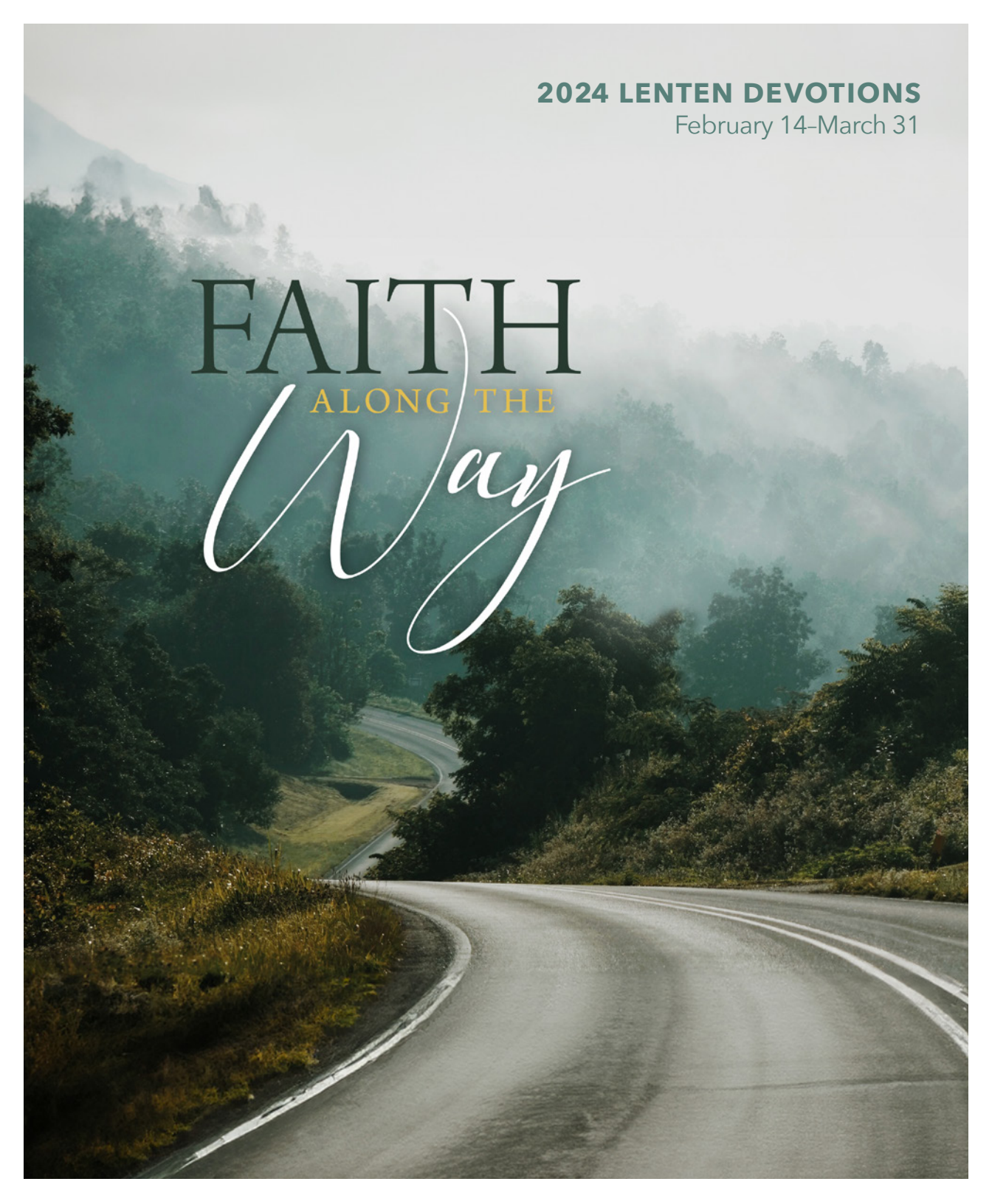


**2024 LENTEN DEVOTIONS**

February 14-March 31

FAITH  
ALONG THE  
*Way*





## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

There is no right way to use this devotional as each individual, group, and family is different. Spending time reading scripture, praying, and thinking creatively is a great way to prepare for Easter.

### **For families with young children**

Set aside some time each day to read the daily scripture together, keeping in mind the word for the day. If your children are old enough to read, have them read. Ask them what they remember or what stood out to them in the reading. Use the questions supplied or make up your own to help focus your reflection. Encourage kids to draw pictures that reflect the reading or the day's word. Please post these to the Lent Photo-A-Day Facebook page. (See page 3 for more information about the Facebook page.)

### **For families with junior or senior high students**

Older children can do much of this on their own but encourage them to join you in this daily devotion. Together, pick a time to touch base each day to review the daily devotion. If you find meeting daily is challenging, set aside a half hour a couple of times a week to review the daily devotions. If your daily schedule is a bit crazy, you might want to schedule a time before things get out of hand!

### **For individuals**

If you are able, set aside the same time each day—15 to 30 minutes will give you time not only to read but to think, ponder, and pray. You are invited to do as much or as little as you find helpful.

You might want to take pictures that reflect each day's word and scripture lesson and share them with each other via e-mail or post them on your favorite social media platforms.

Each day there is a scripture reading, a photo, devotional thoughts, questions, and a prayer. Keep in mind the theme is ***Faith Along the Way***, so as you read the daily scripture, make this the focal point of your devotional thoughts and prayers. As you read, you might choose to engage in one of the following disciplines:

### **Meditation**

Quietly focus on the daily reading, perhaps reading it over and over again.

### **Reflection**

Use this booklet to help focus your thoughts, answer the questions supplied, and ask new ones!

### **Journaling**

You might want to have a little notebook set aside for this or go paperless and blog!

### **Social Media**

Post photos, artwork, or poems that have been inspired by your devotional time.

Share these devotions with family or friends and use this time to prepare your hearts and minds this Lent when we prepare to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

## LENT PHOTO-A-DAY FACEBOOK PAGE

Each day will have a theme word. Focus on that word and what it means devotionally. As you go throughout your day, when something reminds you of that word or evokes a response, snap a picture and share it to your favorite social media platform.

Add hashtags when you post: *#{word of the day}*, *#Lent2024*, *#faithalongtheway*, and any other hashtag that says something about Following Jesus.

Find more information and daily additions on the Lent Photo-A-Day Facebook page,

**[www.facebook.com/LentPhotoADay](http://www.facebook.com/LentPhotoADay)**.



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

# Light

## 1 John 1:3-10

While we can't and shouldn't always put moral values on things like light and darkness, in this passage, John is using light as a metaphor for God and for righteousness, while darkness is a metaphor for sin and unrighteousness. While John's gospel was written to help people come to believe in Jesus, here, John is writing to people who follow Jesus. Because faith isn't just intellectual, like thinking "I believe" is enough. Faith encompasses our

whole lives, including our words, our actions, and the choices we make.

In John 9, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world." In this story, he encounters a man who was born blind. He mixes his saliva with some dirt and rubs it on the man's eyes, telling him to go wash. Immediately, the man can see light for the first time. Jesus is the light for this man, and through this miracle, people came to believe. In Matthew 5, Jesus also says, "You are the light of the world." YOU are the light. In 1 John 1, those who believe in Jesus are called upon to not just believe but to walk in the light, to reflect the light, to be the light for others. We're not to hide that light, but to shine our light, to share our faith with others, as it says in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

### Questions

- Who has been a light in your life?
- For whom have you been a light?
- How can you be light for others?

### Prayer

God of light, you sent Jesus to be our light and to help us bring light to others. Enlighten our hearts and help us to reach out to those in darkness, that they may know your light. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen





FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

# Listen

2 Timothy 4:1-5

When I was a kid, I went to a Lutheran Outdoor Ministries summer camp. (I'd later work there, too.) And, we'd do this game from time to time to learn and teach about listening for God's voice. We'd set up an obstacle course and blindfold a participant. Then we'd have another participant, standing off to the side, guide the blindfolded participant through the course, using only their voice. Sometimes, we'd make it more challenging by having other people shout out false directions as well.

This passage from 2 Timothy reminds us how God's word gives us faith along the way to guide us through life. The voices of this world often try to drown out our baptismal hope, telling us that we are not good enough, worthy enough, or powerful enough. The voices of this world often try to tell us that we have to do more, be more, or achieve more. In listening to the good news of our baptism, we are reminded that we are fully loved, fully redeemed, fully restored in Christ Jesus. And when we listen to that good news, we are empowered to share it with others, doing the work of sharing the faith that we find along the way.

## Questions

- When is it easy for you to listen to the good news of God in Jesus Christ?
- When is it difficult?

## Prayer

Lord God, help us to listen to the good news of our baptism. Help us to know that we are fully loved by you. And, help us to share that good news with others. Amen

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

# Cover

## Psalm 25:1-10

Some days, it's hard to get out of bed. The covers are so warm and comfortable that the temptation to just curl up and stay there—maybe with a good book—is almost overwhelming. Especially on a Saturday morning. Especially a Saturday morning in Lent. It would be easier to dwell in the safety and warmth found there than facing the world. Who wants to get up and face the cold, the chore list, and whatever else may be waiting for us?

But Psalm 25 reminds us that no matter what it is that we're going out to face—from minor inconveniences, to major issues—we don't face them alone. "O my God, in you I trust!" writes the psalmist. Not enemies, not sins or youthful transgressions, not shame, not those who would get in our way, none of that can come between us and the presence of God.

Sometimes that's hard to remember when it feels like we're covered, weighted down by the weariness of the world. Even now, four days in, what can feel like the gloom of Lent might be settling in. But when things start to weigh heavy, imagine those warm, comforting covers... and picture God's love covering you the same way. "All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness," writes the psalmist. In other words, God has you covered.

