A photograph of a person's lower legs and feet walking away from the camera on a grassy path. The person is wearing dark jeans and light-colored lace-up boots. The background is a blurred green field.

2026 Lenten Devotions

February 18-April 5

Grace  
*to Go*



## HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

Set aside a consistent time each day—15 to 30 minutes—to read, think, and pray. Do what is most helpful for you. Each day includes a scripture reading, a photo, devotional thoughts, and reflection questions. As you engage, you may choose practices such as:

**Meditation:** Quietly focus on the daily reading, repeating it if helpful.

**Reflection:** Consider the devotional thoughts and questions—or create your own.

**Journaling:** Use a notebook or go digital.

**Social Media:** Share photos, artwork, or poems inspired by your devotion time.

If you have children, invite them to read along and talk about what stood out. Encourage younger ones to draw, and share their creations on the Lent Photo-A-Day Facebook page. (See below for more information about the Facebook page.)

Older children can participate independently, but it's still meaningful to discuss your reflections together. Choose a daily touchpoint, or, if that's difficult, set aside time a few times a week. You may also take and share photos that reflect each day's theme.

Share these devotions with family and friends, and use this season to prepare your hearts and minds as we prepare to celebrate Jesus' resurrection.

### LENT PHOTO-A-DAY FACEBOOK PAGE

Each day has a theme word. As you go throughout your day, when something reminds you of that word or evokes a response, snap a picture and share it to the Lent Photo-A-Day Facebook page (below) or your favorite social media platform.

Add hashtags when you post: *#(word of the day), #lent2026, #gracetogo*, and any other hashtag that says something about Grace to Go.

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



FEbruary 18

# Clean

PSALM 51:1-17

I took a few guitar lessons long ago. Shortly after mastering *She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain*, I sighed a teen-aged sigh and looked at my teacher, and I said I wanted to learn a real song. That's how I learned to play *Dust in the Wind* by Kansas, my all-time favorite band. Over the years, I've realized that while I like the music, I like the lyrics even more. "I close my eyes / Only for a moment, and the moment's gone / All my dreams / Pass before my eyes a curiosity / Dust in the wind / All they are is dust in the wind." Perhaps there is no better hymn for Ash Wednesday. For some, this may seem dismal, but under all that dust, there is hope.

As I have grown older, I look forward to this day every year. The smudge of ashes that reminds me that I am dust and to dust I will return. In this raw confession, any masks I may wear in this world are stripped away. For me, the plea "create in me a clean heart, O God" resonates deeply, and in it I find hope in God's grace.

David Zahl, in his book *The Big Relief*, states that "Theologically speaking, grace is the answer the Bible gives to the question of God's disposition toward troubled people, like you and me. This answer is revealed in-and inextricably tied to-the person and work of Jesus Christ." On this day, these ashes remind me I am loved, that God is at work, creating and recreating, and that ashes are not the end of the story in God's love.

Create in me... out of dust.

## Questions

- What speaks most clearly to you through Psalm 51?
- How might a simple act like washing your hands be an opening for God's grace and creative work in your life?
- Where do you most sense the "dust" in your own life right now—areas of limitation, frailty, or weariness—and how might you meet God there with honesty?

## Prayer

Lord, in this season of ashes and renewal, create in us clean hearts. Strip away our masks and let the hope beneath the dust shine through, and shape us again by the work of Christ. Amen

# Respond

JONAH 3:1-10

The events of 9/11 awakened in us the importance of first responders. It was not like they did not exist before that day, but during that unimaginable day, as smoke billowed from the Twin Towers, the selfless heroism of first responders became evident. They responded to everyone that day.

I can relate to the book of Jonah. Jonah seems to be a man of faith but only when he agrees with God. God says, "Jonah I need your help. Go to Ninevah and cry out against their wickedness." How did Jonah respond? He replied, "I don't like those folks." He packed his bags and ran the other way.

But God was not done with Jonah. He gave Jonah another chance and this time Jonah reluctantly complied. He spoke God's word to Ninevah and they repented. Interestingly, Jonah was none to happy with God about the whole forgiveness thing. Both Jonah and Ninevah

responded to God but not as we might expect. Jonah responded in defiance, Ninevah responded with a change of heart. In fact, Jonah was so upset about the overwhelming grace of God that he went off to sulk.

During these challenging times it is sometimes hard for our human heart to embrace the fact that God's grace is given to all—even those people I don't like. But that is actually good news. Is it possible that some folks wish God would withhold grace from me? Luckily, God is more than generous with the gift of grace.

## Questions

- How do you respond when someone is in need? Do you run to help, run the other way, or stand by filming it all on your phone?
- How do you feel when you hear that the people you don't like also receive the grace of God?
- When have you been nudged by God to share words of grace?

## Prayer

You are a God of never-ending grace. Strengthen our hearts to share this good news with folks we may not agree with and soften our hearts when we play the part of judge. Help us always respond in love. Amen



February 20

# Live

## Romans 1:8-17

In her 2012 book, writer Anne Lamott made the argument that all human prayers basically boil down to one of three words: "Help. Thanks. Wow." She calls them the three essential prayers. Our passage from Romans today is a little wordier than that, but in this passage, instead of giving three essential words for prayer, Paul provides three essential words for how Christians are to live.

First, in verse 8, he starts with "Thank." While this one does have overlap with Lamott's work, Paul uses it to remind the church in Rome that he is grateful for their work and their witness. The thanks is also directed to God, remembering that all good things come from there.

Next, Paul focuses on service—he reminds the Romans (and perhaps himself) that his life and work is dedicated

to serving God by announcing the gospel. That isn't always an easy task, especially when introducing Christian living to a new group of believers. But Paul reminds himself, and us, that the Christian life is centered around this act.

