received his new name, Israel, which meant Isra (“struggles with”) and El (“God”), and Jacob’s tribe was called the “Israelites.”

El was used many times for the name of God in the earliest versions of the Old Testament. However, YHWH (Yahweh) was the name of the supreme God in the southern regions of Canaan, and beginning with Moses in the Old Testament, YHWH replaced El as the name of God.

Abram is revered as the originator of the monotheism that led to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, representing about half the Earth’s current population.

Prayer: Holy God, We are deeply grateful for Abram, who began the journey that led us to a better understanding of You and Your love in the world.

—Terry Rosborough

Tuesday, February 20

Luke 10:25-37

²⁵Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” ²⁶He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” ²⁷He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” ²⁸And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” ²⁹But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” ³⁰Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. ³²So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. ³⁴He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ ³⁶Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” ³⁷He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

This passage is the well-known story of The Good Samaritan. Jesus first says that a priest saw the injured man and ignored him. Then a Levite saw the man and also ignored him. It was only when the Samaritan came by that the man got help, even though any Samaritan would have been considered an enemy. So two people who should have been ready to help a fellow Jew ignored him, but a Samaritan treated the injured man as his neighbor and provided all the help he could.

Jesus told this story to a lawyer in answer to the question, “Who is my neighbor?”. We are to treat everyone as our neighbor, yet too often today we are encouraged by one group or another to see some people as “the other” and to treat them with suspicion and perhaps even outright hostility. We all need to keep this parable in mind as we read the news and encounter people, known and unknown to us.

We know that no one is perfect, including ourselves. So we need to act when someone is

attacked, verbally or physically. And we need to be careful when we hear ourselves start to criticize or judge others. We should always be looking for and appreciating the good in others.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to see all people as our neighbors who we should help as best we can. Forgive us when we forget this. Amen

—Gary Vig

Wednesday, February 21

John 6:35-51

³⁵Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷Everything that the Father gives me will come to me, and anyone who comes to me I will never drive away; ³⁸for I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰This is indeed the will of my Father, that all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day." ⁴¹Then the Jews began to complain about him because he said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven." ⁴²They were saying, "Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?" ⁴³Jesus answered them, "Do not complain among yourselves. ⁴⁴No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. ⁴⁵It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. ⁴⁶Not that anyone has seen the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷Very truly, I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. ⁵⁰This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. ⁵¹I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

From the age of twelve until his baptism by John at around age thirty, we know little about Jesus. He was an unremarkable man living an ordinary life (a carpenter's son) in Nazareth, a town with a negative reputation. No wonder John the Baptist said, "Among you stands one you do not know." (John 1:26)

Jesus had performed the miracle of multiplying five loaves and two fishes before a great crowd (6:9-13) which had earlier seen him heal the sick. (6:2) The next day, Jesus noted

they followed him to Capernaum only "because you ate the loaves and had your fill." (v. 26) Wanting to teach them, Jesus said, "I am the bread of life." The people knew that bread sustained life and eased hunger pangs. They didn't understand that Jesus offered life beyond mere existence.

When Jesus said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven," they disregarded the miracles they had witnessed and began to complain. And because they knew his parents, Jesus could not be from heaven. Their minds were closed.

The bread of Jesus is the word of God--spiritual food that satisfies spiritual hunger and enriches life on earth. It is also the body (flesh) of Jesus, which was nailed to the cross. When we believe the word of Jesus and the death and resurrection of his body, our life in this world is transformed, and we receive the promise of resurrection: life with God in heaven forever.

Prayer: Dear God, Draw us into your presence. Help us to hear, learn and believe your word so we may live in your kingdom now and always. Amen

—Anita Platt

Thursday, February 22

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

¹When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." ³Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him,

⁴"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.

⁷I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

¹⁵God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

When the Lord showed up at Abram's 99th birthday party, it wasn't the first time the two had met. That happened two dozen years before, when Abram was a youthful 75. "*Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land I will show you,*"

God had said to him then, and Abram had gone, taking everything he owned. No map, of course; God's promise was the only map he had. This is how Abram and Sarai lived for the next 24 years. Whenever they felt like giving up, God would not let them.

Then when Abram was one year short of 100 years-old, the Lord appeared to him again to renew God's promise to them. On this occasion, God changed Abram's name to Abraham, meaning "father of a multitude of nations," and Sarai's name to Sarah, for "kings of peoples shall come from her." I can imagine Abraham saying, "Father of a multitude! Who does he think he's kidding?" And I can imagine Sarah saying, "I don't have any kids much less kings! Give me a break!"

It's hard to believe in a promise—to live by it, day after day. And yet. What better way to live than in the promises of God? To wake up every morning to see if there are any glimpses of those promises in the day ahead? Sure enough God keeps God's promises. There was a day in Sarah's 90th year, when she came to Abraham and said, "I have something to tell you."

Prayer: "Dear Lord: Help me to live today in the promise of your love and your forgiveness in all that is to come. Amen."

—*Pastor Mark Nelson*

Friday, February 23

Romans 4:13-25

¹³For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation. ¹⁶For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us,

¹⁷as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations") —in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be."

¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²²Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness."

²³Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴but for

ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Paul is writing to the Romans who didn't necessarily have a background in Jewish history or Jewish Law. Old Testament Judaism was very much law based, founded on the 10 commandments and expanded with additional laws that governed how the Jews dressed, ate, prayed and interacted with each other and non-Jews. I believe Paul is providing the context of the gospel here in Roman 4.

The passage starts with the founder of the Jewish race, Abraham, who has a big problem. Abraham was given a promise of being the father of many nations and numerous descendants. From a physical perspective, he and Sarah were well beyond the childbearing age and there were no children. Abraham believed God's promise despite all indications of the contrary. It was this faith that made Abraham righteous in God's eyes, not the act of following Jewish law. Paul then makes the case that the heirs of the promise of Abraham go beyond the Jews and includes you and me as part of the many nations. What ties us to the promise of Abraham is not the bloodline in ancestry but faith in God.

Paul writes, "Therefore his (Abraham) faith was reckoned to him righteousness." Then the real gem of this passage Paul writes, it will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead and in that faith, we too are reconciled.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we claim the inheritance of justification by faith, through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Help us to live out our faith in our community and world. Amen.

—Mark Pladson

Saturday, February 24

Mark 8:31-38

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."

³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those

who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

First Devotional: In this verse, Jesus is predicting rejection by others and eventually his death and resurrection. As He was greatly loved and admired by His Disciples, Peter was unhappy hearing this and criticized him.

I was thinking back in my life at the U of M in the 1960's. I was involved with a Student Union group who had a magnetic and charismatic leader. I was so compelled by this young man that it was easy to see that I might follow him wherever he might lead. I'm sure that was a similar sentiment that the disciples felt towards Jesus.