### Questions

- What's weighing you down or covering you in weariness these days? How might the love of God help lift that weight?
- What can you do to remind yourself that no matter what may come along the way, God has you covered?

### Prayer

Holy One, wrap us in your love with all the comfort of our favorite blanket, all the warmth of a caring parent's arms, all the protection that your path has to offer. Remind us that you are a God of steadfast love and faithfulness, and no matter what, you've got us covered. Amen



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18

# Promise

**Genesis 9:8-17**

God not only makes promises, but God makes good on every promise made. Our track record, as it relates to promises, is less consistent.

There is a stronger word in scripture for God's promises: covenant. A covenant is an unbreakable promise. When God makes a pledge, consider it a "done deal."



I assume most of you know the story of Noah and the ark and the subsequent flood. The story tells of God's disillusionment with humanity. Even from a human point of view, we can see why. In this fresh start, Noah and his family are saved from the great flood along with a boatload of animals.

What does this parable tell us? We learn that sin was not eliminated, because Noah and his family were imperfect, too. Of course, God knew that already, but this story reminds us that there is no such thing as "good people" and "bad people."

In today's devotional reading, we hear of the promise God made to Noah and his family about never destroying the earth again with a catastrophic, life-ending flood. The rainbow is a sign of God's unbreakable promise to humanity.

Every time I see a rainbow, I stop and look at it. I'll even take a picture and post it. Rainbows bring me happiness. BUT God's promises give me joy!

Promises of forgiveness, love, peace, presence, compassion, spiritual protection, and even gentleness.

I need those promises to get through the ups and downs and life. I suspect you do, too.

## Questions

- Which promise of God do you need to be reminded of today?
- Is there someone you know who needs to be encouraged with a promise from God?

## Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks for all the ways you watch over us and promise to care for us. Break into our stormy lives and bring us hope like a rainbow after a storm. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen





MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

# Gave

## Ephesians 2:1-10

There's an old joke about a writing contest between Jesus and the devil. Just before the end of the contest, the power goes out and Satan's work is lost. Jesus wins because "Jesus saves." The joke's punch line works because the fact that "Jesus saves" has become a bumper-sticker slogan of the Christian faith. You see it on signs at football games and on billboards along the highway, on 'how to be saved' tracts and, yes, car bumper stickers.

"Jesus saves" can't be the only tenet of our faith, but it is an essential one. In Ephesians, Paul writes: "But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through

our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved..." Our salvation is a free gift of God's rich mercy and great love. We are made right with God, rescued from sin, and given new life—all because Jesus saves. It's not our own doing, the passage makes clear. And it lays a foundation for all that comes after, especially how we live our lives serving others. Jesus saves. It's far more than a joke or a punchline or a roadside billboard; it's foundational to our identity as people of the Way.

### Questions

- Do you have a story of 'being saved'? Or have you come to understand your salvation differently?
- Ephesians 2:10 talks about good works as our way of life. What connection do you see between your salvation and the works you do in Jesus' name?

### Prayer

Lord, give us faith to see our salvation as a free gift of your abundant mercy and deep love for us, a gift that transforms and claims us and makes us new. Amen

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

# Ready

1 Peter 3:8-18a

When I think about getting ready, my first thought is about getting ready for a trip. When I get ready to go somewhere it involves a lot of planning, researching, internet surfing, and months of dreaming. I even have a space set aside as my prep area. Adding things to it as I think of them, sometimes even removing things if I think of something better. The act of getting ready is almost as fun as what I am getting ready for. For others, getting ready is a last-minute thing. Grab what you see, throw it in the suitcase, and rush off to wherever you are going.

When I get ready for worship or times of devotion and prayer, my practice is different. I get ready by silencing my phone and turning off the computer. I dim the lights, take

a few deep breaths, read a passage, and listen. I listen for a sound, a word, a breath. I listen for God.

As we journey through this season of Lent, we are invited to get ready, to prepare for this sacred time together. We can do this in a variety of ways, as there is no one right way to get ready. We just open our hearts to the movement of the Spirit. In this devotional we will be hearing stories throughout the scriptures, stories filled with the activity of God and his followers. Some of them were ready for what was going to happen next, others were not.

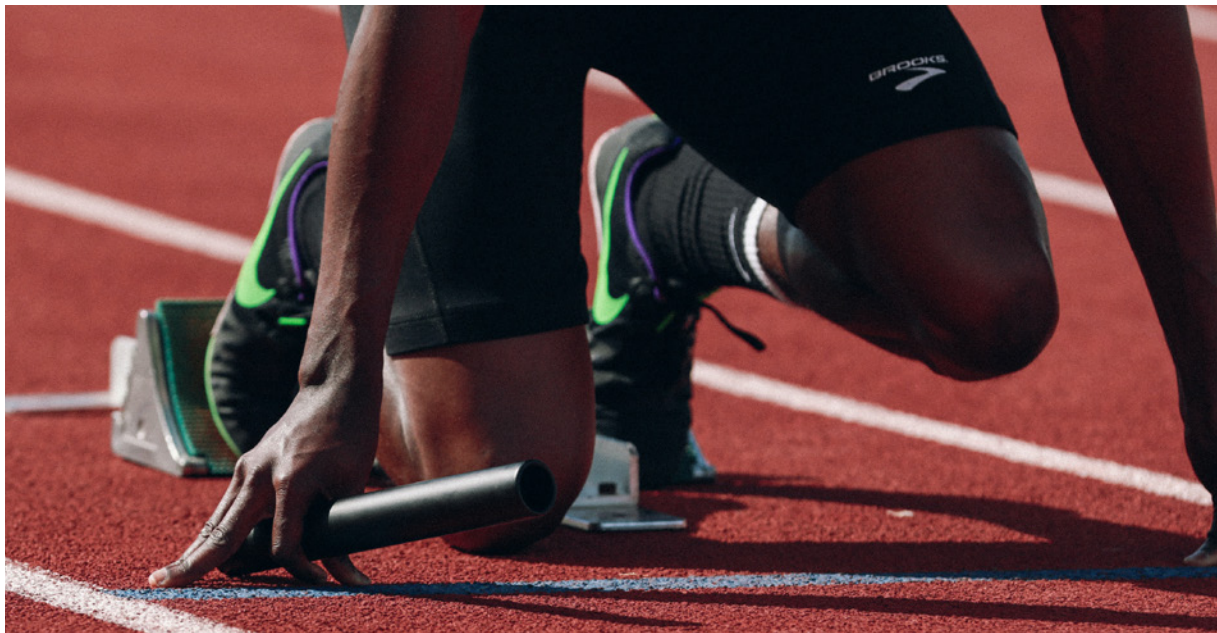
So today, I invite you to slow down and listen, what is God trying to say to you?

## Questions

- How do you get ready?
- What are some of the most important events you have gotten ready for in life?
- How do you get ready for worship?

## Prayer

Holy Lord, empower us to work past our pains and trials. Strengthen us with your Spirit of life and forgiveness and help us to love one another as you love us. We ask this in your love-filled name. Amen





WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

# Wilderness

**Matthew 4:1-11**

One of my sons is a geologist and another is a high school teacher who lives at the base of the Rocky Mountains. Both of them have a love for adventuring into the wilderness, to connect with this unique beauty of nature, to learn more from it, and to go where only those who savor such an experience are usually found. They know what kind of clothing and equipment to consider, who to be in contact with, and what they need to have for water and nutrition.

There are those in our world who live in the wilderness, not by choice but by circumstance. The place in the world they live has been brutal due to limited resources or it has become that way slowly because of climate change or rapidly because of more severe weather. Life is far more vulnerable for many of these people, and they may die without aid from another. Thank God for aid from countries and peoples with far greater resources.

This latter wilderness experience is where Jesus found himself, with nothing to eat or drink, with no one to give him anything, no one but the devil. When offered something to meet his needs, why not accept? A deal dependent upon turning away from God was more than Jesus was willing to sacrifice; he was no Esau willing to satisfy his hunger at the cost of the blessing of being with God.

Jesus also experienced wilderness for us, even on Golgotha.

## Questions

- What do you find inviting about the wilderness?
- How could wilderness (physical, emotional, mental, relational) be threatening to your survival?
- What wildernesses have you/are you experiencing in your life and how might loving God help? What else do you need?

## Prayer

Jesus, you know what it is like to be alone in the wilderness. So do we. May we be in contact with you. Give us faith along the way, to be with people in the wilderness. Amen



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

# Distinction

**Romans 3:21-31**

Take a good look at the photo today. I don't know what sets this bird apart more. Is it those eyes or that "hair?" Whatever it is, this creature will not be soon forgotten. It will certainly be set apart in a crowd.

We all like to be set apart—we like to be special, especially before God. A mark of distinction is like wearing a little crown (or a puff of feathers.) We can strut around like the bird.

In today's reading from Romans, the Apostle Paul has words for those who like to flaunt their little crown—get over it. He removes that crown with these words—"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." That sure levels the playing field. Remember how we entered this

season of Lent—remember you are dust and to dust you shall return. We are invited to be as humble as dust.

Yet, sin does not have the last word. We are made right with God by grace through the love of Jesus Christ. It is by faith not works. Faith which trusts that God's promises are true. Grace does not only come upon those who are wearing the little crowns but rather on all creation. God's grace comes upon Jew and Gentile alike, which for Paul's audience was everyone. It had to be a great shock. Think of it this way, the beautiful bird did not live a life of distinction because of something it had done—it was God's gift.

## Questions

- How do you respond to the statement, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God?"
- When do we act as if we are puffed up?
- How does this passage help you live in community with those who are not like you?