Finally, Paul highlights sharing—that the good news is to be shared with everyone, and the promise of the gospel is open to all who believe. What a way to live!

### Questions

- How can you live out thanks today?
- How can you live out service today?
- How can you live out sharing today?

### Prayer

God, I give you thanks for [list things for which you are thankful]. God, help me serve [list places where you can use your gifts]. Finally God, help me share your news with [list those with whom you can share God's love]. Direct my living all of my days. Amen



FEBRUARY 21

# Change

MATTHEW 18:1-7

I remember getting ready for church years ago, home from college, and proudly wearing my best blue jeans and a new t-shirt. My mother was not impressed. I reminded her—rather heroically, I thought—that I was going willingly to church. That did not sway her. Down the stairs I went to change, returning in a pair of corduroys (the closest thing to jeans I could justify) and a button-down shirt.

I sometimes wonder what Jesus would wear. Maybe he would show up in jeans and a T-shirt—perhaps even one of those novelty shirts that read, “Growing older is mandatory, but growing up is optional!” But the change Jesus speaks about in Matthew 18 is no lighthearted slogan.

“Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Jesus is calling us to a transformation that runs deeper than outward appearance or social expectations. The world complicates change with a thousand pressures,

distractions, and demands for self-improvement. But Jesus calls us to a different kind of change—one rooted in humility, openness, and trust, the big relief of grace.

To become like children is to unclench our hands, loosen our certainty, and rediscover our dependence on grace. It is a change away from self-sufficiency and toward the simple, profound truth that God delights in us as we are, even in blue jeans and invites us into a life shaped by Christ’s mercy.

## Questions

- Where in your life do you sense Jesus inviting you to a childlike openness, humility, or trust?
- What habits or patterns might you need to release to experience the kind of change Jesus describes?
- How might embracing simplicity—spiritually or practically—draw you closer to the heart of God in this season?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, You invite us into a change that is deeper than our habits and broader than our understanding. Teach us to become like children again—trusting, open, and ready to receive Your grace. Loosen our grip on the things that weigh us down, and reshape our hearts according to Your mercy. Lead us into the simple, joyful freedom of life with You. Amen



# Gift

ROMANS 5:12-19

Lent invites us to slow down and take an honest look at our lives—our choices, our brokenness, and the ways we fall short of who we long to be. Romans 5 does not shy away from this reality. Paul names sin plainly, reminding us that it has a long history and deep roots in the human story. Yet this passage refuses to let sin have the final word. Instead, it points us again and again to a gift.

What makes a gift a gift is that it cannot be earned. It is given freely, motivated not by worthiness but by love. Paul contrasts Adam and Christ to show us this truth. Where sin once spread, grace now overflows. Where death once held power, life now takes hold. The good news of this passage is not that humanity finally gets it right, but that God steps in anyway.

During Lent, it is easy to focus on what we need to give up or fix about ourselves. Romans reminds us that

before we do anything, something has already been done for us. Grace has been poured out. Life has been offered. Christ's faithfulness meets us in our failure and calls us beloved even when we feel most unlovable.

Receiving a gift requires humility. It means letting go of the illusion that we can save ourselves. Lent is a season for practicing that kind of humility, opening our hands, loosening our grip, and trusting that God's gift is enough.

## Questions

- Where do you struggle to receive grace as a gift rather than something to earn?
- How might your Lenten practices change if they flowed from gratitude instead of guilt?

## Prayer

Gracious God, you give what we cannot earn and love us when we fall short. Open our hearts to receive your gift of grace anew. Teach us to live that gift, not striving for worth, but resting in your love. Amen





FEBRUARY 23

# Snack

1 KINGS 19:1-8

The man in the picture looks perplexed and stressed as he absent-mindedly takes another bite of the powdery cookie. As if he's thinking, "Who are you and what's going on here?" I wonder if Elijah looked a little like that when he woke up at the touch of an angel offering fresh baked bread and water—sustenance for Elijah's continuing journey. The story doesn't say how Elijah felt about it, just that he got up and ate and drank—twice.

Elijah was coming off a mountaintop experience. Elijah's God had outdone the prophets of Baal in a miraculous show of power. But now Elijah was running for his life, fearful and so discouraged he just wanted to die. Did he get too pumped up about his own power? Were his expectations smacked down by reality? No matter. God gave the prophet what he needed—a bite to eat and some rest to get him to the next milestone in his prophetic calling.

Following Jesus can be like that. Times when we feel the Lord's presence and power moving so strong in us and through us, and times we feel anxious, lost, drained, and distant. Is this my own fault? Am I guilty and undeserving of you, Lord? No, that's not how God's grace works. God gives us what we need—sustenance for our bodies and food for our souls. "Take and eat. This is for you." Though we may be perplexed and anxious, we simply receive and carry on in Christ.

## Questions

- Can you think of a time of fear or doubt when God provided just what you needed? Give thanks!
- How might the Lord be calling you to bring some needed refreshment to a brother or sister today?

## Prayer

Dear Jesus, your grace is sufficient to make me whole and able to respond to your call. Forgive me when I prefer to stew in my own juices. Open my heart to receive your grace. Amen

# Perfect

HEBREWS 4:14-5:10

How many of us strive for perfection? Be it in our personal lives, professional lives, or whether we are parents and or grandparents. It seems to be something that is ingrained in us, to strive for perfection. As someone who has rolled a perfect game in bowling, trying to be perfect is extremely difficult. There are forces that surround us that lead us away from that which we think can make perfect. Sure, there are times when we might do something pretty well, but striving for perfection is very difficult.