Jesus snaps back to Peter saying “Get behind me Satan – you do not have the concerns of God, only human concerns”. Jesus tells his followers “Whoever wants to be my disciple must take up the cross and follow me. For “whoever wants to save their life will lose it but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

What does he mean by losing one's life – by doing things that have little value and don't involve God.

“If anyone is ashamed of me and my word, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels.”

Are we ready to forsake our human things and focus on heavenly things? In America, we are definitely focused on our earthly belongings. We enjoy our warm cozy houses, a full refrigerator and a newer car in the garage. We like the opportunities for a good education and job. What will we give up for Jesus?

Prayer: Dear God, Help me keep my priorities straight. Help me follow your will and not mine. Help me keep on the heavenly track. Amen

—Bev Viken

Second Devotional: *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”* –Mark 8:34

In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that when Jesus says, “*Deny yourself*,” it means to put Jesus Christ and his intentions, his desires for us at the very center of one's being. When Jesus says, “*Follow me*,” Bonhoeffer believed it meant to live your life in the world as his man or woman, totally, holding nothing back. It was this definition of faith as following and obeying Jesus Christ in the world that led Bonhoeffer to

join the resistance. For Bonhoeffer, to “*take up the cross*” of Christ meant the decision to love others in the name of Jesus Christ, even if it was costly.

The call to follow happens far less dramatically for most of us, thanks be to God. Even so, the call to follow Jesus in loving others—even if there is sacrifice to oneself—is a call to all of us. The mother and father who make sacrifices on behalf of their children, the daughter whose devotion to her struggling mother, the youth who says, “*No*” to behavior that is destructive, even if it costs them friends—there are countless thousands who, through the centuries and in varying contexts, have interpreted Jesus’ words with their lives. To them and to you, I say, “*Blessed are you! You’re following Jesus!*”

Prayer: “Dear Lord: Grant me so to glory in the cross of Christ that I may gladly suffer loss for the sake of your Son. Amen.”

—Pastor Mark Nelson

Monday, February 26

Exodus 3:1-12

¹Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ²There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³Then Moses said, “I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up.” ⁴When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” ⁵Then he said, “Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” ⁶He said further, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.

⁷Then the LORD said, “I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt.”

¹¹But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?” ¹²He said, “I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain.”

Have you ever been asked to negotiate a project for which you felt unqualified? If the boss said, "I will be with you," could you refuse? Moses, born a Hebrew slave and raised as an Egyptian prince, found himself in this predicament when he was living as an alien in Midian after murdering an Egyptian. Well into middle age, he was a shepherd for his father-in-law.

Moses did not see a mission from God coming. He only wanted to know why a bush that was on fire didn't burn up. When God's voice spoke from the bush he was afraid. God was sending Moses to Pharaoh to bring God's people out of bondage in Egypt, into "the country of the Canaanites," where several tribes of people had lived for generations. What could go wrong? Moses felt inadequate. The kicker: proof that this directive was from God wouldn't come until all the Israelites were out of Egypt.

The story of Moses is taught in Sunday School. Might it still have lessons for us today? Here are a few:

- 1) Trust God to be with you.
- 2) Be open to surprises from God.
- 3) Be willing to investigate when something provokes your curiosity.
- 4) Don't let fear stop you from taking on a task from God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, Thank you for Bible stories that we never outgrow. Help us to see you and hear you at unexpected times and places. Give us the courage to work with you, and help us to trust you. Amen

—Anita Platt

Tuesday, February 27

Luke 11:1-13

¹He was praying in a certain place, and after he had finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples." ²He said to them, "When you pray, say: Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. ³Give us each day our daily bread. ⁴And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone indebted to us. And do not bring us to the time of trial." ⁵And he said to them, "Suppose one of you has a friend, and you go to him at midnight and say to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; ⁶for a friend of mine has arrived, and I have nothing to set before him.' ⁷And he answers from within, 'Do not bother me; the door has already been locked, and my children are with me in bed; I cannot get up and give you anything.' ⁸I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. ⁹"So I say to you, Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ¹⁰For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door

will be opened. ¹¹Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for a fish, will give a snake instead of a fish? ¹²Or if the child asks for an egg, will give a scorpion? ¹³If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”

This reading is about praying. One of Jesus’ disciples asks, “Lord, teach us to pray...” Not only does Jesus teach them the Lord’s Prayer, he also shares a parable and gives some advice about praying.

As I read this scripture, I was struck by Jesus inviting us to start praying by calling God, “Father”. In our everyday lives, we only have one person in our life that we call Father and he has a special, personal place in our life. Here, Jesus invites his disciples (and us) into a personal relationship with God by encouraging the disciples (and us!) to call God using the same name that Jesus *uses, Father*.

Jesus then shares a parable called, “The Friend at Midnight” that explains the power of prayer. The first man, by persistently knocking, had the door opened to him. The first man again, by boldly asking for bread, got what he needed. If a friend will give you what you ask, even if inconvenient, then surely God will answer our requests. Take a moment and reread v. 10. What else could give you such a tender feeling that God truly cares about us and our needs than these words?

Last, the advice. Father’s only want to give their beloved children the best. So it is with God. He only wants to give us the best (fish, an egg) and definitely not the worst (snakes, scorpions).

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are comforted that you are listening to our prayers. Give us the good gifts that a father would give a child. Amen.

—*Daina Sivanich*

Wednesday, February 28

1 Corinthians 10:1-13

¹I do not want you to be unaware, 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 indulge 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.

A bit of a fire and brimstone letter from Paul! He is warning the people of Corinth to be wary. God, though loving and forgiving, does not tolerate sin and evil. He reminds them of Exodus story. Their ancestors were a beloved, chosen people of God. They were a people who experienced blessings, deliverance, baptism, food, water and the presence of God with them in the wilderness. Yet, Paul tells Corinth, they could be lead astray and into sin. If that can happen to them, it can certainly happen to the complaining, sinful people of Corinth.

Even though Paul is reminding them of the consequences their ancestors suffered because of sin and that they could also suffer if they test God, he also reminds them of God's love and faithfulness. He asks them to remain strong in their faith.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to remain strong in my faith. Amen.

—Lori Thomson

Thursday, February 29

Exodus 20:1-7

¹Then God spoke all these words: ²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³you shall have no other gods before me. ⁴You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, ⁶but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. ⁷You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

This passage is part of the story of Moses receiving the 10 Commandments from God on Mt. Sinai. Here, God gives the first two commandments: 1) You shall have no other gods

before me, and 2) You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord, your God...

We think that God wants us to stay loyal and faithful to God, and to everyone.

One question we have: God is self-described as “jealous” in the passage. Is jealousy a sin? Why would God be jealous? And what would make God so angry that God would punish children for the iniquity of their parents? Seems like an overreaction.