## Prayer

Loving God, through the gift of grace you tear down the walls that divide us. Fill us with your Spirit that we might embrace one another as sinful beings saved by your love alone. Amen

# Reckoned

## Romans 4:1-12

To “reckon” is to consider all the available data or information and come to a logical conclusion. For example, an accountant might say, “Given your current account balance, less your projected expenses and revenue, I reckon you’ll be bankrupt in two years.” Or a teacher: “Given the time and work you put into this project, I reckon I’ll give you an ‘A’ for effort, even though I reckoned you a ‘D’ based on points earned.”

We have learned that certain standards must be met to achieve certain results. The Jewish people had learned that certain standards must be met—including circumcision for males—to be considered a righteous Jew. Since Jesus was the Jewish Messiah, they reckoned circumcision was required to receive salvation in his name. “Wrong!” says Paul.

According to God’s Word, Abraham “believed the Lord, and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness”

BEFORE he was circumcised (Genesis 15:6). Lutherans especially, get this. We love to quote Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works.”

And yet, how often I get sucked into a different reckoning: prayer + good behavior + reading the Bible = approval by God. Wrong! The reading reminds me of God’s reckoning formula: God’s righteousness + God’s mercy + Jesus’ victory over sin, death, and the devil = free righteousness + fullness of life + power to serve for believers. What a deal!

### Questions

- Do I allow my sense of guilt and unworthiness to erect a barrier between me and God, thinking I need to do better to deserve God’s love?
- Do I apply standards of righteousness to others that lead me to reckon them as lacking in true faith?

### Prayer

Dear Jesus, forgive me for discounting the perfect righteousness you so freely grant to me as I try to prove my own goodness. Draw me continually back into your gracious, cleansing love. Amen



# Remember

## Psalm 22:23-31

I have never been a very good “remember-er.” Maybe that is why I love taking pictures so much. They help me remember. In the big picture, remembering the day-to-day stuff like where are my keys, photos don’t help much. I have tried every trick in the book to help me remember important dates, times, and numbers. Yes, I have even tied a string around my finger, only to wonder why I tied a string around my finger. When people come up to me with an idea, a concern, or ask a favor before or after worship, I have learned to tell them to write it down or e-mail me, because I will not remember it by the time I get into the office on Monday! But when I lead worship, I don’t really have this issue; its flow, structure, and rhythm help me to remember everything from the words of the creed to the notes for the Kyrie and the words of the benediction; they all are present for me.

When you saw the citation for the day’s verse, you may have remembered the opening words of this psalm that Jesus uttered from the cross—the sorrowful and agonizing words, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Amid unknowable suffering, Jesus cries out, but by quoting this Psalm, he is also causing the rest of the Psalm to be remembered. We read words of expansive praise today, for God remembers us.



### Questions

- What memory do you have that means the most to you? What feelings does it evoke?
- What helps you—or what do you need to help you—remember God’s love for you?

### Prayer

God of all, help us to remember to turn to you in good times and bad. May we remember your care for your people as we face challenges and difficulties in this life. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25

# Deny

Mark 8:31-38

"Deny" seems to be a word that hovers around Peter. You'll remember how after Jesus' arrest, Peter denied knowing Jesus, not just once, but three times. And here, many chapters before the Passion, Jesus advises Peter and the other disciples that they will need to "deny themselves" and take up their crosses to follow him. "Deny" literally means, "to say no to," or to renounce. Peter's denial of Jesus in Mark 14 can be interpreted as Peter renouncing his relationship with Jesus in that stressful moment. Maybe that helps us understand how heart-breaking that denial was.

And here, in Mark 8, Jesus was telling his disciples that at some point, they'd need to say no to themselves, to

renounce their individualism and their pride. They'd need to say no to their own wants, their own preferences, even their own needs, for the sake of the larger mission. Although the disciples may have eagerly agreed to this at the time, it would prove more difficult for them to put Jesus and his mission over their own fears and their own wants. Yet in the end, their lives would reflect this need to put the mission over and above their own desires. Even more so, as these disciples became apostles, sent into the world, the mission would align with their own desires.

## Questions

- When is a time that you've had to "deny" yourself and your own wants?
- How did it feel for you to deny yourself in that situation?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, you denied yourself again and again when you came to serve and die for us. As we follow you, remind us that sometimes faith is uncomfortable, and we may need to put our own wants aside in order to serve you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26

# Laughter

Genesis 21:1-7

No kidding, Sarah was jubilant. She and Abraham were beyond fertility age. A lot had happened in their relationship. There were plenty of reasons for them to distrust each other and, more importantly, distrust God's promises. God finally comes through and gives Sarah a sign of life. Something she will cherish to the end of her days, as nothing compares to the bond and the love between a mother and her child. Early Jewish tradition acknowledges as much as legends tell of Sarah being furious when she learns of the attempted sacrifice of Isaac atop Mount Moriah.

In the aftermath of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, I attended an online class about womanist theology—a reading on the bible using the lens of women of color, like Sarah. During a break out for small groups, I humbly heard the pain of African-

American mothers over the fears and losses they endure daily when their children are simply going about doing what children do, like going to school. I was immediately taken to my visit to the National Museum of African-American history and the display about the infants separated from their enslaved mothers to be sold as enslaved people themselves. I wonder how jubilant the colored and beloved daughters of the King will be when they finally receive the assurance that their children have the same rights as any beloved child of God.

## Questions

- In this repentant season, we are called to seek a change of heart and mind. How may the Spirit be encouraging you to channel this transformation to the joy of others?
- What may you be willing to give up this Lent so the burdens of every mother can be relieved and every child of God can be free to live, love, and laugh?

## Prayer

God of everyone, every child belongs to you. May you direct our hearts and minds to live in ways that promote life and laughter and resist the choices that lead only to death and sorrow. We pray in the name of the Savior of the World, our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen





TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

# Conviction

Hebrews 11:1-3, 13-19

Crime dramas—CSI, Law and Order, any or all of their spin-offs—make conviction seem a simple thing. In most cases, the episode starts out with a crime. The diligent detectives and heroes of the show, carefully follow trails of information and clues, assembling evidence and eyewitness statements, to lead them to the person who committed the crime, who is then found guilty, and convicted, all within the span of 60 minutes, less if you don't count commercials!

However real life is rarely that clear, or that simple. We don't always have the benefit of knowing things beyond a shadow of a doubt, and big complicated issues are rarely wrapped up in a neat 60-minute time slot. The author of the reading today writes, "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen," which is a good reminder about our faith journey. Living a life of faith isn't something that you do and have neatly wrapped up in 60 minutes... or in three years of confirmation... or in the course of a decade.

Our faith is a conviction of something not yet seen, something that we keep journeying toward, something that we get to seek out, learn more about, investigate for our whole life. Our conviction may guide us, but it's not an easy answer—rather it's something that keeps propelling us along our path to walk with God. That kind of conviction—lasting and enduring, through all the questions. That's a faith to hold on to.



## Questions

- Where is there doubt or question in your faith journey right now? Where do you see God's faithfulness in the midst of those questions?
- What are three convictions that you hold about God or about faith? (If you're stuck, the Creed can be a great place to start with this question.)

## Prayer

God, you ground our faith in our convictions. Help us hold to the things we hope for, the things not yet seen, the promises you have given us through any questions, doubts, and sorrows we may face. Ground our convictions not in what we think, but in what you reveal to us in your amazing love. Amen

# Sign

John 12:36-43

"We cannot attain the presence of God because we're already in the presence of God. What's absent is awareness."—Richard Rohr

God leaves hints of his presence everywhere we go. We often miss those signs because our head and hearts are in a different place. Make no mistake, God is present in our world and in your life.

Even when Jesus walked the earth and performed miracles, some chose to ignore the signs they saw with their very own eyes! I suppose some could say the same thing about us when we miss the grace of God working in our lives and we attribute it to good luck instead of a sign of Jesus' love for us.

Seeing signs and wonders of Jesus in this world (no matter how small) is a reminder that Jesus is Emmanuel.

Jesus is God with us. Jesus is always with us because he promised to be ever-present.

Our awareness is the obstacle. Jesus' presence is like a radio station broadcasting. The radio station is always broadcasting, and those radio waves are present even though we can't see them and our radios are off; however, when we turn on the radio and tune that specific frequency, we can then hear what we have been missing!

Let us tune our hearts towards Jesus so that we may see the signs of his presence and love in our daily lives.

I promise you, if you open the eyes of your heart, you will see the signs of God's presence.

## Questions

- What is preventing you from seeing the signs of God around you on a daily basis?
- What sign are you looking for from Jesus?

## Prayer

Loving God, attune our hearts to your will and help us to sense your presence in this moment and in our daily lives. Help us to be still and seek you in both the good times and in our challenges. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen





THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29

# Cornerstone

1 Peter 2:4-10

Because the Bible comes from lands filled with rocks of all shapes and size—where rock is both the primary building material and a potential means of execution—it shouldn't surprise us that rock and stone also become the material of metaphor and teaching.

Following that vein, I once wrote a whole series of Lenten skits called *Stumbling Blocks and Stepping Stones*. This text from 1 Peter about Christ as the living stone and the cornerstone that was rejected was one of the key texts as we highlighted Jesus as the foundation of our lives and asked the question, "What things along the way are a tripping hazard, and which are foundation-worthy?" What things, what ideas, what pursuits, are worthy of anchoring and aligning the rest of our lives?

Because that's what a cornerstone does, right? It lays out the levels, angles, and dimensions of the whole building. The biblical metaphor of the cornerstone has nothing to do with a decorative date or hidden time capsule; it's all about orienting and anchoring the building itself. And the builders must take time and care in choosing the correct cornerstone, or all will be askew.