There is only one who is perfect, who has been in human form and was able to refrain from sin. He was tempted, yes, but as the Son of God, chosen by God to fulfill God's will, Jesus willingly gave up his life for the salvation of the world. In all that Christ did, he never once "glorified 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.'"

It is only God in Christ, that has saved, redeemed, and made us perfect. As I look at the picture for the day, I see God's thumb giving us the thumbs-up telling us, I've got this. You are mine and through my Son, you have the full forgiveness of sins and the promise of eternal life. I've got this for you. You don't have to be perfect, because my Son who was and is perfect, has made you perfect.

## Questions

- Where do you hear God telling you, "I've got this"?
- How can you give to God your need for perfection?
- During this Lenten Season how can you seek God's perfection?

## Prayer

Gracious God, we give you thanks and praise for the work of your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Guide and direct us in your way so that we might not seek our way, so that we might not pat ourselves on the back, but to seek your way. For you are our source of light and life and our perfection. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen





FEBRUARY 25

# Found

MATTHEW 18:10-14

Have an NRSV translation of the Bible? If not, look it up online, and take care to read Matthew 18:10-14. What do you think? Did you find Matthew 18:11? "For the Son of Man came to save the lost" is apparently not in the most depended upon ancient authorities.

We are want to think of the Bible coming together from complete original documents, because it is God's inspired Word, after all. Yet much of what we have today comes from multiple sources, and those sources may have varying degrees of completion and compliment.

But I digress; lost in my thoughts, I have found my focus again. Let's come to where the rubber hits the road: who are children that hold a place in your heart? Imagine their faces, their voices, cries, and laughter—their favorite toys and stories, activities, and people. Now imagine the unbearable: if one of them were to come up missing.

Once you found your breath again, once your heart found its beat, you would drop everything to look high and low to find them. Jesus used such imagery to talk to adults about the life and faith formation of children, but illustrated it with something a little less alarming to bring the point home; sheep and a shepherd. The shepherd doesn't want any to be lost, and invites us to join him in that work. It is the work of noticing the other, of admitting that we all have been lost, know it or not.

## Questions

- When was a time that you have gone astray? What was the reason? How was a way out found?
- At the heart of it all, what do you want to find in a community of faith?
- Who is a person experiencing being lost, and will they find God's love in you?

## Prayer

The Lord is my shepherd. May I find it in my hearts to pray your way of grace for the most vulnerable. May I see your way of grace by looking for/at these neighbors, and may I live your way of grace by helping them. Amen



FEBRUARY 26

# Encourage

2 TIMOTHY 1:3-7

I had a colleague back when I lived in another state, and one time she was talking about when people would come to her for advice. I can't remember exactly what she said, but she told me that people would often say that they didn't think that they had any patience, or any self-control, or assertiveness. And, they didn't feel as though they could express those qualities since they just didn't have them. My friend would respond that everyone has those qualities. Maybe we all have different amounts of them, but those qualities are always there. It's all about learning to access what you do have, not wishing you had what you don't.

And, the encouragement that Paul gives to Timothy in this portion of 2 Timothy: Paul points to Timothy's faith. It was there in Timothy's mother and grandmother, and it is surely there in Timothy. Even if Timothy wasn't sure

that it was there, Paul assures Timothy of the faith that lives within him.

This is the encouragement that we have today as we follow in the way of grace. God has already provided us with what we need. God has given us companions (like Timothy's mother, Eunice and grandmother, Lois, as well as Paul) to encourage us in our lives and lives of faith. We do not need to earn more, achieve more, or have more, in order to live our lives in Christ. God has given us what we need, and that is encouraging!

## Questions

- When have you been able to encourage someone in their life or faith?
- What has been the most encouraging thing that someone has said to or done for you?

## Prayer

God of grace, when we are discouraged, encourage us. When we feel disempowered, empower us. When we feel as though we are not enough, remind us that you have given us all we need. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

# Delight

MICAH 7:18-20

For the first twenty or so years of my life, Lent was as a dreary season to be endured. We suffered forty days because we gave up something. Even worse was when I learned that Ash Wednesday to Easter was actually more than forty days to trudge through. We had extra worship. We sang depressing songs. We packed away the "A" and "H" (you know, those words that mean "praise God") until Easter, when we could be happy again. Lent was the time of "No joy allowed." Growing up, I only felt the sorrow, the lament, the sense of punishing myself.

Perceptions can shift with age. Like how a somber adult sees walking through puddles as miserable while a child jumps in and splashes joyfully. Or how a child fears the dark while the adult finds the quiet of night soothing.

For me, Lent has shifted from God's anger and our suffering to the love God shows to all who repent and turn back to God. God "delights in showing steadfast love" (Micah 7:18). Instead of grumbling that it took us long enough, God shows compassion and casts "all our sins into the depths of the sea." (7:19)

I delight in this somber season. I find the honesty and openness of Lent to be refreshing. This is a time set apart to reset my soul, to reflect upon where I have gone astray, to feel God's compassion and love. God delights in loving, forgiving, being faithful to us. And we are called to delight in our Lord as well.

Even if we might skip the "A/H" words of praise for a few weeks...

## Questions

- What makes you smile and delights you?
- How do you feel when you share love and forgiveness with others?
- When have you shifted your focus from doom and gloom to see God's goodness playing in your life?

## Prayer

God, help me to remember to delight in you. May the small moments of joy fill my heart. Help me not get distracted or bogged down by any worries of this life. May honest confessions bring a sense of relief that I no longer pretend to be someone I'm not, confessing the sin that you cast away. Thank you for delighting in showing love to me. Amen



# Amazed

LUKE 7:1-10

As the Son of God, I would imagine it would take a lot to amaze Jesus. After all, Christ was present at the time of creation (John 1:2). Yet, in today's devotional reading, we hear that Jesus is amazed by the trust of a Roman Centurion.