A second question we have: What does it mean to use God’s name in vain? Is it as simple as not saying, “Oh my God,” or does it go deeper—things like not using God or your faith to coerce someone to do something, or not weaponizing your faith for your own personal/political gain.

Prayer: God, you recognize that we are all both fully saint and fully sinner. Help us to follow all of your commandments—in context—as faithfully as we can, and forgive us when we fall short. Amen.

—Confirmation Students

Friday, March 1

1 Corinthians 1:18-25

¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.” ²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God’s foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God’s weakness is stronger than human strength.

I can only lump myself together with those who seek “Wisdom” in this world. For me it is part of my desire to, “Get Ahead In This World.”

To quote from Corinthians, “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” So once again I feel humbled. I have learned to treat that feeling as a good thing. I believe when the Lord humbles me, He is trying to teach me something. I need to open my heart fully to understand the Lord’s message.

God is telling me that earthly wisdom is foolishness to Him. More importantly, God tells me that I am saved through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Praise and Thanks be to you Lord!

Prayer: Lord as we prepare to enter the season of Lent, we thank you for the knowledge that we are made right with you by our faith in Your Son, Jesus Christ. Blessed Assurance. Amen.

—Charlie Manley

Saturday, March 2

John 2:13-22

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

Every time we study this story in Bible Study, someone will ask, "isn't this covered by the other Gospels later in Jesus ministry?" And the answer is 'yes.' Matthew, Mark and Luke all cover the same story, late in His ministry, but John wants his disciples and us to know up front, that Jesus came here for a far greater purpose than they or we could understand in the beginning. Jesus wasn't just chasing away the rightful merchants on the temple grounds, but in fact prophesying his own death and resurrection which would replace any need for future sacrifices or a temple. He was God's son; God in the flesh. No further need for sacrifices. The Jews and the poor disciples, knowing what little they knew at the time, couldn't begin to understand what Jesus was doing or saying. John writing many years later, knew the good news of Easter and the eventual destruction of temple.

As we approach Easter. I am always drawn to hearing John's words in Holy Week. I marvel at the courage of Jesus, facing a certain death, alone, deserted by his followers and how they just didn't get it....until the resurrection. Jesus going to the cross changed everything!

Prayer: Dear God, help us to pay attention to what the scriptures tell us, and trust that God is always with us, even now. Come Lord Jesus.

—Dave Dynneson

Monday, March 4

Isaiah 6:1-8

¹In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple. ²Seraphs were in attendance above him; each had six wings: with two they covered their faces, and with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. ³And one called to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." ⁴The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke.

⁵And I said: "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" ⁶Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. ⁷The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: "Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out." ⁸Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!"

In today's scripture we hear Isaiah's call story. Isaiah is anointed as the coal touches his lips. His guilt and sin blotted out. Each of us through the waters of baptism have been anointed, named, claimed and called to witness to God's love in the world. Promises were made at our Baptism to:

*Live among God's faithful people,
Hear the word of God and share in the Lord's Supper,
Proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed,
Serve all people following the example of Jesus
Strive for justice and peace in all the world.*

These are often referred to as the 5 gifts of Discipleship. God continues to call, often in a still small voice. Sometimes in our busy-ness, and our world's cacophony, we miss God's voice. Sometimes despite our efforts to share God's love, the world is not ready or willing to hear the Good News of God's abundant love. Even Isaiah's message fell on deaf ears, (as you read on in this chapter). Living out our call does not promise ease or comfort rather our call is to be faithful, trust and lean on God who promises to walk with us throughout life. **Ponder:**

What is God calling you to in this chapter of your life?

When have you heard the voice of God?

What will be your first faithful step to listen and respond to God's call?

May you listen deeply, watch carefully, open your mind and heart to live as a disciple of Christ Jesus. May you respond: "Here am I, send me."

—Deacon Tammy Devine

Tuesday, March 5

John 3:1-13

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

Poor Nicodemus! He doesn’t want to be seen with Jesus, coming after dark, wanting to affirm that surely God was with Jesus, and that he was a great teacher. He had just witnessed the cleansing of the Temple, and many other miracles he performed in Jerusalem during Passover (John 2). But Jesus flipped the script in a heartbeat - “This isn’t about me, it’s about you; Nic, you must be born again!”

“Do you want to see the Kingdom of God; do you want to enter the Kingdom of God? You must be born again...born of water, and the Spirit.” Nicodemus can’t fathom how one can be born again! John writes, “...to all who believed him, and accepted him, he gave the right to become children of God. They are reborn!” (1:12-13). New life, from heaven! We now see, and enter, the Kingdom of God!

We live in a world that is very troubling and that can be overwhelming. Jesus says that in this world you will have troubles, trials, tribulations, but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world! Born again, we have entered His kingdom here on earth. We are blessed with the presence of His Holy Spirit, that fills us with joy, comfort, and power. We pray, often, ... Thy Kingdom come (it has!), Thy will be done (we’re doing it!), on earth, as it is in heaven.”

Prayer: Lord, remind us, as believers, born again, baptized with your Spirit, we live and serve in in your kingdom. May we not be led astray with all that may tempt us, discourage

us, or even defeat us as we live day by day in a kingdom of this world. Fill us with your joy and love. Amen.

—*Ric Soderstrom*

Wednesday, March 6

2 Corinthians 4:1-15

¹Therefore, since it is by God's mercy that we are engaged in this ministry, we do not lose heart. ²We have renounced the shameful things that one hides; we refuse to practice cunning or to falsify God's word; but by the open statement of the truth we commend ourselves to the conscience of everyone in the sight of God. ³And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake. ⁶For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. ⁷But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

⁸We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies. ¹¹For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh. ¹²So death is at work in us, but life in you. ¹³But just as we have the same spirit of faith that is in accordance with scripture—"I believed, and so I spoke"—we also believe, and so we speak, ¹⁴because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus, and will bring us with you into his presence. ¹⁵Yes, everything is for your sake, so that grace, as it extends to more and more people, may increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God.

I was listening to a podcast recently and the subject of tipping philosophy came up. The show's guest shared that he tips generously, no matter what. And the show's host asked, but what if you got really lousy service? "I leave an amazing tip," he replied. The host was incredulous—why reward bad behavior? And then the guest explained: People know when they've done a bad job. They know when they've messed up. Maybe there's a reason, maybe the server is having one of the worst days of her life; I don't know the circumstances. If I leave an epic tip, my hope is to create a chain reaction.

Now the server's day just got a little better. She knows she didn't deserve that tip, but she got it anyway. That's going to impact how she interacts with her customers—influencing in turn the tips they give her and their mood when they leave. When the server gets off work, her state of mind is going to affect how she connects with her friends and family. Ultimately, I'm not even leaving the tip for her, but for a ripple effect of positivity that cascades as she touches another person, who touches another person, and so on. That's the universe I want to live in! Now think, what would've happened if I had left a meager tip?