When God gave us Jesus as our cornerstone, we received the opportunity to anchor and align our lives in a new way. With Jesus as the foundation, the guide, it becomes easier to discern stumbling blocks. With Jesus as the living stone, even the things that trip us up can be transformed.

## Questions

- What makes for a good cornerstone? What would make a builder reject a stone as a cornerstone?
- What orients your life?

## Prayer

Loving Jesus, the living stone, help us to align our lives with yours. Anchor us in your grace and lend us your strength for the rocky paths we walk. Amen

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

# Holy

**Acts 7:30-40**

Take off your shoes, you are standing on holy ground.

A rocking chair creaked as grandpa rocked it back and forth. On his lap was a baby girl giggling as he read to her. It was holy ground.

A young man in tears, arms wrapped around his mother. He got into the school. It was holy ground.

An older woman, sitting on an uncomfortable chair in a sterile room, hand held by a nurse, tears rolling down her cheeks. It was holy ground.

Where have you experienced holy ground?

The women approach, the stone is rolled away. They look, it is empty. It is holy ground.

## Questions

- Where are some places that are holy ground for you?
- What happened in those spaces?

## Prayer

God of all times, open our eyes so that we may see the holy ground that we have been standing on. Open our ears so that we may hear what you want to say to us. Open our hearts so that we may receive your Word. In your Holy name we pray. Amen





SATURDAY, MARCH 2

# Handiwork

## Psalm 19

I love butterflies, or as I am want to think of them: flutterbies. Their flight so often appears abandoned to chaos at the whims of the wind, and yet somehow they always seem to find the flower that calls them and navigate nature and most of the world of humanity around them. But they only reside here for the warmer season, and then off they must be, their absence somehow making where they have left behind feel just a little colder. Until, at least in this part of the world, they shine a message of hope in the winter night sky, simultaneously letting us know that they are only gone for now, and that in a way, they are always with us. What is this beacon that shines like a Bat Signal over our northern hemisphere when our nights are longer than our days? The Ages have dubbed it Orion, but when those stars give light to my eyes, I see a butterfly, slowly

crossing the darkness until the longer days welcome flutterbies back again.

David saw these great lights, as well, and celebrates our relationship with all of God's creating in Psalm 19. "The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the dome proclaims his handiwork." The one-time shepherd, having tended the flocks by night, knew well the glory of God's work here and above. How many times did he get to experience the nightly and daily renewal of Genesis's second (1:6-8) and fourth days (1:14-19)?

### Questions

- Jesus encouraged us to let our lights so shine that others may see our good works and glorify God in heaven. How are you and I every bit the handiwork of God that the lights of the sky are?
- Does knowing that every person is the handiwork of God help you to love your neighbor as you love yourself?

### Prayer

God of Abraham, whose descendants are as numerous as the stars in the sky, give us faith along the way no less than you did to he whom you first promised. Amen

SUNDAY, MARCH 3

# Zeal

John 2:13-22

I will admit, "zeal" is not a word I use in my everyday speech. In fact, I am not sure if I have ever used that word by choice. But in scripture, "zeal" is a commonly used word. When I looked it up I discovered it means, "to have enthusiasm for a cause." I suppose we could say the drummer in our image today has zeal. He is excited about something and is willing to beat the drum for it.

Zealous people show up in interesting places these days. There are folks who are excited by their sports team, their political candidate, and even their favorite celebrity. It seems to me that overzealous behavior can cause great division. When we become obsessed with something or someone, we can become blinded by it. No other voices can come through. The Apostle Paul warns in his letter to the Romans that we can be overcome by zeal for God but not be enlightened. Who had enlightened zeal in today's story? Was it the people selling goods in the temple or was it Jesus who was laying the foundation for his crucifixion and resurrection?

Which raises an interesting question—do we have right zeal for God? If anything, it seems like most of us are really good at being indifferent. No, we should not be riled up because someone put the wrong flowers on the altar or because some young child was restless in church. But we can be passionate about our love for God and neighbor.

## Questions

- What things are you passionate about?
- What might zeal for the Lord look like in your life?

## Prayer

Gracious God, fill us with your Spirit that we might show unbridled zeal for you. Help us use the gifts you have given us to share your love with the world. Amen





MONDAY, MARCH 4

# Foundation

**1 Corinthians 3:10-23**

The people on the ad for the foundation repair company are upset. Mold and shifting ground are causing problems with the structure and safety of their whole house. A solid foundation is vital, whether for a house, a person, or an organization. Even with a solid foundation, though, it's possible to build a faulty structure that won't withstand the storms and fires of life.

Our reading for today reminds us that the firm foundation for our faith is Jesus Christ. And the structure of our lives is built as we listen and respond in faith. As Jesus said, "Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock." (Matthew 7:24).

These days, denominations and congregations are being shaken. It seems like the structures are crumbling,

maybe due to some failures in listening and acting? But the foundation—Jesus Christ—will never fail. The hymn by N.F.S. Grundtvig proclaims, "Built on the Rock, the church shall stand even when steeples are falling." And further, "We are God's house of living stones, built for His own habitation; He fills our hearts, His humble thrones, granting us life and salvation."

The company representative in the foundation repair ad reassured the customers: "No problem. We've got this." God's Word—Scripture and Word made flesh—is even more reassuring. "All things are yours, and you are Christ's and Christ is God's." In Christ, our foundation is unshakable.

## Questions

- In what ways am I hearing and acting upon my foundation of faith in Jesus Christ?
- In what ways am I proclaiming faith so that others hear of the unshakable foundation that is Jesus Christ?

## Prayer

O Lord, my strong foundation, show me the flaws in my life of faith. May everything I do flow from you. Amen

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

# Strength

## Psalm 84

"Happy are those whose strength is in you (Psalm 84:5a; NRSVue)." What does it mean? When I was in elementary school, my father became president of the high-rise condominium association where we lived. So, a couple of my child room friends and I thought we could go about breaking every rule in the building. The strength (or power) we thought we had was in my father as the boss, and we believed he would have our back no matter what. I was his beloved child, right?

Nothing could be more misguided. Neither my father was the boss, nor was his tolerance level unlimited. I can only say that it eventually did not go well for me. Yes, God has our back. He wants us to live and be well. But that is not a hall pass to do as we please and invoke his name. Actually, this would fall under using the Lord's name in vain.

The psalmist, however, does not leave us without a clue. "O LORD of hosts, happy is everyone who trusts in you (Psalm 84:12; NRSVue)." That rings a different bell. It is the bell of Luther's explanation of the first commandment in the small catechism. All the other commandments are derived from the trust and love we should have for our God. By faith, God has enough power to anchor us when we are adrift and pull us out of the depths of our trespasses.

## Questions

- Lutherans proclaim we are saved by the grace of God through faith. Grace is the keyword. Indeed, we are. However, the Word of God also has laws and teachings we are expected to follow. Can the expectations God sets for us both in the Old and New Testaments be seen as gracious gifts from the God who commands us to love one another and not kill?
- In this Lenten season, how is God equipping you to use God's strength to love both your neighbor and the stranger?

## Prayer

God of strength and power. You alone know where we have been and what we have done. Empower our faith, give us a contrite heart and a renewed spirit so we can trust in you to preserve, protect, and lead our lives and faith communities. We lift these prayers in the name of the Savior of the World, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen







WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

# Prayer

**Mark 11:15-19**

Where and when do you find it easiest to focus and talk to God without distractions? Maybe you're a car-prayer, praying on your way to work. Maybe you prefer to pray outside while you're in nature. Or do you pray in bed, hoping to stay awake until the Amen?

When we read this passage, we're often a little shocked by Jesus. This angry Jesus is so different from the kind and loving Jesus we often think of. In John's version of this story, we see a whip-wielding Jesus, driving money changers out of the temple while flipping over their tables. What was the issue? Why was Jesus so upset? Was he just having a bad day? The vendors were simply selling their wares so temple visitors could make sacrifices to God.

But the vendors were selling their wares—often loudly-bleating sheep and cooing pigeons—not outside, but within the temple court itself. And they often overcharged poor travelers who couldn't bring sacrifices with them. Rather than prayerful silence and songs of praise, the temple looked like a flea market and sounded like an auction. It wasn't a prayerful place where people could connect with God. So in his dramatic way, Jesus drove out the distractions, trying to restore the temple to a peaceful, prayerful place.

## Questions

- Where and when is your favorite place to pray? Why?
- Where and when is prayer difficult for you? Why?
- In this prayerful season, how can you connect with God in a new way?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, you drove out the vendors and moneychangers to restore peace to God's house of prayer. Help us to drive away distractions that threaten our relationship with you. Hear our prayers and help us listen to you as you speak to us. In Jesus' name. Amen



THURSDAY, MARCH 7

# Blessing

Ephesians 1:3-6

What does it mean to be blessed? That's a question that I've been wrestling with for most of my adult life. On one hand, I hear so often that blessing is given and received completely in the material realm. Having a big house. Having a big car. Those were the things that I held up in my early adult life as signs of blessing. Later, I'd count myself blessed simply to be able to pay all my bills on time and have food on the table and a roof over our family's head. But no matter if I was aspiring to material greatness or simply hoping for material sufficiency, I was still viewing blessing, even if I could understand

that God was the source of that blessing, as almost completely material.

Today's reading from Ephesians provides us with a different view of blessing, however. Here, God blesses us by adopting us as his children through Christ Jesus. Blessing is not about what God provides for us. Blessing exists in who God makes us to be. Blessing comes in God's grace, freely bestowed. Blessing is about what God does, not about what we have. We can be blessed when we are rich in material possessions. We can be blessed when times are more difficult. We are blessed at all times by God, who makes us heirs of salvation with Christ and gives us faith along the way.

## Questions

- How would you describe blessing?
- How does this reading from Ephesians confirm or challenge that description?