One day, a group of Jewish leaders come to Jesus and ask for his help. It was not for them but the servant of Roman Centurion. Surprise! Romans were the enemies. Romans were the occupying force in Israel.

Why would these Jewish leaders ask Jesus to heal this Centurion's servant? Because the Centurion was a person of faith. These elders explain that the servant of the Centurion was precious to him.

In a few short sentences we see that faith and relationships transcend politics and power when we search our hearts and put our biases behind us.

Jesus agrees to go see the Centurion and his servant. The precious one of heaven goes to the precious servant of the Roman soldier.

When Jesus arrives, the Centurion tells Jesus he knows about authority and following orders as a soldier. He knows that Jesus has the authority and power to heal all he needs to do is "say the word." Give the order and it will be done.

This interaction amazes Jesus. He sees the absolute trust of the Centurion in God.



I'll be honest, I would like to amaze Jesus with my faith and my actions. My sneaking suspicion is that Jesus is always amazed when goodness and mercy win out over hate and cruelty in this world.

## Questions

- When was the last time you were amazed by something?
- Do you believe that Jesus has the power to amaze you this very week?

## Prayer

Heavenly Father, we ask for the faith of the Centurion and the love of Jesus in our lives. Help us to see we are precious in your sight. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

# Blessing

GENESIS 12:1-4a

Many years ago, I had the opportunity to visit the Holy Land. One of our stops was at the Dead Sea, one of the saltiest bodies of water on earth, over nine times saltier than ocean water. There are several rivers and streams that flow into the sea, but because the land around the Dead Sea is the lowest on earth, the sea has no outlet. So it receives water but nothing flows through it, which makes it saltier. Because of its high salinity, no fish or plants can survive in the water. (Hence the name "Dead Sea.")

This seems an appropriate illustration for blessings, like the blessings God promised Abram and Sarai. When God called them, God promised them many blessings, but God also promised that they would become a blessing—that blessings would flow through them to

others. Abram and Sarah weren't called to hold onto the blessings God gave them. They were called to share them, to bless others through their blessings.

We, too, are called to share the blessings we've received, so that others can be blessed through them. Hoarding our blessings doesn't give life to others, but letting our blessings flow through us allows life and love to blossom for others.

## Questions

- What would you say are your greatest blessings?
- What are some ways you already share your blessings?
- How could you use your blessings to bring blessings to others?

## Prayer

Gracious God, you shower blessings upon us though we don't deserve them. Help us recognize how you've blessed us and how our blessings may be used to enrich the lives of others. And inspire us to be generous. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen



# Faithfulness

HEBREWS 3:1-6

Old Faithful is named for what it does again and again. It does not erupt on impulse or emotion, but according to a steady order set deep beneath the surface. People gather not because the geyser is spectacular once, but because it can be trusted to act as it was made to act: spewing thousands of gallons of boiling water 130 feet into the air. There are bigger geysers in the world, but none that are more predictable.

In Hebrews 3, faithfulness is not first described as a human virtue but as a quality of Christ himself. Moses is honored as a faithful servant, but Jesus is named as the Son—faithful over God's house. The distinction matters. Faithfulness does not begin with our sincerity or effort, but with Christ's authority and commitment. He is not merely part of the house; he is its foundation and Lord.

I often need to remind myself that faithfulness is never abstract. To belong to Christ is to be drawn into his obedience. We are not spectators of Christ's faithfulness but participants in it. "We are his house," the writer says, "if we hold firm." Faithfulness, then, is lived trust—daily allegiance shaped by listening, following, and remaining.

Like Old Faithful, the church's life is meant to be marked by constancy rather than novelty. We return again and again to prayer, to Scripture, to service, not to prove ourselves, but because this is how Christ forms a faithful people.

The hymn *Great is Thy Faithfulness* names this truth simply:

"Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,  
Blessings all mine and ten thousand beside."

Faithfulness anchors us in Christ, whose steadiness calls forth our own. We stand firm not by willpower alone, but by belonging to the One who is faithful over us.



## Questions

- In what ways are you participating in the "house" of God—your community, your family, your church—rather than simply observing?
- Where in your life do you rely on Christ's faithfulness rather than your own strength?
- Where do you see the tension between trusting Christ's faithfulness and taking responsibility for your own actions?

## Prayer

Faithful God, you do not falter, and your promises do not fail. Even when we waver, forget, or stray, you remain. Keep our faith alive, even in the ordinary moments of life. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen

MARCH 3

# New

Isaiah 65:17-25

You are invited through the scripture today to dream. In the season of Lent, when nothing new is expected, we are called to dream something new. How is it new? The same biblical stories that we have heard and worshiped through guide us, yet we are called to dream anew. Every time we are called to walk through this Lenten season, we are called to see God's grace in new and transforming ways. Are we able to live in awe of God's ability to see, create, rejoice and take delight during really challenging things that are going on in our world?

Today's passage in Isaiah reminds us that God does not impose limits on our history. God makes something new. Our passage opens today with an invitation for us, "See, I will create new heavens and a new earth." New is not always easy. We like to live in the comfort of our past, like the feeling of an old La-Z-Boy chair that

gives us the best naps when we are feeling sad and overwhelmed. This new understanding of God's grace invites us to transform our lives and the world. We must be compelled to move from comfortable faith to a vision of grace that leads to transformation. Isaiah inspires us to dream of a world where death is not the end, and through the transformation of God's love, we are invited to dream of a place where we do not labor in vain but work and dream of a future that is transformed by the love and grace of God.

## Questions

- What parts of your faith feel comfortable and worn in?
- Where do you see God calling you to something new?