How can you become a light in the darkness? Don't worry about justice, focus on grace—extend it to more and more people, to increase thanksgiving, to the glory of God. Prayer: Gracious God, grant us the strength to let our light shine before others by giving of ourselves and speaking your truth, especially when it's not easy. May we choose to freely give love, forgiveness, understanding, and grace throughout our days.

—Amy Strasheim

Thursday, March 7

Numbers 21:4-9

⁴From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. ⁵The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." ⁶Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. ⁷The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

"Snakes...why'd it have to be snakes?" This line spoken by Indiana Jones speaks to a core fear of many people, snakes. The people of Israel were delivered from Egypt in dramatic fashion, they were led by Moses in the wilderness. Despite many miraculous events on their journey, they complained against Moses and God. Then came poisonous snakes, the people acknowledged their sin and asked Moses to pray to God to take the serpents away. God did not answer their prayer in the way they asked, God made this a learning moment. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. The serpent

infestation persisted, and the snakes continued to bite the people. They needed to demonstrate their faith. If bitten by a snake, they looked up to the bronze serpent on the pole and they would live.

This passage in Numbers is a lesson that directly relates to the image of Christ on the cross in the New Testament. Note that John 3:14 states “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him”.

Prayer: Dear Lord, there are times in my life where my sins make me feel like I am surrounded by poisonous snakes. I know that you died on the cross to forgive my sin, help me to look up to the cross and claim the gift of abundant life in you. Amen

—Mark Pladson

Friday, March 8

Ephesians 2:1-10

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else.

⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Immediately upon reading these verses I was taken back to 1996 when the last Billy Graham Crusade took place in Minneapolis. Having watched Billy Graham on TV for decades, I volunteered, and was assigned to be a Children’s Counselor. Included in the training was the memorization of certain bible verses, two being Ephesians 2:8 & 9.

These verses are special to me partly for that reason, but all ten verses add even more understanding to what God is like, and what he has done for us, to bring us from death - to life.

God is rich in mercy, having great love, with immeasurable riches of grace and kindness toward us, he raises us up with Jesus, making us alive with Christ. All as a gift, it’s not

dependent on us, what we do, or don't do, it's all God, who through Christ Jesus gives us faith, and life!

We think that we have to do something, that nothing is really free- that's typically how this world works, but God is not of this world. His free gifts equal life now, and eternally.

Though works are not required for our salvation, they're still important. Verse 10 states *"created in Christ Jesus for good works...to be our way of life."*

God's plan for us includes service. The Lord knows that serving not only helps others, but gives both the doer and the receiver, life. You know the feeling, after doing something you felt lead to do. Sometimes, do you get to see the blessing it is in the face of the receiver? My heart also swells with joy when I see, or hear, someone else shining the light, love and life of Christ in the world! It's life for all! And when done in gratitude to God, it's also worship and a loving response to Him who first loved us.

Prayer: Lord, Thank you for your amazing grace, and for the free gifts of faith, salvation and life. Help us to live in gratitude to you, by sharing your love and gifts with others. Amen

—Rhonda Grunwald

Saturday, March 9

John 3:14-21

¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

By time the book was written, probably 90 AD or later, many differences and disputes had arisen between the followers of Jesus. There were even disputes over the nature of Jesus, himself. The Gospel of John answers that.

We learn that Jesus existed from the beginning of the creation with God, and that he was God. Not "a god" but God. Those who thought God the father created Jesus later, are wrong. Those who thought Jesus was subordinate to God, are wrong. Jesus is a coequal

part of God. The mystery of the trinity is being revealed here.

I think this passage is about God's response to human bad behavior. We are free, and we always are eventually mean to each other.

God's response to this is not punishment, but rather love. He gives us Jesus, who is literally a part of himself. This part, Jesus, becomes fully human, being born of a woman, raised as a child, working as a laborer, and experiencing directly everything it is to be human, even unto death on a cross. And he is also the Son of God. He shows us the spiritual way to overcome this harsh physical world. For "everyone who believes in him may not perish, but may have eternal life." He has suffered with us, he understands us, and he saves us.

Prayer: "Lord God help us to accept your great sacrifice of yourself in Jesus, and be true to your ways."

—Max Fritzler

Monday, March 11

John 1:35-46

³⁵The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, ³⁶and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

³⁷The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. ³⁸When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" ³⁹He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. ⁴⁰One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. ⁴¹He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). ⁴²He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

⁴³The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." ⁴⁴Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. ⁴⁵Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth." ⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" What a thought-provoking question. I chuckle a bit by it because if any of you are from a small rural town, this is a phrase you can relate to. Just insert the name of your hometown! Jesus broke all the rules of what

the king or savior those early Jews were waiting for. Born not into riches, worldly power, or royalty, he came as the sacrificial Lamb of God, who suffered and died for our sins. He taught us of God's abundant love for all and that we are to love one another.

In this lesson, Jesus asks these early disciples, "What are you looking for?" which is a question that many of us have likely asked ourselves. "Just what is it that I am seeking out of life?" or "Am I the person God intended me to be?"

Thankfully, just as Jesus invited Andrew, Simon and Phillip to join him, he is still inviting us today to "Come and See; Follow Me!" Thanks be to God!

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your steadfast love and for calling us by name to follow you. Help me to listen for your invitation and eagerly respond as did your early disciplines. Amen

—Deb Cross

Tuesday, March 12

Mark 9:30-41

³⁰They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it; ³¹for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again."

³²But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him.

³³Then they came to Capernaum; and when he was in the house he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the way?" ³⁴But they were silent, for on the way they had argued with one another who was the greatest. ³⁵He sat down, called the twelve, and said to them, "Whoever wants to be first must be last of all and servant of all." ³⁶Then he took a little child and put it among them; and taking it in his arms, he said to them, ³⁷"Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me."

³⁸John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us." ³⁹But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. ⁴⁰Whoever is not against us is for us. ⁴¹For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward.

We are now only a little over 2 weeks from the Festival of Easter. Easter is the final answer to Christmas. A Savior was born....and now this Savior is crucified and will rise in glory. But wait! There is more to come.

Our passage today is the second announcement from the lips of Jesus that he will be killed,

but will rise again. The first announcement is found in Mark 8 and the third in Mark 10. So pieced together, Mark is telling his readers not once, but three times that Resurrection (Easter) is the final answer to Christmas.

This announcement spoken long ago was first heard by the ears of the disciples and today those same words are being heard by us. Adults and children too, just like long ago. Remember, that children in Jesus day were considered to be weak and insignificant. Yet it is the children Jesus tells the disciples to bring to him. He blesses them, takes one into his arms and says, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name, welcomes me."