## Prayer

Lord God, you make us your children in holy baptism, and you bless us each day in Christ Jesus. Give us faith to perceive your blessings and grace to trust them. Amen

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

# Forgive

Ephesians 1:7-14

There's a children's book written by David LaRochelle and illustrated by Mike Wohnouka called *How to Apologize*. It's a delightful book showing all sorts of humorous situations—a hedgehog who popped their friend's balloon, a beaver that has chopped down an owl's tree. Using these giggle-inducing situations, the book details all the steps of a good apology—making it sincere, not making excuses, and being willing to apologize even if the other person did something



wrong, too. One of the main points of the book is that everyone makes mistakes, and learning how to deal with them—to apologize—is a basic life skill that everyone needs to have.

This is true on our faith journey, as well. No matter how faithfully we try to follow the way of Jesus, we are going to mess up. Repeatedly. There is just no way to be a part of the messy human condition without doing so.

The good news is that as followers of the way of Jesus, forgiveness from God is something we have assured. It's our inheritance, the promise given when we were sealed by the Holy Spirit, and marked by the cross of Christ forever. There's nothing we can do to break that relationship with God.

But that's between us and God. When it comes to our mistakes with other humans... we're going to need to learn how to apologize, as well. So make sure to say sorry when you make a mistake. That's part of our faith journey, too.

## Questions

- Is there a place or situation in your life where you should offer an apology for something you did wrong? What would a sincere, simple apology without excuses look like?
- Does the promise of forgiveness from Jesus make it easier or harder to apologize to those we have wronged on Earth? How might that forgiveness give you strength to say "I'm sorry" where it's needed?

## Prayer

Patient One, thank you for the promise and gift of forgiveness you give us. Help us work to mend our human relationships with the same spirit of forgiveness and repentance we have with you. Amen



SATURDAY, MARCH 9

# Testimony

John 3:1-13

I am under the assumption that the vast majority of those who are using this devotional are of the Lutheran flavor of Christianity. If that is the case, the vast majority of those Lutheran Christians who saw the title of this devotion shuttered a little.

Testimony is either something we do in court or something other Christians do. When we think about giving a testimony to our faith, we want to pass the buck. "The church down the street does that, not us."

We love the gospel stories of Jesus and most of us claim this verse as our favorite verse about evangelism, "Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him." (Mark 8:30) Just kidding, kind of.

Instead, we should take to heart the words of Saint Peter, "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect..." (1Peter 3:15b)

When Jesus met with the Nicodemus the Pharisee, Jesus made clear the reason for his testimony. "No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man." (John 3:13)

Jesus came to tell the world of God's love. That was not commonly understood or believed in the time of Jesus. He could give that testimony because he personally knew the Father and the Spirit!

Jesus came to set the record straight about God's intentions for us. Jesus gave us his testimony and it was full of grace!

Never forget: you could be the reason someone might come to know the love of Jesus. Tell your story.

## Questions

- When was the last time you told someone about Jesus or had a spiritual conversation?
- Can you verbalize what Jesus has done for you personally as a person of faith?

## Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for sending Jesus to us so that we might know your heart and will. Give us the strength and will to share your love with others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

# Love

## John 3:14-21

Have you ever felt unlovable? Unlovely? Unloved? Even in the midst of a supportive family and community, people can feel separated and alone, distanced from the people we want to be closest to.

We don't know exactly why Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night. Perhaps because that was a time they were both free. Perhaps because he didn't want to stir up political resentments or cause problems for himself. But, maybe Nicodemus came at night not because of external reasons, but because of internal ones. Did he feel unworthy of Jesus' time and attention? Did he feel like he needed to sneak his questions in at a time when he'd inconvenience the Rabbi the least? Did he feel a growing gulf between himself and his colleagues?

Whatever his reason, we know that Nicodemus was reaching out for answers, for hope, and for connection.

And Jesus reached back—by listening and then by responding. His answer is long and theological, but it starts with love and ends with light. And in the midst, there is real conversation. As difficult as they are, real conversations are usually the place where we can express our fears and worries, and find shared experience, solace, and connection. When our innermost selves reach out honestly to each other, the feelings of being unloved or unlovable or unlovely can be diminished. And when our innermost self reaches out to the Source of Love and Light, then we will discover that we are already beloved.

### Questions

- Why do you think Nicodemus came to see Jesus at night?
- When has someone reached out to you? How have you reached back?

### Prayer

Remind us, O God, that we are beloved. Even when we feel alone or separated, even when our actions and words are unlovely, you still love. Help us to reach out to one another and to close the distances that separate. Amen



MONDAY, MARCH 11

# House

Hebrews 3:1-6

We can tell when "God is in the House," right? I try not to lose any chance to point that out to my faith community. I often ask them to pay attention to what is happening in those moments, because they are the evidence of God with us.

It may sound redundant. I know. It is a given that the God in Jesus Christ is present every time the church of living stones gathers. We know that God's Spirit assembles the stones and that the same Spirit is placed upon us when we raise anew from the font. Therefore it is not just that God builds the house; God is the house, and we are part of it, with Jesus as the cornerstone and keystone—big mind boom!

So here is what I think happens. God smiles when we do ministry in harmony with what Jesus hopes for us, and the whole house can feel God's joy. Using the same line of thinking, when we act out of selfishness, judgment, anger, or only to vindicate ourselves, God weeps. We know when that happens because we can also feel the dread.

It is a big house with enough love for everyone. We need not to fight for it.

## Questions

- What may you, or your faith community give up to work in harmony with Christ and experience "God in the house?"
- Which one is better. The house of dread or the house of hope?

## Prayer

God of shelter, you provide the safe space where our faith can flourish and your kingdom grow. May we stand firm not to cause friction but to embody your house according to the example of your Son. We pray this in his name, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen



TUESDAY, MARCH 12

# Water

**Numbers 20:1-13**

Forty is a number that represents the fullness of time that we cannot survive without faith along the way. Forty days Jesus went without water and sustenance in the wilderness. His lips must have been cracked, his throat so dry that voice could hardly come off his tongue. Forty years of an entire nation (the whole congregation of the Israelites) wilderness-wandering was going to necessitate a huge demand on water.

CBS News' Bill Whitaker reported July 30, 2023, that "These [Colorado River] reservoirs are now being sucked dry by 40 million different straws—that's the number of people in booming western states who depend on the Colorado to quench their thirst, power their homes, water lawns, and splash in the sun."

Brad Udall (a climate scientist at Colorado State University), who has known the river his whole life says, "We've over-allocated it, and we now need to think about how to turn some of this back. 'Cause the only lever we control right now in the river is the demand lever. We have no control over the supply. So we have to dial back demand."

The Israelites, the whole congregation, had no control over any water supply the wilderness had to offer. The only control they had was demand, and demand water of God they did. Would the teaching moment of who was in control take hold, would people give God control of not just their water, but of their hearts, of their lives?

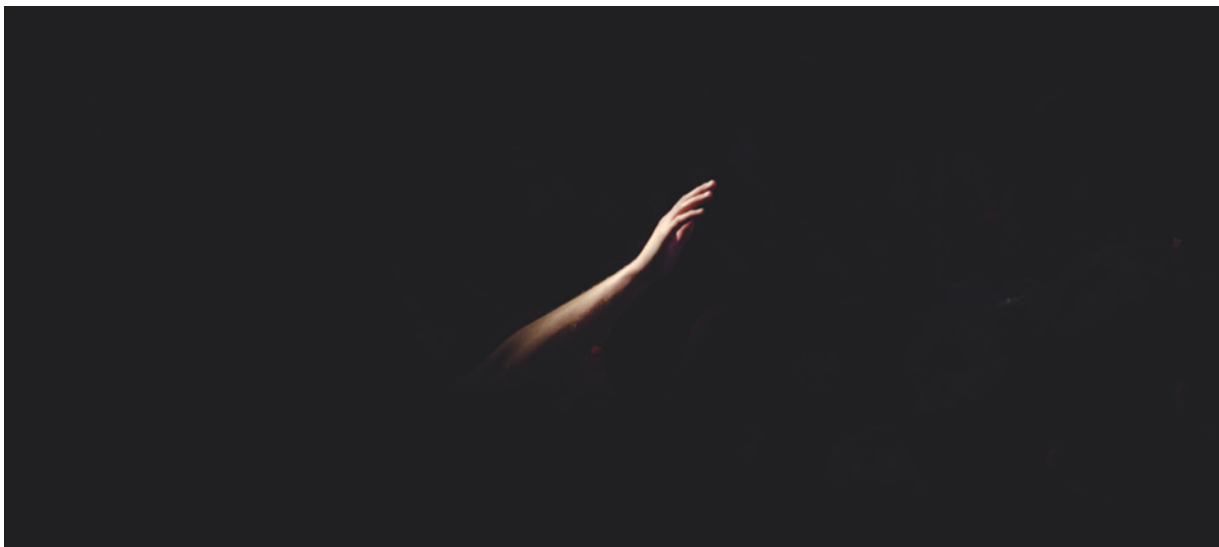


## Questions

- Have you ever heard of southern Illinois' Marion Medical Mission ([www.mmmwater.org](http://www.mmmwater.org))?
- What are you in short supply of in your life, and how might faith along the way, turning to God, impact you?

## Prayer

God, you created the waters and the life that comes from them. Compel us to love you, our neighbor, and ourselves and be even better stewards of this life-giving resource. Amen



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

# Darkness

**John 8:12-20**

Did the month of January seem dark to you? If you remember, there was some quite cold weather followed by what seemed like weeks and weeks of overcast skies and even dense fog. I would rather have cold and clear days than gloomy mild days. I need sun to function, especially in winter. I guess I am solar-powered.