## Prayer

Creator God, amid our challenges, you are with us. Amid suffering, you make all things new. Help us hold on to the dream of a new heaven and a new earth as described in Isaiah 65. Inspire us to find ways to rejoice in life's joys and challenges, and to savor your presence in the season of Lent. Amen



# Restore

EZEKIEL 36:22-32

Years ago, I was privileged to run two small museums, and one of my skills was using copied and restored photographs to help tell a story. This process often took a tattered old picture like the photo we have today, and breathed new life into it by repairing what had been damaged and sometimes improving on the original.

Restoration is one of the most beautiful works of God, and Ezekiel 36 reminds us that it is rooted not first in our worthiness but in God's unwavering grace and faithfulness. Israel had wandered, rebelled, and profaned God's name. Yet God declares that He will act—not because His people have earned it, but because His own character is steadfast and holy. Restoration begins with God.

The work God does here goes way beyond what I could do in a dark room or with paint and bushes. To be restored in God's grace is not a touch-up; it is a transformation.



And so it is with us. God's restoration in our lives—whether healing, freedom, repentance, or renewed hope—is never merely a touch-up nor is it only personal. It becomes a testimony. A life once broken, now renewed, is a living declaration: God restores.

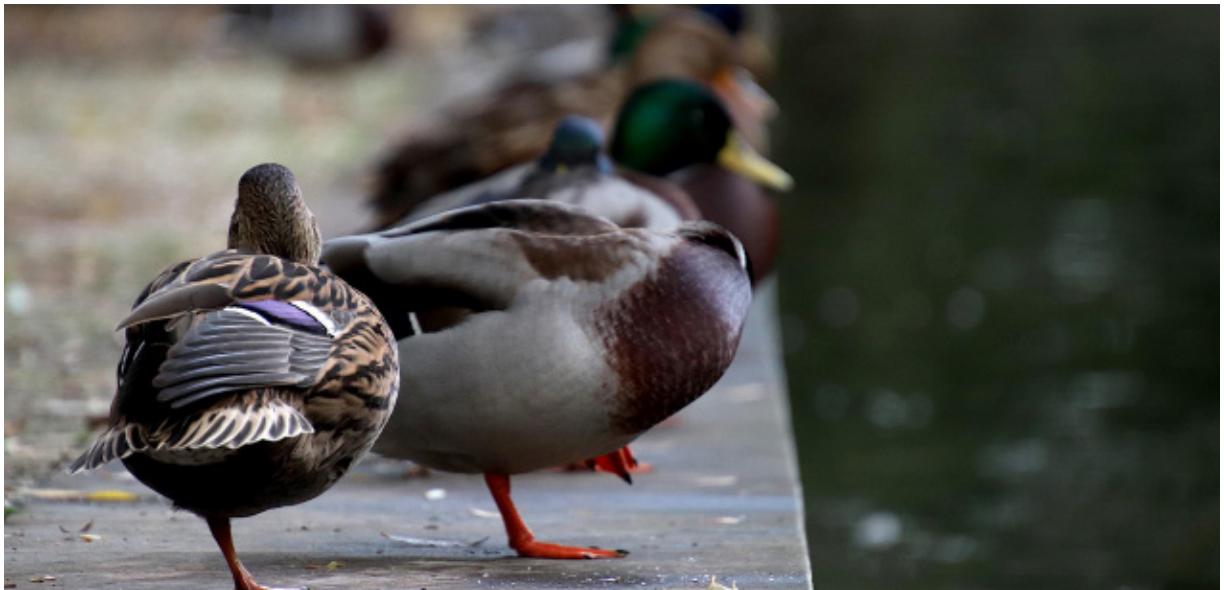
## Questions

- Where in your life right now do you most long for God's restoration—and how might He be inviting you to trust His grace rather than your own worthiness?
- Ezekiel emphasizes that God restores for the sake of his name. How does seeing restoration as God's work, not yours, reshape the way you view your past and your future?
- In what ways might your own story of being renewed—your "before" and "after"—serve as a testimony that points others to God's faithfulness?

## Prayer

Gracious and faithful God, thank you for being the One who restores, not because we have earned it, but because your character is steadfast and holy. Restore in us hearts that reflect your grace. May our restored lives become a testimony that points others to your goodness. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen





MARCH 5

# Aligned

COLOSSIANS 1:15-23

Years ago, I was in the basement trying to create order out of the mess that was "my area," and my wife called out, "What are you doing down there?" I replied... "Just trying to get my ducks in a row." Where that phrase came from, I have no idea, but I have used it thousands of times since. Sometimes it's just a little "duck" that gets out of line, like a picture frame that needs to be aligned a scooch. Once done, you step back, only to realize it is now ever so slightly off in the other direction; it can drive you up the wall.

Paul reminds us that Jesus gathers our scattered "ducks" pieces of our broken hearts, scattered dreams, and frazzled expectations, and Jesus draws them back into himself. When we waddle off—slowly, subtly, sometimes without noticing—Jesus calls us again to stand firm on the foundation of his love and reconciliation.

In the big relief of God's grace, we are invited not simply to work harder or feel guiltier, but to return. To let Jesus

tend to our ducks. To remember that our lives, our identity, and our hope are in a row because he aligns them in forgiveness, grace, and mercy.

Wherever your ducks may wander today—strained relationships, unraveled routines, weary emotions—Christ is already there, calling, guiding, and reconciling us each step of the way, for in him all things are held together.