In these days leading up to Easter, we are reminded again that the good news of Easter is for all people. It's kind of a welcome. Yes, for you and me who hear the good news week after week at Peace Lutheran and for those who walk outside our doors and wonder what goes on there. Good news. Welcome. Jesus has defeated the final enemy of death. Once... for All! Praise God!

Prayer: Hear us Lord as we pray. Your coming has brought life to death. And because you live, we will live too. Eternally and forever. Amen.

—Mike Carlson

Wednesday, March 13

Acts 13:16-26

¹⁶So Paul stood up and with a gesture began to speak: "You Israelites, and others who fear God, listen. ¹⁷The God of this people Israel chose our ancestors and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it. ¹⁸For about forty years he put up with them in the wilderness. ¹⁹After he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he gave them their land as an inheritance ²⁰for about four hundred fifty years. After that he gave them judges until the time of the prophet Samuel. ²¹Then they asked for a king; and God gave them Saul son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, who reigned for forty years. ²²When he had removed him, he made David their king. In his testimony about him he said, 'I have found David, son of Jesse, to be a man after my heart, who will carry out all my wishes.' ²³Of this man's posterity God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised; ²⁴before his coming John had already proclaimed a baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel. ²⁵And as John was finishing his work, he said, 'What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of the sandals on his feet.' ²⁶"My brothers, you descendants of Abraham's family, and others who fear God, to us the message of this salvation has been sent.

Whenever my Aunt Patty meets someone new, she tries to find out if they are related to her, or if they know other relatives. In this way she expands her family. On his first missionary journey, Paul and his companions went into a synagogue on the Sabbath, here in Pisidian Antioch. During the service, the synagogue rulers asked if they had a "message of encouragement for the people" (Acts 13:15). Paul stood up and addressed the Jews and Gentile believers who were present, recounted their shared Biblical history, and noted that God "chose our ancestors and made the people great." (v. 17) Paul and his audience are kin.

The listeners knew well Paul's references to events from Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and the Psalms. Which is why Paul zeroed in on King David and proclaimed that from David's descendants, "God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised" (v.23 quoted from Isaiah 11). The very scriptures studied in their synagogue pointed to Jesus.

Paul declared that descendants of Abraham's family and those who fear God are his brothers. Salvation through Jesus, the son of David, descendant of Abraham, is for all people.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, Thank you for your holy scriptures. Thank you for Paul, who used that scripture to authenticate Jesus for people in Biblical times and for us today. Thank you for providing our salvation through your son, Jesus. Help us to remember that we are all brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Amen

—Anita Platt

Thursday, March 14

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

Jeremiah prophesied for nearly 5 decades, calling on the people of Israel (Judah) to repent and return to the Lord, rejecting their sinful ways and the worship of pagan gods.

Numbers 14:18 "The Lord is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and

rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

Jeremiah’s prophecy comes more than 800 yrs after the exodus. From the very beginning, the Israelites grumbled, stumbled, and sinned against God despite the miracles performed and the blueprint given on how to live, worship and provide atonement for their sins.

It took another 600 yrs before fulfillment of this prophecy thru the birth of his son...slow to anger, abounding in love and always true to his word!

To rectify our iniquity, God sent his son who was perfect, without sin and became the ultimate offering/sacrifice. There would be no further need for sacrifices. God would remember our sin no more! The first covenant was written on stone tablets, the second covenant was written on our hearts via the Holy Spirit...thank God for the second Covenant!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for being slow to anger, abounding in love and willing to forgive our sins. Thank you also for the blessing of your Son, in whom we look to emulate, lean on in times of trial and [thanks](#) for picking us up when we stumble and fall! Amen

—Ken Cryer

Friday, March 15

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.

Let’s skip the confusing ancient history about the order of Melchizedek.

The real point here, I think, is that Jesus intercedes with God the Father for us, like the high priest was supposed to do for the people back in Jesus’ time. Jesus became fully human, and suffered through life like one of us, until he was called to his mission. And here is the mystery of our faith. Though fully human, Jesus was also God, and perfect. Not “a god”, but God. This suffering human, who was also God, was sent to save us by our faith in him. Imagine yourself as a parent, concerned about a child’s struggles and perhaps misbehavior.

You feel some disappointment at your child's behavior. But there is a part of you that always loves your child, that kneels down and dries the child's tears, that tells the child "be nice to your friends," and makes it all better with hugs and love.

I sometimes think of God and Jesus like this, like two parts of myself. One part wants justice, and the other part wants mercy through love. Jesus is that part of God that is there to save us from ourselves through him and his love and mercy.

Prayer: "Merciful Savior, open our hearts to your love, strengthen our faith in you, and help us to live in your ways, until our eternal salvation comes.

—Max Fritzler

Saturday, March 16

John 12:20-33

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say—'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 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.

In John 12:20-33, Jesus is speaking to a non-Jewish group of people that have asked to see Him. Part of his message to this group is a strong and clear mandate not to center ourselves on worldly things - but on what God wants us to focus on.

Jesus says to the group in John 12:27-28: Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!' **Then a voice came from heaven, 'I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.'**

In this part of the scripture, there is a voice from the heavens in response to what Jesus has told the group. Some believed that the heavenly response was just thunder, but others believe it was from angels. Jesus offers the following to the crowd (John 12:30,31) ...**“This voice has come for your sake, not mine.** Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ...”. It seems to me that an important part of this message is that God gives each of us enough proof of God’s existence and we make our own decision to either believe and follow him (hear angels) or not believe (hear thunder).

Prayer: Please God, we ask that you help us abandon worldly pursuits and focus on Jesus. We also ask that you help us hear the angels in our daily lives and not to dismiss them as thunder.

—*Sam Sidhom*

Monday, March 18

Acts 16:1-15

¹Paul went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. ²He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. ⁴As they went from town to town, they delivered to them for observance the decisions that had been reached by the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem. ⁵So the churches were strengthened in the faith and increased in numbers daily.

⁶They went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷When they had come opposite Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them; ⁸so, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. ¹¹We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, ¹²and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. ¹³On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. ¹⁵When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at

my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

I picked this scripture because of the travelog and because it was about Paul’s second missionary journey. Years ago, while stationed in Italy, we took our most memorable vacation ever to Greece and Turkey covering much of the terrain Paul covered in his letters.

I was and am always amazed with how far Paul traveled, on foot and by sea, over some very rugged terrain ministering to people from very different backgrounds, planting all those churches. He simply went where God told him to go; not always where he wanted to go. I always wondered why he was told to skip going to ‘Phrygia and Galatia’ and the cities therein (modern day Turkey) and head straight to Macedonia (northern Greece) , but God had a purpose. The timing was not right, and Paul needed to spread the Message to another continent, Europe. He also needed to pick up a cohort in Troas name ‘Dr. Luke.’ Luke then accompanied Paul to Macedonia, and later wrote this letter. Paul would visit those other places later on his third journey.