The image of light is often used to describe Jesus. Today he refers to himself as “the light of the world.” The Gospel of John is filled with such images. “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness will not overcome it.” I find great hope in this promise.

But at creation, God separated the light from the darkness; God did not eliminate darkness. Darkness is

a part of our lives, whether we like it or not. Darkness can be a gift, because life is different in the dark. Owls, bats, and all types of nocturnal creatures come out in the dark.

Even Jesus experienced darkness in his life. Can you imagine the darkness of Holy Week, especially the pitch black of the three days in the tomb? The light of Christ overcame even this darkness.

We live in the now, but not yet. We can see the light, but we are not totally there yet. This is part of our Lenten journey. This could be why the disciplines of Lent are so important. Embrace the darkness knowing the light of Christ is near.

## Questions

- How are you experiencing darkness in your life now?
- What life do you notice in this darkness?
- How can you embrace the darkness while we wait?

## Prayer

Jesus Christ, you are the light of the world. Join with us as we journey through the dark times of our lives. Help us to embrace the darkness, knowing that the darkness will not overcome us. Trusting in your light we pray. Amen



THURSDAY, MARCH 14

# Compassion

Isaiah 30:15-18

The photo shows a right hand offered—open, not grasping—and a person seeming to gently accept the offered hand. Is there compassion in the outreached hand—a sense of, “I’m here to help, if you’ll let me?”

I think of all the references to God’s right hand in the psalms. God’s hand holds pleasure. It provides refuge, support, deliverance, and victory over enemies. It rescues, plants, holds up, and holds fast. It is high, strong, encompassing, valiant, exalted. In today’s reading, God offers salvation and strength if God’s people would return to the Lord and rest in quietness and trust. God’s people reject the offer, trusting in their own strategies to deal with threats and fears. Reminds me of a boss I once had who would say, jokingly, “Okay, have it your own wrong way.”

The consequences are dire. But God is patient with us even though we are not patient with God. God has compassion for us when we suffer, even when our own choices bring it on. God’s gracious and merciful outstretched hand waits for us. When we put our hand in God’s hand and wait for the Lord to act, we find ourselves blessed. How do we do that? In rest, quietness, and trust. When the enemy is at your door, take a deep breath.

Back to the picture. The outstretched hand is human. Which makes me realize that sometimes it’s me who needs to be patient and compassionate to serve as God’s hand in the world.

## Questions

- Am I anxiously running away from something today, rather than waiting in quietness and trust for the Lord to act?
- Is there someone to whom I could offer my hand in Jesus’ name?

## Prayer

Holy God, forgive my lack of trust and my anxious efforts to deal with life in my own strength and wisdom. I place my hand in yours at this moment. Thank you, Lord. Amen



FRIDAY, MARCH 15

# Empathy

Hebrews 4:14-5:4

You may notice that in our photo today, the person reflected in the mirror shard is the person who is slightly blurred in the foreground of the picture. For me, that powerfully evokes what empathy is—in part, the ability to see yourself in or share in another person's experiences. Years ago, I was on North Michigan Avenue in Chicago—a small-town boy in a hive of human activity—and I was gawking at the large buildings, when a raindrop plopped directly in my eye, dislodging my contact. Instantly, I fell to my knees, searching for the lost lens. What shocked me was that suddenly, a dozen people were all around me, all on their hands and knees, looking for my contact lens with me! It caught me off guard, and words of thanks stumbled out of my mouth and one of my fellow searchers said... "Hey, buddy, don't worry, I think we've all had this happen!"

For me, one of the fascinating parts of the Christian faith is the empathetic nature of Jesus, who is fully God and fully human. This passage from Hebrews highlights this. Not only is Jesus a compassionate high priest, but one who knows the depth of human need. Be it because of our human weakness or through no fault of our own when we suffer and struggle; there is one we can turn to who knows precisely how we are feeling and can offer grace-filled and merciful hope.



## Questions

- Have you ever been introduced to someone famous? How did that make you feel?
- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase "high priest?" Is this language helpful, or do you struggle with it?
- How confident are you when you pray?

## Prayer

Lord God, you know the fullness of who and how we are. In your perfect life, you have done what we cannot. Come to us in our weakness and strengthen us so that we might be your love for others. In Jesus' holy name, I pray. Amen

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

# Clean

## Psalm 51:1-12

"You are the man!" Those were the convicting words that King David heard the prophet Nathan declare before this psalm was written. David had seduced another man's wife, then he'd tried to hide her pregnancy by having the man killed in battle. His sins were substantial, and after Nathan had helped David see the error of his ways, David felt the weight of guilt and shame and repeatedly asked God to cleanse him.

It's interesting how often sin is associated with physical dirtiness. In MacBeth, Lady MacBeth is so wracked with guilt over a death she blames on herself, that while sleepwalking, she repeatedly scrubs her imaginarily

bloody hands, saying, "Out, damned spot!" Just like blood and dirt can soil our skin, sin feels like it soils our souls. And it's much easier to wash our skin than it is to wash our souls.

So this psalm of David is a beautiful song of repentance, confessing sin and fault, and asking God to cleanse the sin away. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity... cleanse me from my sin... purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."

The good news this Lenten season is that we have a God who sent his Son to die in order to cleanse us from our sin, to wash us clean in baptism, and to forgive our iniquities.

### Questions

- How do you feel when you know you've done something wrong?
- What do you do to make yourself feel better?
- What do you need God to cleanse you from today?

### Prayer

Almighty God, you sent Jesus to wash away our sins, that we might be in right relationship with you. We give you thanks for giving us a fresh, clean start, that we may live in service, compassion, and generosity to others. Amen





SUNDAY, MARCH 17

*Gee*

**John 12:20-33**

We wish to see Jesus. That's what these folks ask at the beginning of our gospel reading today. We wish to see Jesus. That's also what Jesus promises, when he says that he will draw all the world to himself. So what do these two instances have in common? In both, Jesus points toward his death. He tells Andrew and Philip, who relay the initial message, that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains but a grain. And in the conclusion of this passage, Jesus again looks toward his death by speaking of his being lifted up from the earth, which indeed will happen on the Cross.

And that Cross is what we look to, as well, when we wish to see Jesus. We see Jesus in the Cross, where Jesus reminds us that God's victory looks a lot like human failure. We see Jesus in the Cross, where Jesus reminds us that God's strength looks a lot like human powerlessness. We see Jesus in the Cross, where Jesus reminds us that God's wisdom looks like human foolishness. We see Jesus when God subverts our human understandings and expectations, and when God gives us faith along the way to believe and trust in the ways that God shows us Jesus each and every day.

### **Questions**

- How do you see Jesus in your daily life?
- How do you see Jesus in and through the Cross?

### **Prayer**

Lord God, help us to see Jesus. Help us to see Jesus in our lives. Help us to see Jesus in our world. Help us to see Jesus in the Cross. Amen

MONDAY, MARCH 18

# Glory

## 2 Corinthians 3:4-11

In the 2014 movie *Selma*, the end credits are set to a song by John Legend and Common, called *Glory*, that speaks to the ongoing battle for civil rights—both those in the 1965 Selma marches and those battles that still go on today. At the end of the second verse, the lyrics are:

“No one can win the war individually  
It takes the wisdom of the elders and  
young people’s energy  
Welcome to the story we call victory  
The comin’ of the Lord, my eyes have seen the glory”  
—John Legend, Common, and Rhymefest

One of the things that this stanza points out clearly is that glory is not a solo endeavor—it depends on members of the community, both young and old.

No one person can do it alone. And ultimately glory is not dependent on any one person, but rather looks to the coming of the Lord.

The scripture reading today refers to the story of Moses, because of his time with God, reflecting God’s glory in such a way that no one could stand to look at him (read Exodus 34:29-35 if you’re not familiar with the story). But the important part here is that it’s God’s glory that Moses is reflecting—not his own role in the community. Just like it’s the glory of the Spirit and Jesus that Paul points to in this passage. But while it’s ultimately God’s glory, it’s important to note that the community—Moses, Paul, us—is involved in reflecting, sharing, and proclaiming that glory as part of our journey in faith.

### Questions

- Who has reflected God’s glory to you along your faith journey?
- How have you helped to share God’s glory in places where there is injustice?

### Prayer

God of Glory, we give you thanks for those glimpses of your glory we see in our lives. May we be a part of the community that reflects your justice and truth. Amen



TUESDAY, MARCH 19

# Servant

Isaiah 44:1-8

We are the children of God. In our baptism, we have been adopted into God's royal family. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, we have been forgiven, made new, and put on a path of transformation.

The evidence of our spiritual transformation is our willingness to serve others. Not out of guilt or compulsion or even to keep up appearances. When there becomes a genuine hunger to serve those who are struggling for any reason, we are being transformed into the likeness of our Savior.

When we embark on a life of service, we personally discover the meaning to these words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Yes, Jesus actually said that!

In our reading today, God calls the people of Israel his servants. Don't miss the second part of what God is saying through Isaiah. God promises to bless and care for those who serve Him.

It seems too good to be true, but it is not. Think about this, Jesus doesn't ask us to do anything that he wouldn't do himself. A call to serve doesn't come from a taskmaster who sits back and watches us struggle. Jesus serves others right along with us—and even within and through us.

When there is a need at church or within your community and you step up to fill that need, Jesus is right there with you. A sense of fulfillment will actually cause you to serve even more.

If you listen carefully, you might hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant."



## Questions

- What spiritual gift has God given you to serve others?
- Is there an opportunity to serve someone this week at church or other organization that you can volunteer for?