## Questions

- Where in your life do you feel "your ducks are out of alignment" right now, and how might Christ be inviting you back to center?
- What practices or postures help reorient your heart toward Jesus when you feel scattered?
- How does knowing that Christ "holds all things together" reshape the way you see your current challenges?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, center us again in your love. When our hearts drift or our days scatter, draw us back to the you in whom all things hold together. Fill us with your grace and align our desires, our choices, and our lives with the truth of who you are. Amen

# Family

EPHESIANS 2:11-22

We have Paul sending a letter to early Christians having difficulties accepting one another. This seems to be a common theme for Paul and the first century Christians. The letter addressed to the congregation in Ephesus was one among many letters sent to congregations that included reprimands from Paul about communal living.

The pragmatic reality of overcoming generations of cultural bias is formidable. Communities that formerly were at least dissuaded, if not outright forbidden contact, were now expected to unite. The practicalities of various traditions bear witness to a root issue—who is more important.

When discussing conflict in pre-marital counseling, step number one is to identify the actual conflict. Oftentimes the current 'fight' is not the root cause of the conflict. When cultures or families intertwine, the root conflict is usually that of who is seen as having more importance or power.

In God's kingdom—or God's family—everyone has value and worth. Our identities are no longer dependent on abilities, ethnicity, age, gender, accomplishments, or any other human metric. In God's family, you are united by grace into One Body in Christ. Your worth as a brother or sister in Christ is solely dependent on the love of God. This family is diverse and sometimes even complicated, but we are bound together into one family to be a blessing to the world. Even in those complicated times, it is the power of God flowing through and in you that guide you into peace.



## Questions

- Who is easiest for you to love? Among them, is there anyone with whom you need to make peace?
- Whom do you consider 'other' or 'strangers' (different enough from you to raise distrust, fear, or anxiety)? Where/how do you see Christ 'breaking down the walls of hostility' around you?

## Prayer

God of eternal grace, your Holy Spirit knits us together into your family. We live in a world full of hostility. Remind us that you break down the walls of hostility and make us One in Christ. Guide us to trust in the family you create, the Body of Christ, that surpasses all of our shortcomings and lack of imagination. Amen

# Reminder

## EXODUS 16:27-35

Every time I see someone giving away note pads, I always pick some up. I use these pads to write notes to myself, so I don't forget both important and even mundane things. I want to remind myself of important meetings or to pick up the grandkids or buy milk on the way home. Ironically, I end up with so many notepads because I forget where I put the ones I had.

The Israelites often had a memory problem. The time in the wilderness was certainly challenging. The people needed to learn to trust God before they could remember what he said. And you can't remember on an empty stomach.

After crossing the Red Sea the people were hungry. What would they do? They had plenty to eat in Egypt. God said "Don't worry. I will provide manna from heaven which will give you all the nourishment you need. Here is the deal... go out each morning and pick up what you will need for that day and only that day. On the sixth of the week, pick up what you will need for two days because you will rest on the Sabbath."

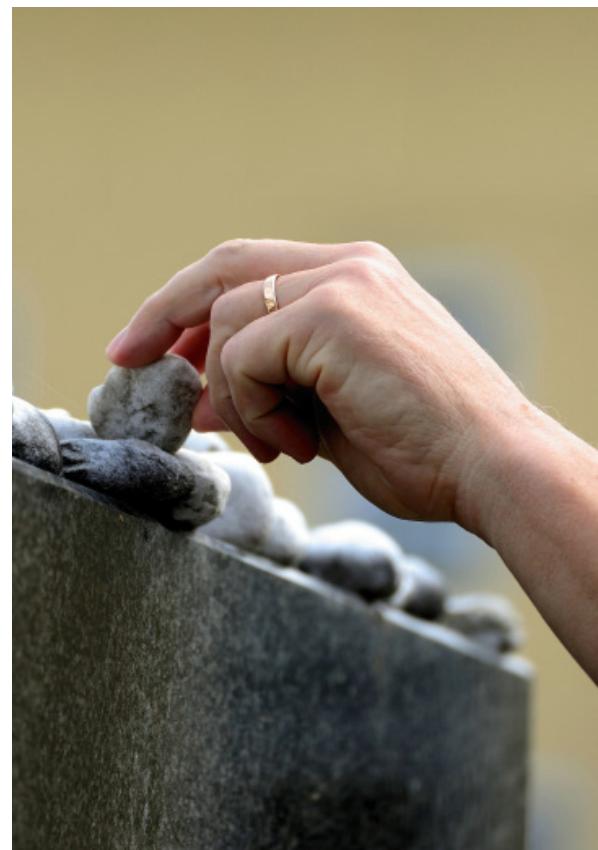
That is a tough command. Don't we usually want to make sure we won't run out? Yet some folks either did not remember or did not trust God. On that day the ground was barren, because the people did not remember the command and the promise of God. They did not trust God's grace.

### Questions

- Is faith about trust or memory or both?
- Why is it so hard to remember the promises God makes?
- Where does our memory fall short?

### Prayer

Everlasting God, throughout all time you remain faithful to your promises. Give us the courage to remember the promises you make to us and to act boldly, trusting in your love. Amen



MARCH 8

# Water

JOHN 4:5-42

Like a river, this story is deep and has many currents. On the surface, we have human Jesus, resting by the well of his ancestors, Jacob's well, tired and worn out from his journey. He's met at the well by a Samaritan woman, an outsider, drawing water in the heat of the day when the well was most likely to be empty. On the surface, this encounter never should have been any deeper than that—as the writer, Luke, points out, Jews do not share things with Samaritans. Especially not Jewish men with Samaritan women at a well, alone.

But Jesus is never content to leave things at surface level. He engages with the woman, and speaks with her. Their conversations winds like eddies in the river, from surface matters, to deep, deep matters of faith.

And in this depth, the woman realizes exactly who she's speaking to—the Messiah she and her people have been waiting for, the Christ.

Even though she's out of her depth, she still engages with Jesus—still asks for the living water, still goes forth from that place, flowing with joy. Her faith waters the entire village. Jesus has called her, her people, and us, to a faith as deep as those flowing waters in the story today.