The other part of this story I always liked is the story of Lydia, ‘Europe’s first convert.’ A dealer of ‘purple cloth,’ she was not only self-employed, but probably had others working for her. She listened to Paul and God opened her heart....only God could do that. She then had all of her household baptized and invited Paul and his team to her home. Hospitality!

God still calls us today to places we often don’t want to go to do things we don’t want to do....but if we look for His purpose, we’ll discover why we were sent there. I know from experience. When grumping about an unpleasant assignment, a young, junior Chaplain once took me aside and said, “...look God sent you here for a purpose,... You should quit grumping and find out what that purpose is, and then do it.”

So when called, Go and Do.

Prayer: Lord, help us to see your purpose in everything we are called to do, and the courage to go and do in our daily walk with You. Amen

—Dave Dynneson

Tuesday, March 19

Mark 10:32-34

³²They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; ³⁴they will

mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again."

For the third time in the Gospel of Mark, Jesus asks his disciples to embrace some difficult truths in foretelling His death and resurrection. The twelve "*were amazed, and those who followed were afraid*." It's likely they still did not understand, nor did they want to understand, that particular message. "He couldn't really mean what He seems to be saying, could He?" they might have asked each other. As Jesus often spoke in parables, I suspect they were inclined to assume He was again communicating some hidden truth. They were not looking for a messiah who would be a suffering servant; they expected a messiah who would overthrow the Romans and physically sit on David's throne. Two verses later, James and John even requested, "*Appoint us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory*." Shortly thereafter comes Jesus' triumphal entry on Palm Sunday and likely all the apostles' thoughts of mocking, spitting, flogging, and killing were forgotten in favor of their preferred narrative. We probably prefer Jesus' many words of comfort and joy. But Jesus also requests we embrace some difficult truths in following him. When these conflict with our preferred narrative, where shall we seek the strength to respond?

Prayer: Lord, strengthen us for your service and grant us your peace. Amen

—Marc Hanson

Wednesday, March 20

Hebrews 3:7-19

⁷Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, "Today, if you hear his voice, ⁸do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, as on the day of testing in the wilderness, ⁹where your ancestors put me to the test, though they had seen my works ¹⁰for forty years. Therefore I was angry with that generation, and I said, 'They always go astray in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.' ¹¹As in my anger I swore, 'They will not enter my rest.'"

¹²Take care, brothers and sisters, that none of you may have an evil, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. ¹³But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," so that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have become partners of Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end. ¹⁵As it is said, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion."

¹⁶Now who were they who heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses? ¹⁷But with whom was he angry forty years? Was it not those who sinned, whose bodies fell in the wilderness? ¹⁸And to whom did he swear

that they would not enter his rest, if not to those who were disobedient? ¹⁹So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief.

Alright, that's it! The last straw, you're grounded - for forty years, or death, whichever comes first! Can you imagine? Yet, that's what the writer in Heb. 3 says, twice, again in chapter 4. "Today, if you hear my voice, do not harden your hearts; you'll never enter my rest." The Israelites were a rebellious people, complaining, whining, ready to go back to Egypt when they were at the southern border of Canaan. But, hearing the report from 10 of the 12 scouts who had just come back from Canaan, in fear, they turned their backs on God, hardened their hearts, and wanted to go their own way. Angered, God says this generation will live out their lives in the wilderness, everyone 20 years old and up, 40 years...even Moses!

The warning is still there for us today, "If you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." Jesus, when tempted by Satan himself, said, "You shall not test God!" The temptations in this life are the same as what Adam and Eve had: "the cravings of sinful man, the lust of the eyes, and boasting of what he has and does." (1 John 2:16).

We are to exhort one another, daily, that none of us is hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. David wrote: "How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults." (Ps.19:12 NLT). Heb.4:1 says, "...let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress." Our loving God is "slow to anger" and is always ready to forgive, even 70 times 7 times! We need to confess to one another, with one another, "Lord...forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us." Daily, that we may enter his rest, daily.

Prayer: Lord, help me to not harden my heart, but to keep it soft and open to you. Help me to trust others to encourage and exhort me along my journey, that I may not live out my days in a self-imposed wilderness.

"Oh, what peace we often forfeit,

Oh, what needless pain we bear.

All because we do not carry,

Everything to God in prayer."

—*Ric Soderstrom*

Thursday, March 21

Isaiah 50:4-9a

⁴The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, 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 up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ⁹It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty?

First Devotional: This is one of Isaiah's "servant songs". They are messages to Israel and forward through the times to today's people to instruct us on how to live.

The Teacher here is Jesus Christ who came down to earth to teach people how to learn and speak the truth. He projects trust and confidence in this text. The Teacher's "well-instructed" tongue helps others by 'sustaining the weary' and through his word, He offers hope and strength. "He opens our ears", so that we can learn and speak, "Morning by morning"; meaning this we must continually listen to the Lord.

"I do not turn away from those who beat me; I do not hide my face from mocking and spitting, because the Sovereign Lord helps me." "I have set my face like a flint and He who vindicates me is near". He is ready to be challenged. "For the Sovereign Lord helps me out." It is a text of support, power and strength to help all who are followers.

The word Sovereign in this text is powerful to me. It means supreme power or authority; Power over everything, our lives, our work, and our families. It gives us something to reflect on; how great and mighty is the Lord and to live our lives in complete surrender.

Prayer: Dear Sovereign Lord, keep our ears and hearts open to your teaching. Give us support so that we don't become weary. Give us strength to challenge or be steadfast when others go against us. Show us the way to your heavenly home. Amen

—Bev Viken

Second Devotional: Sometimes I struggle with being a good listener, so it's a comfort to know that "Morning by morning God awakens my ear to listen." If we listen, we can know how to help others, especially those who are weary in their souls. Even if we are going through trials and hard times, we can count on God to help us along the way.

Jesus faced unimaginable suffering in the days leading up to his crucifixion, as this passage prophesied. Jesus "set his face like flint" to accomplish all that God had called for him to do. It didn't matter that the religious leaders discredited him. Jesus faced his accusers and didn't hide from them. He knew he would not be put to shame, but would be the salvation of all people, because God was with him.

Prayer: Dear God, help me to wake up each day with listening ears, ready to hear all that you wish to teach me. Help me also to be ready to share the good news of Jesus with all who cross my path, and to set my face like flint when I need to be strong.

—Loey Nordsletten-Soderstrom

Friday, March 22

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of 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.