## Prayer

Loving God, give us hearts to serve you by serving others. Open our hearts to see that there is blessing from you when we pour ourselves out for others. Give us the spiritual strength to get out of our comfort zone to serve others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

# Remnant

Haggai 2:1-9, 20-23

Mary's song in Luke 1 is sometimes called a song of reversals, filled with images of the mighty being deposed and the hungry being filled. Her song echoes words from the prophets, including Haggai. In Haggai, God promises that the conqueror will be conquered, and the people will return home, free and blessed. This returned remnant are asked to consider what it means to put God in the center of all life.

However, they return to a city in ruins, a temple destroyed. Will they rebuild and restore just as God is rebuilding and restoring them? Or will they give up in despair?



In the prophets, that idea of the remnant is generally one of hope—"a shoot springing from the stump," "waters in the desert" kind of hope. Even though they've suffered, even though they've been nearly destroyed, God has not abandoned God's people. A future awaits them as a community. New life will come.

Today, we may look around us and see empty church buildings, decimated church staffs, struggling seminaries, and declining attendance. Will we rebuild? Will we give up in despair? Or with the help of the Holy Spirit, will we imagine a new way forward that again puts God in the center of our whole lives?

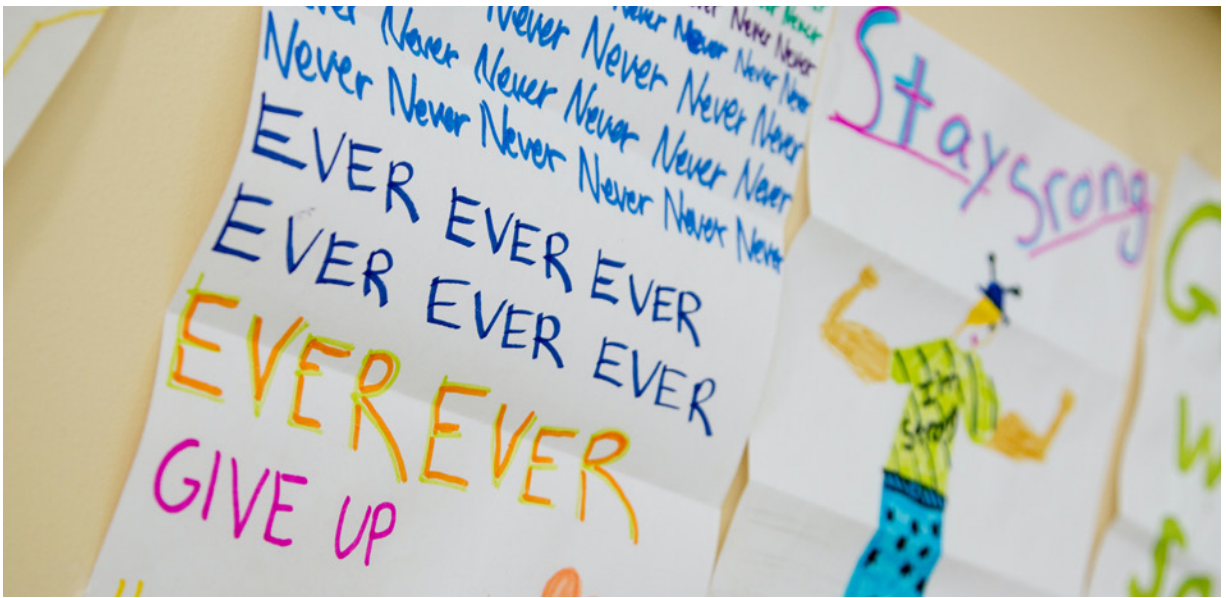
The promise God made to the remnant in Haggai is still valid—and perhaps even more so through the activity of the Holy Spirit: God has not abandoned us. New life will come.

## Questions

- Where have you seen hope springing out of despair?
- What might it mean for you to center your whole life on God?

## Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit. Breathe new life into us and into the churches we love. Remind us that you have the power to restore and rebuild and to redirect us into a new future. It might look different than the past, but in God's love, it will be good. Amen



THURSDAY, MARCH 21

# Encourage

**Philippians 2:1-11**

Encouragement is rare in our world today. We are overrun with words and people that strive to tear us down.

You're not good enough!

You're not smart enough!

What made you think you could do that?

How could you believe that? That's stupid! You're stupid!

The world tears us down, and yet there is hope.

In our reading for today, Paul fills us with words of encouragement, reminding us that Christ fills us with what we need:

- Forgiveness
- Love
- Community

We are empowered with these blessings and given the opportunity to build places of encouragement, places where all are welcome, places where love is shared. And it is in these communities where Christ calls us forward, encouraging us with this community of faith and feeding us with what we need:

- Bread and wine
- Body and blood
- Water and Word
- Promise—you are loved, your sins are forgiven

## Questions

- Who are some people who have encouraged you in your faith?
- In what ways can you encourage others?

## Prayer

God of all blessings, I give you thanks for the community I am a part of, and I pray that you would strengthen us as we grow together. Empower all of us to encourage one another and build a safe, loving, and forgiving space for all. In your name I pray. Amen



FRIDAY, MARCH 22

# Purpose

## Philippians 2:12-18

In our master bathroom, the medicine cabinet is on my spouse's side of the vanity. Its purpose is to hold some of the things that she needs first thing in the morning and to close out the day. It is something that she opens every day. So, once I wrote some words of love, affirmation, and gratitude on Post-It® Notes and stuck them on the back side of the mirror so that she would initially be pleasantly surprised and then be twice daily reminded of our relationship and how much she means to me. She has added more of my notes since.

Part of my purpose in our relationship is to make sure she knows that I love her. Part of my purpose in our

relationship is to rejoice in how much she means to me. Part of God's purpose in our relationship is to love and bless us. It takes work on all three of our parts to keep love healthy and growing.

Paul's purpose (work) is reminding the people of Philippi of who God is and how much God loves them and to make sure they know they cannot take that for granted. Part of God's purpose is to be at work in them, giving them faith along the way to do what loving neighbors do. Because of this, part of their purpose becomes letting the world see the beauty of this work. It took work on all their parts to keep love healthy and growing.

### Questions

- Who could use a word or note of encouragement from me?
- What work do I do for God?

### Prayer

Jesus, be at work in me, so that I can do the loving work you command. Amen



SATURDAY, MARCH 23

# Endure

**Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

We are on the doorstep of Holy Week. Tomorrow we will wave palm branches and shout “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!” Today we wait for the grand entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem. We know what will happen, which actually gives us time to wait and ponder the events of coming week.

Our word for today is “Endure.” As I think of the week to come I begin to wonder, “how was Jesus able to endure all that he experienced?” From early on in his ministry he predicted that he would suffer and die at the hands of his executioners, but that he would rise on the third day. He knew that he would not be defeated by the suffering that would soon occur, but still his endurance, both mental and physical, is beyond my imagination.

We also know that Jesus often quotes the Book of Psalms. The Psalms are often called the Prayer Book of the Bible. We find hope in the words of Psalm 118. “God’s steadfast love endures forever.” Jesus trusted that he would not be alone during the trials of this week. He retreated to quiet places to pray. I can imagine his deep conversations with his Father. I can also imagine him drawing on these prayers that were taught in his childhood—the prayers of the Psalms.

As you enter this most sacred time, look to the Psalms for hope. Trust as Jesus trusted, God’s steadfast love endures forever.



## Questions

- What can we learn by Jesus’ endurance?
- Where do you find the strength to go on during difficult times?

## Prayer

Gracious and loving God, at times we wonder how we can go on. The things you endured on our behalf is beyond imagination. Give us the courage and hope to trust in your promise—the steadfast love of God endures forever.

SUNDAY, MARCH 24

# Understand

**John 12:12-16**

The child in the picture peers intently over the shoulder of the man holding her. She looks secure, but curious. What am I seeing? Who is that person with a camera? What is going on here?

I imagine the scene outside Jerusalem that day Jesus entered the city in such a surprising way—riding on a donkey's colt while crowds of people proclaimed him to be King of Israel! Why not a royal steed? Did the disciples look on in puzzlement? Did they feel secure in their decision to follow Jesus, even if perplexed by the paradoxical scene of humility and grandeur?

"The disciples did not understand these things at first," according to John. But later, after Jesus was glorified, they connected the dots with the Messianic prophesies of their Hebrew scriptures.

How many times do we find ourselves puzzled, looking out in the world, or into our own hearts. Why is this happening? Am I on the right track? Is the world coming to an end? Where is God in this?

When we don't understand, sometimes we find answers in God's Word. But then there's this: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9). Oh, well. When we don't understand the whys and how's, we trust in the Who—Jesus, Son of God, Savior, Lord!

## Questions

- When have you had to trust in Jesus even though you didn't understand?
- When have you had an "aha moment" when something in Scripture clicked for you?

## Prayer

Dear Jesus, guard our hearts and minds with your peace that passes all understanding. We ask it with thanksgiving, in your name. Amen



MONDAY, MARCH 25

# Enter

Hebrews 9:11-15

The last time my wife and I were looking for a new home, we visited over a dozen places, most of them very lovely, but not one felt like a place we could call home. After looking at one home, our agent said there was another nearby we could look at; it didn't have one of the features we had hoped for, but it was nearby, and would we want to take a look? We said sure, and a call was made. Moments later, as we entered the home, we had hardly crossed the front door threshold and knew this was the place for us.

Today's photo is evocative of what I imagine Jesus may have seen as he entered and exited Jerusalem through the city gates in the last days of his life on earth. During the celebration of Passover, the city would be alive with

activity, and the temple was the center of it all. Did he feel at home when he walked into the city, into the Temple? How did he feel when he walked by Golgotha? Was it a sense of fear, of home, or something else? We don't know, but we do know in Jesus' act of selfless love, we are purified, and the barrier of sin, guilt, and shame is removed for us. Before the cross, the high priest would have to bring in the blood of the sacrifice to atone for sins and enter into God's presence. Through the gift of baptism, we enter right relationship with God, and we are restored and made whole even as we are at home in this grace now and forever.