## Questions

- Is your faith life feeling shallow and surface level or deep with the flowing waters of faith right now?
- What waters your faith?

## Prayer

Wellspring of Life, you call us to deep faith. Draw us beyond surface level practices into the living waters you offer that refresh the body and nourish the soul. Help our faith water those around us when they are parched for good news, as we, too, proclaim that we have met the Messiah who gives the living water. Amen





MARCH 9

# Stubborn

PSALM 81

The redemption event, the way of grace, of the Hebrew people from slavery to the freedom of a promised land is celebrated in the singing of Psalm 81. Being defined by that way of grace of God, however, did not mean that the journey was done. The redemption event, the way of grace, of the people of the way from slavery to sin to the freedom of an agape forgiveness is celebrated in victory over death in John 20. Being defined by that way of grace of God did not mean that the disciples' journey was done.

"Do you love me?" the resurrected Jesus asks Peter, not once, not twice, but three times (John 21). If your dearly beloved were to ask you that question once, it would certainly get your attention. What message is my dearly beloved trying to send? What warrants that question? It would stop you in your tracks were they to ask that a

second time immediately after you had given a clear answer. Does my dearly beloved believe me? "You know that I love you." To be asked "do you love me?" a third time renders the heart bear. Both parties need to hear the answer, both need to know what loving truly means.

"Will you please listen to me?" God psalms to Israel not once (verse 8), not twice (verse 11), but three times (verse 13). The way of grace begs stubborn hearts to be laid bear with God, not least of all for our own well-being.

## Questions

- What makes it hard to listen to God?
- What is the most important thing you have heard from God?
- What is true love?

## Prayer

Lord of the Psalms, you call on us to hear you. We hear you as we pray Daniel L. Schutte's Psalm\*, "I will break your hearts of stone, give them hearts for love alone....". Thank you for that way of grace. Amen

\**Here I Am, Lord*

# History

1 CORINTHIANS 10:1-4

We do not arrive at Lent or faith out of nowhere. We come carrying stories, memories, and histories that shape who we are. In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul reminds the community that their faith is rooted in a much longer story. He points back to the Exodus, to a people who were freed, guided, sustained, and sometimes stubborn. Their journey matters, not because it was perfect, but because God was present in it.

History can be complicated. Some of it we cherish and some of it we would rather forget. Paul does not bring up Israel's story to shame the community, but to ground them. Remember where you came from, he says. Remember who sustained you. Remember that God has been faithful before, even when the people were not.

Lent is a season for remembering honestly. It invites us to look at the patterns in our own lives: the way we

repeat mistakes, resist trust, and the ways God continues to show up anyway. We are shaped by what has come before, but we are not trapped by it.

The rock that followed the Israelites, Paul says, was Christ. Even before the name of Jesus was spoken, God was already present, offering life in dry places. That same Christ meets us now, in the middle of our own unfinished stories. History matters, but it is God's faithfulness that carries us forward.

## Questions

- What parts of your personal or communal history shape how you approach faith today?
- Where do you see God's presence woven through your story, even in difficult chapters?

## Prayer

Faithful God, you walk with your people through every chapter of history. Help us remember honestly and trust deeply. Meet us in our stories and guide us forward with hope. Amen





**Wednesday, March 11**

# Perception

JOHN 7:14-31

Have people ever assumed things about you that weren't accurate? How did it make you feel? People used to perceive my shyness as snobbishness. "She doesn't talk to us because she's a snob." It couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, I didn't think I was good enough, and I was terrified to talk to somebody who didn't understand me. While some people say, "Perception is reality," that's simply not true. Perception is the way we filter reality through our lenses of experience, opinions, and influence. And those lenses are different from person to person.

Even Jesus dealt with the snap judgments and faulty perceptions of others. In this passage, why did people assume that Jesus had never been taught? Just because he wasn't educated at the Temple didn't mean he hadn't been taught. When Jesus spoke about things they didn't understand, they assumed that he had a demon. Some people assumed Jesus was the Messiah. Some thought

it was impossible since he grew up in Nazareth rather than Bethlehem. And as Jesus' ministry continued, people would continue to be ruled by their perceptions and assumptions, rather than truly listening, watching, and seeking to understand him. In the end, Jesus was killed because of perceptions overshadowing reality.

## Questions

- What incorrect perceptions have people had of you? How did it feel?
- What perceptions do you have of others that might be inaccurate?
- How can you work on being more open to the reality of others?

## Prayer

God, when we start thinking we know everything, we pray that you would help open our eyes, our hearts, and our minds to greater truths. Help us seek your truth rather than merely the perceptions of our senses. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen

# Transform

EPHESIANS 4: 25-32

Have you noticed how angry people are today? Turn on any afternoon talk show, particular news programs and even late-night talk shows, and you'll hear a whole litany of angry people sounding off their frustrations left and right. There are many reasons why people are angry.

Some are angry at actions of ICE in cities across America. Some are angry about tax cuts to the rich and the gutting of health care for the poor. Maybe we are angry with how another person has treated us. Maybe we are angry with a store employee, and we demand to speak to a manager. Maybe, just maybe, we become angry with God.

Don't get me wrong, sometimes anger is justified. We do live in a sinful world and there are things that will make us angry. But it is what we do with that anger that makes the whole difference. In the scripture passage for today, Paul is encouraging us be angry, but do not let that anger lead us to sin. Paul invites us to not let evil talk come out of our mouths. The phrase, "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me," is often taken out of context. Because words can and do would many people. It's not because we are soft, it is because often our words are used to hurt others. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can be transformed to be God's voice in the world and not for evil.