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to his faithful congregation in Philippi, which is in today's northern Greece, situated on a major trade route between Europe and Asia and a Roman Colony. Eugene Peterson's 'Message' says this was Paul's happiest letter and it is believed it was written in AD 60. Paul was in prison at the time, in a dark and dingy cell shackled to a Roman guard. He really loved the Philippians and tried his best to encourage these early Christians.

This passage of scripture is an expression of the joy and gratitude Paul had for Jesus. Paul wanted to remind the Philippians of Christ's obedience and willingness to accept death on the cross for us. He also sought to hold up Christ as an example of how we should live, so that we too could experience that same joy and happiness in serving others.

At Peace, we often see this joy when we collect 'Most Needed Items' for VEAP, serve at Loaves and Fishes, or provide winter clothes to newly arrived refugees. This last fall we had over 100 members stay after church and pack 15,000 meals for 'Harvest Pack;' young and old participated with great joy. At Christmas, we shared that joy with our Good Gifts to the world.

Paul had great love for the Philippians. I think he would love Peace too, for I am filled with joy and gratitude at what Peace does year in and year out in serving our living Christ.

Prayer: Lord help us to be more loving and kind and willing to share the Good News of Jesus Christ.

—Nancy Dynneson

Saturday, March 23

Mark 11:1-11

¹When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples ²and said to them, “Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it. ³If anyone says to you, ‘Why are you doing this?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.’” ⁴They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it, ⁵some of the bystanders said to them, “What are you doing, untying the colt?” ⁶They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it. ⁷Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it. ⁸Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields. ⁹Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

¹⁰Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

¹¹Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple; and when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.

If you were to plan an entrance for Jesus, what would it look like? If he were to come to Bloomington, to Peace, or to your home, what would you do in order to make sure Jesus felt welcomed and to show him hospitality?

In modern times, presidents and world leaders often travel in fancy airplanes, have motorcades with nice cars, and operate under intense security and with the best technology. Even back in Jesus’ time, kings and emperors would ride on noble steeds, have vast entourages, and parade their wealth for all to see.

Yet Jesus, the king of kings and lord of lords, makes an entrance into Jerusalem riding on a lowly donkey. Jesus was and still is an unexpected king—one who leads not with hubris, but with humility. One who leads not with the power of his might, but by the power of his mercy and love. Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!

Prayer: Gracious God, you lead us by example in your humility and in your care for others. Teach us how to be humble and rid us of our desires for more wealth, more power, and more things—that we would serve you and your Kingdom out of the goodness of our hearts and the greatness of your Spirit. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

—Pastor Joe Orner

Monday in Holy Week, March 25

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 at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' 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.

Ok, I must admit that this story occasionally has come to mind at those times when I find myself to be a reluctant giver. Mary (sister of Lazarus) has just used some extravagantly expensive perfumed oil (roughly worth a year's wages) to rub on Jesus' feet; she was then roundly chastised by Judas who suggested it should be sold and the money given to the poor. I could infer that Jesus' response in verse 8 means: "Why care about the poor? Your money won't help much. They will always be there."

Is that what Jesus was saying? I don't think so. First of all, he knew Judas was a thief who would likely sell the oil, maybe give a small amount to the poor to make himself look good, and pocket the rest. Jesus was fully aware of Judas' character and the insincerity of his comment. Did Jesus care about the poor? Of course he did! Jesus repeatedly demonstrated this throughout the Gospel as he feeds the poor, ministers to prostitutes, heals the blind, the lame and the lepers. However, at this moment, he recognized the meaningfulness of Mary's pure act of selfless devotion, using this costly oil to anoint Jesus' feet, without caring about how it might appear to others.

As I ponder this story, there is no way I can use it to justify being a tightwad when opportunities arise to help those less fortunate. Of course the need will always exist, but hopefully, I will genuinely be willing to give without hesitation. However, when moments arise where there is an opportunity to deepen my relationship with Christ, then perhaps I should set worldly needs aside for the moment and allow spiritual growth to take precedence. In the long run, I'm guessing that acts of charity and growth in Christ will often

not be mutually exclusive, but rather will be one and the same.

Prayer: Lord, please help me to be mindful and generous when needs of others arise while also helping me to be aware and seize upon those moments which will allow me to enter into a deeper and more personal relationship with you.

—Gene Cross

Tuesday in Holy Week, March 26

John 18:33-38a

³³Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” ³⁵Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” ³⁷Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

This passage is so timely! What with fake news and artificial intelligence concocting what we read on the internet, we all find ourselves asking, “What is truth?”.

Jesus used the word “truth” many times in the Gospel of John. I first read that he used the word 26 times. I did my own count and got 48 times. Then I read that Jesus used the word 55 times in John's Gospel. Maybe it depends on which translation you're using, but the point is Jesus mentions truth a lot! In fact, one of His most common phrases is “I tell you the truth, ...”.

So what are we to do when we can't be sure that what we read and hear is an accurate and complete picture of what is happening in the world? Part of the answer is not to accept whatever we read or hear without questioning it and looking for corroboration from multiple sources for anything of significance. Another part of the answer is to be aware of our own biases, i.e., what do we want to believe is the truth versus what does the most objectively credible information tell us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to always be open to the truth even when it may make us uncomfortable. And help us to do our part to act on the truth, no matter how discouraging it may be, to make the world more as You would have it be. Amen

—Gary Vig

Wednesday in Holy Week, March 27

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 next to him; 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 at the table 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 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: Lord help me to live in your love and Word. Amen

—Lori Thomson

Maundy Thursday, March 28

Mark 14:12-25

¹²On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, ¹⁴and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." ¹⁶So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

¹⁷When it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." ¹⁹They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" ²⁰He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. ²¹For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

²²While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

I always look forward to Maundy Thursday each Lent, not because it's near the end of the 40 days rather because of the meaning of the events. The stories told in these verses are all very familiar and are written about in each of the gospels. It is also referenced in many familiar paintings and hymns and acknowledged each week when we and others around the world share the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Jesus taught several lessons that evening in the Upper Room during Passover and the one I will focus on is Holy Communion.

Over the past couple of years, I've had the honor of assisting with Holy Communion. I look forward to those Sunday's as they have become a time of contemplative personal worship experience in the preparation, service and clean up. Sure, there is the worry about filling the cups just right, getting the naan ready and making sure there is enough. But I am filled with so much more during the time I spend in the sacristy. It takes me right back to that evening meal and wonder what I would have thought hearing Jesus say "Take; this is my body" followed by "This is the blood of the covenant". The presence of

the Holy Spirit is nourishing and a reminder of God's presence.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for the Sacrament of Holy Communion that we may be nourished to continue to do your will. Amen

—*Mary Kautto*

Good Friday, March 29

Luke 23:32-43

³²Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. ³⁴Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, "He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!" ³⁶The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷and saying, "If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!" ³⁸There was also an inscription over him, "This is the King of the Jews." ³⁹One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, "Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" ⁴⁰But the other rebuked him, saying, "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" ⁴¹And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong." ⁴²Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." ⁴³He replied, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

Most of us are quite familiar with the Easter story, beginning with Palm Sunday thru Easter morning. Good Friday, Jesus was crucified, died, and was buried. He "descended into hell, the third day he rose from the dead..." I don't ponder enough what was going on between Jesus' death and resurrection. I wonder, is there a painting I've never seen, showing Jesus and the man who died next to him, walking together as they enter heaven. "Truly, (I assure you), today you will be with me in Paradise." Today, dying side by side, and today, coming into His kingdom, together.