## Questions

- Have you ever entered a building or city and just felt different? Do you know why?
- How does knowing we have direct access to God help us deal with sin on a day-to-day basis?
- What are the holiest places you have ever entered?

## Prayer

O God, as we enter this holy week, fill us with your grace and remind us that we are at home in your love through the mercy of Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen



TUESDAY, MARCH 26

# Proclaim

## 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

“Stumbling block” has been an attempt by English translators, to put things mildly. The original Greek word is *skandalon*. Therefore, the mood of Paul’s statement is better rendered by the English word “scandal.” Paul is not happy here, and he is not measuring words. The early church community in Corinth was made of either Jews, who were somewhat moved by the “way,” or gentiles, living under Greco-Roman cultural influence. According to Paul, they come from all walks of life; however, they seem to be struggling to see the wisdom or the power of God behind what took place at Golgotha.

His Jewish audience would demand signs. That is, they would be true to the faith of their ancestors and ask that Paul produce prophetic evidence anointing Jesus as the Messiah. Here, the fact that Jesus died prematurely at the cross would be a scandal to them. They likely expected the Messiah to free them from their oppressors as Moses did.

The Gentiles, on the other hand, would have a hard time following a king who, in their view, was dead. That would be foolishness for them. They would be more likely to anoint Paul as their king.

So, yeah, from a human point of view, what happened at the cross was scandalous and pointless. Nonetheless, it was exactly how God planned to save all humanity and reconcile the whole world to God. The strength of God’s plan was that God became vulnerable in Jesus to show that he can take the beating of mortals and still be no match for our evil ways. The wisdom is self-evident. The Word Jesus Christ still has the power to transform us for the better.



### Questions

- The proclaimers of the crucified Christ still face the same resistance that Paul did in the early church. Prove me this. Show me that. What makes it so hard for our faith communities to take in the power and the wisdom of God’s new covenant in Jesus’ blood for the forgiveness of all sins?
- What kind of authority is given to us to tell without fear the story of the God who died for us at the cross so we could live?

### Prayer

God of power and wisdom, you are most holy. Your will be done among us. Give us today what we need to overcome the weakness and foolishness of our ways. To you, everything belongs. Inspire us to tell the story of the cross as you meant it to be. We pray this in the name of the one who died for us and left the tomb empty—our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

# Cloud

Hebrews 12:1-3

In high school science, I learned about something called the “electron cloud model.” Now, I’m no scientist, but I’m going to explain it the best I can. Basically, within an atom, you can’t ever tell precisely where the electrons are to be found, but you can use probability to construct a model of where the electron is likely to be. And, that map of likely electron locations is called the electron cloud. And I can’t help but think about that idea when I read this account of the great cloud of witnesses in the book of Hebrews: that the witness cloud is the place where the witnesses of Jesus are likely to be found.

And being surrounded by that cloud of witnesses—being in the place where these witnesses are likely to be found—empowers us to press onward in the faith that we find along the way of this Holy Week journey. So let us be present for one another. Let us ensure one another that we are in that cloud of witnesses. Let us ensure that we are witnesses to the faith that God has given to us, so that others, finding themselves in that cloud might press on toward that same faith.



## Questions

- Who have been part of the “cloud of witnesses” in your life?
- How can you be a part of the “cloud of witnesses” for others?

## Prayer

Lord God, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses. Help us, by their example, to press on toward the faith that Jesus gives, and help us be witnesses for others. Amen

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

# Bread

## 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

My Nana taught me how to make bread. Well, technically she wasn't my Nana—all my grandparents died when I was quite young, but when I was in college my soon-to-be husband's Nana took the time to teach me the family recipe for her whole wheat and honey bread. She taught me how to prove the yeast, mix the ingredients, and knead the dough. She handed on to me—quite literally—the skills I needed as she showed me how to knead and stretch and shape the dough. Though she died during the pandemic, I am still connected to her every time my hands work the dough for a loaf for my own family. We are connected through bread.

It is the same in communion. When you receive the bread and hear the words, "This is my body that is for you," you are connected—to the person handing you the bread, yes, but to the one who first handed them the bread of communion, and to the one who served them, and the one who served them, all the way back

to the first Maundy Thursday where Jesus took the loaf and gave it to his disciples. All those who gather or who have ever gathered at the table and heard these words, the bread connects us back to that first time those words were spoken at a table so long ago.

It's more than bread. It's memory, and identity and promise and grace. It's nourishment and assurance that no matter what comes, we are a part of that promise of Jesus's incredible love. Bread connects us as a sign of love.

### Questions

- Do you remember who first handed you the bread of communion? How does that connect you to your faith?
- Luther reminds us that it's not the bread, but rather the words "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin" that bring about the promise. What other things help remind you of your connection to God's love?

### Prayers

God who meets us in bread and memory and promise, you call us to our place alongside all of your people in the great communion of saints. May the bread we eat be a reminder of the connection we share with you and each other. Amen



FRIDAY, MARCH 29

# Crushed

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Before you read on, take a moment to read our scripture passage for today.

God whispered those words to Isaiah the prophet 700 years before Jesus Christ came to earth. There is no one else in human history who fits the description that God gave Isaiah so long ago.

Isaiah might not have even understood these words in their entirety, but that wasn't his job. A prophet's job was to proclaim God's heart; understanding the message was not the goal. As Christians, we can see clearly that the "suffering servant" that Isaiah describes is Jesus.

These words paint a picture of what would happen to Jesus on Good Friday.

Jesus died for us. Jesus died for our brokenness. Jesus died to bring us peace.

Jesus did for us what we cannot do for ourselves: he atoned for our sin. As far back as the time of Moses (1500 BC) God proclaimed in the law that atonement through sacrifice was the only way to mend the broken relationship between God and ourselves.

This was the only way to bring us closer to God. This was the only way to fix what we broke. On Good Friday, Jesus took away the barrier between us and God.



I hope you can attend worship today and honestly face the death of Jesus because he died for you. I pray that you can see the cost that Jesus was willing to pay to draw you close.

One of the secrets of the Kingdom of God is this: Only death can bring new life.

Embrace the gift given today. Don't shy away, even if it is difficult.

## Questions

- Were you surprised by the description of Jesus found in Isaiah?
- In what ways are you thankful for the gift of Jesus' death and resurrection?

## Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for giving yourself to us. Thank you for bringing us life and salvation. Help us to see the cost of our sin and bring us peace through your love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen





SATURDAY, MARCH 30

# Suffer

1 Peter 4:1-8

In 2004, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* was released. Of all of the criticisms that can be leveled at this film, one concern was the way in which the movie seemed to glorify Christ's suffering. Perhaps this comes out of a particular Christian piety, but it still made me uncomfortable. I won't deny that Christ suffered, or that scripture tells us to rejoice in sharing Christ's sufferings. Yet it's not so much our suffering that makes us close to Christ; it's Christ's suffering that brought him close to us.

When I consider Christ's suffering and passion, I see God's solidarity with human suffering of all kinds. Suffering is common to our human experience; but we don't need to deliberately add suffering in order to know Christ more.

Yet we do. We cause suffering—for ourselves and for others—all the time. Today's image comes from an art installation at the Wat Rong Khun Temple in Thailand. The message of the piece is about sin and unrestrained desire, and the hands themselves are twisted, reaching. To me, it speaks less of hell and more of hungry people, reaching out for food and sustenance that has been denied them by the powerful.

This is only one of the ways in which we participate in or experience human suffering. Thanks be to God that we have a savior who understands our suffering and who came to share it, and by sharing it, both save us from eternal suffering and call us to the work of alleviating it for others.

## Questions

- What suffering have you experienced or seen?
- How do you or can you work to alleviate suffering?

## Prayer

Suffering God, you came among us to share both our joys and our pains. Help us to follow your example and work to reduce the suffering in this world. Amen



SUNDAY, MARCH 31

# Life

**John 20:1-18**

Today, on Easter Sunday, we celebrate that amazing gift of life. In early February we entered into Lent with ash on our foreheads. Today the ash has been washed off and replaced with the bright light shining out of an empty tomb. Today we are reminded that death is not the end. There is a voice crying out from the darkness, a voice of the one who defeated death so that all may live, a voice coming from Christ and calling to you—you are my child,

you are my beloved. Come and celebrate this new life with me. So on this Easter Sunday we celebrate that the tomb has been emptied and new life has been born. And this new life is a gift for you.

## Questions

- What is your favorite Easter memory?
- How do you celebrate the gift of life on a regular basis?
- What stands out to you in John's telling of the Easter story?

## Prayer

O Lord who rolls away stones and empty tombs, open us to your new life. Empower us to share this message of life, love, and forgiveness with others. And stay with us no matter where our journey takes us. In your life-giving name we pray. Amen

# Thank You

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# FAITH

ALONG THE

Way

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**FEBRUARY 15**

Light

**FEBRUARY 16**

Listen

**FEBRUARY 17**

Cover

**FEBRUARY 18**

Promise

**FEBRUARY 19**

Save

**FEBRUARY 20**

Ready

**FEBRUARY 21**

Wilderness

**FEBRUARY 22**

Distinction

**FEBRUARY 23**

Reckoned

**FEBRUARY 24**

Remember

**FEBRUARY 25**

Deny

**FEBRUARY 26**

Laughter

**FEBRUARY 27**

Conviction

**FEBRUARY 28**

Sign

**FEBRUARY 29**

Cornerstone

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Holy

**MARCH 2**

Handiwork

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Zeal

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Foundation

**MARCH 5**

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**MARCH 31**

Life

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