Funny how something can just pop into your head! This morning, thinking of this story, the song "American Pie" did just that, the ending of each refrain, and the song, "...this will be the day that I die." The thieves knew this was their last day - death on a cross. Think what all would be going on in their heads: fear, dread, horror, your worst nightmare. Yet, one of the men says, while on the cross, "I deserve this, for what I've done." Really? Death on a cross? What did he do? The Bible says we are all sinners, guilty, but death on a cross? Jesus died for us, and paid the price for our sins.

This story of the dying thief's last minute conversion is only found in Luke. In Matthew and Mark, they say both men joined in with the mocking crowd, scorning, insulting, and ridiculing him. Yet, somehow, in his dying moments, one criminal realizes who Jesus is - the Messiah, Son of God, King of the Jews! In his waning moments of life, truly a "deathbed confession!"

This is the day that I die - we all have that day coming, and yet, on that day, Jesus will be there, to usher us into His Kingdom of Heaven - Paradise!

Prayer: Lord, I do not know the number of my days, or how my life will end. But I do know, you are my shepherd and will not only be there to the end, but usher me into eternal life with you. Amen.

—*Ric Soderstrom*

Holy Saturday, March 30

Psalm 36

¹Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in their hearts; there is no fear of God before their eyes.

²For they flatter themselves in their own eyes that their iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

³The words of their mouths are mischief and deceit; they have ceased to act wisely and do good.

⁴They plot mischief while on their beds; they are set on a way that is not good; they do not reject evil.

⁵Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

⁶Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains, your judgments are like the great deep; you save humans and animals alike, O Lord.

⁷How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

⁹For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

¹⁰O continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your salvation to the upright of heart!

¹¹Do not let the foot of the arrogant tread on me, or the hand of the wicked drive me away.

¹²There the evildoers lie prostrate; they are thrust down, unable to rise.

Psalm 36 paints a stark contrast: the chilling darkness of the ungodly heart against the radiant brilliance of God's character. While the wicked revel in their evil workings, blind to the judgment that's coming, God's love soars high above, unwavering in its faithfulness and justice. In this contrast, I find both a call to self-reflection to examine the shadows within myself, and a deep comfort in knowing that even in the deepest valleys, God's light shines, offering hope, protection, and light to those who seek it.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, as I open the pages of Psalm 36, my heart overflows with awe at the enormity of your love. Your steadfast love is a love that encompasses all, both right and wrong, and offers shelter and protection in your arms. In this world where darkness often seems to prevail, your love, grace and mercy shine as a beacon of hope - reminding me that even when I stumble and stray, your love remains constant, a guiding light leading me back to your embrace. Lord, I pray that you fill me with the wisdom to discern your righteousness and the courage to walk in your truth. May your love be the guiding force in my life, inspiring me to share its warmth with others and reflect your goodness in all I do. Amen.

—Emily Sidhom

Easter Sunday, March 31

Mark 16:1-8

¹When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ²And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³They had been saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance to the tomb?" ⁴When they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had already been rolled back. ⁵As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man, dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. ⁶But he said to them, "Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here. Look, there is the place they laid him. ⁷But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

"So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."—Mark 16:8a

My first reaction to Mark's Easter story? *"Seriously, Mark: this is how you end your story of Jesus? On Easter day I want more."* In the first verse of his gospel, Mark advertises his story

of Jesus as “*good news*.” But here, at the end of the story we wonder: what kind of good news ends with the women running away from the tomb, “*for terror and amazement had seized them*.” The words are even stronger in Greek: *tromos*—trauma, and *ecstasis*—ecstasy. Trauma and ecstasy had seized them. They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

And yet, of all the four Gospel stories of Easter, Mark invites us to stand where those first scared witnesses stood. The three women didn’t see Jesus. Neither do we. They didn’t hear Jesus call their names. Neither have we. They weren’t invited to touch his wounded hands. We haven’t touched Jesus’ hands either. Mark leaves us with no happy ending, no tying up of loose ends. He ends his Gospel with the witnesses afraid/traumatized at this earth-shattering event; amazed/in ecstasy of what Jesus’ rising from the dead means for *everything*. And isn’t that where we are, too?

But then we remember something Mark had reported earlier. “*Go tell the disciples,*” the young man said. “*He is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.*” In other words, the story isn’t over! Jesus is on the loose! He’s going ahead of us and who knows what will happen now! Mark’s ending to Jesus’ story? It’s an ending without end. “Christ is risen; he is risen, indeed!”

Prayer: “Dear Lord: You came back to us! You go ahead of us! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen.”

—Pastor Mark Nelson

“God in Pain”

2024 Lenten Wednesday Worship

All of us know something about pain and suffering. Anyone who has suffered through even one night of deep hurt knows what it is like to pray for relief. Sometimes the prayer is answered and sometimes it is not. Still, as Christians in those times, we trust that Jesus Christ is present in our suffering.

On these Wednesday evenings, we will look at the pain Jesus suffered during Holy Week and Good Friday and what God might be showing us in our pain and suffering. Join us on Wednesday nights, 6:30-7:15pm on February 21, 28, March 6, 13, and 20. Our evening worship will use the Holden Evening Prayer setting.

—*Pastor Mark Nelson*

- February 21: John 13:21-35
- February 28: John 19:8-11a
- March 6: John 19:1-6
- March 13: John 19:16b-28
- March 20: John 19:31-37

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

LENT 2024

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.

WEDNESDAY IN LENT

- 5:30pm Lenten Supper, starting February 21
- 6:30pm Worship, Holden Evening Prayer, starting February 21
Please turn to the previous page for a description of the Lenten sermon series, "God in Pain"
- 7:15pm Peace Choir Rehearsal; Confirmation

SUNDAYS IN LENT

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

HOLY WEEK

SUNDAY, MARCH 24 – *Palm Sunday*

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

THURSDAY, MARCH 28 – *Maundy Thursday*

- 7:00pm Worship

FRIDAY, MARCH 29 – *Good Friday*

- 7:00pm Worship

SUNDAY, MARCH 31 – *EASTER SUNDAY*

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

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