## Questions

- When have you found yourself so angry that you hurt someone?
- How can you transform anger into God's message for the world?
- How can you help the world be transformed into disciples of Christ?

## Prayer

Gracious and loving God, we praise you for your unending mercy and love. Guide and protect us from all evil and all that leads us away from you. We are emotional people but ask that you help us so that we may not hurt others because of things like anger. Transform us to live in your will. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

# Abundance

## PSALM 23

What do you see: is a glass half empty, or is it half full? Your answer tells us something about you; the glass has an abundance of water either way. Therefore, for someone who is thirsty, their want could be met with such a glass of water.

The Lord is my Shepherd. What are the next words? "I shall not want" is a faith statement. Not only is 'the Lord my Shepherd' enough, 'the Lord my Shepherd' is abundantly what I need. If you would like to sense a deeper expression of that abundance, read the Psalm 23 as litany. Beginning with the second verse, after every punctuation add "I shall not want"; let "I shall not want" become your refrain. You can even select what key you sing it in!

Keys come in so many forms now. Doors can be opened with a standard metal key, and some doors can be

opened with a plastic card, a phone app, or a fob. Digital security is even moving from passwords to passkeys.

An abundance of keys are in today's photo. If the keys are all cut the same, there will be an abundance of key holders who will be able to open that one lock. If no two keys are cut the same, there are a lot of doors that might be opened. And because we Lutheran Christians trust that we are justified by grace and not by works, we know that only the Master('s) Key opens what we need.

### Questions

- How might it change the perception of the Psalm if it were written in the collective rather than the personal, in the plural rather than the singular?
- Where is your life in want?
- What does God's abundant love look like in your life?

### Prayer

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. Your child Martin Luther said that you, God does not need our good works, but our neighbors do. Move our hearts to meet their want. Amen





MARCH 14

# Witness

JOHN 1:1-9

There's a very famous painting of the crucifixion of Jesus by Matthias Grünewald, which was originally painted as part of the altar decoration for a monastery in Issenheim in Northeast France. One unique aspect of this painting is that it has John the Baptist standing to the side of Jesus as he hangs on the Cross. John, of course, had been executed by this point, so this is more an artistic choice than anything else. As John stands there, looking toward Jesus, he raises his right hand and points to the Crucified Christ with his index finger, which is longer than a normal finger.

Twentieth Century Swiss theologian Karl Barth very famously had a copy of this painting in his study, and when people would talk to him about the work that he

did as a public theologian, he would direct them to look at the painting, specifically at John the Baptist, and tell them "I want to be that finger." In essence, Barth was saying that the goal of everything he said and did was to point toward Jesus, to bear witness to the saving work of the crucified savior.

And, as we walk the way of grace this Lent, that's what we, the Church, are doing. We are looking to Jesus. We are pointing to Jesus. We are bearing witness to Jesus in this season. We are that finger: always pointing to Christ.

## Questions

- How have you witnessed the saving grace of Jesus in this season of Lent?
- How have you born witness to the saving grace of Jesus in this season of Lent?

## Prayer

God of grace, as we witness your saving acts of grace and goodness, help us, we pray, to bear witness to that salvation in all that we do. Amen

MARCH 15

# Visible

EPHESIANS 5:8-14

Scriptures often compares light with dark, blindness with sight, invisible with visible. These opposites are meant to highlight what is known or understood versus kept secret or hidden. Our God does not appreciate when we try to hide what should be visible.

Darkness is a reality for so many of us. Stories in the news are filled with war and violence, greed and corruption, neglect and misunderstanding. Lack of light can hide misdeeds and lurking dangers in the shadows, so we only walk outside when we feel safe, when we have lights to see the path we walk, when we wear reflective clothing so others notice us. And so many of us avoid the dark.

We know that it may hurt to expose what lurks in the dark, but making the hidden visible is usually best for all. So we expose what thrives in darkness: danger, deceit, and lies. We make the hidden visible and expose the secrets so they no longer weigh heavy on our souls. We may want to hide our sins and wrongdoing, but trusts work best with honesty. Forgiveness and reconciliation cannot happen unless one acknowledges the wrong. Healing happens when we stop ignoring the hurt or denying that wounds exist. Growth happens when we live in the light of God.

So let us be visible beacons of God's love in this dark, broken world. When we live in ways that are pleasing to God, we become the light. We are called to shine light in the darkness, so that we all will flourish.

## Questions

- What secrets or dangers do you keep hidden?
- How would it feel to shine light into the dark spots in your life? What can you do to make that happen?

## Prayer

God of light, help me to shine light into the darkness. Help me when my soul is hurting and is weighed down with guilt, shame, fear, or uncertainty. Help me to speak words that bring healing and hope to others. May my actions be fruitful as I live in your light. Amen



# Trust

## PSALM 146

Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer called the Psalms, "The prayer book of the Bible." The Psalms express the good, bad, and ugly of everyday life. If you struggle in your prayer life, go to the Psalms.

In Psalm 146 we hear the plain choice between praising God or trusting human leaders. It should be an easy choice, right? In reality, we people choose to align with political parties and human leaders all the time. It becomes their identity. Those same people do all sorts of theological gymnastics to prove that God is on their side and their favorite political party.

During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln was asked if God was on his side and the cause of the north.

This was President Lincoln's reply, "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side, my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right."

Lincoln had the correct perspective and so did the author of Psalm 148. God first before all others.

Princes and leaders cannot (and probably would not) save you, because they are human like me and like you.

When their (princes and leaders) spirit departs, they return to the ground; on that very day their plans come to nothing. Psalm 148:4

Why trust in what is temporal and limited when the eternal God waits for you?

If you are curious about God's agenda for our lives and the world, take a moment and read Psalm 148:7-9. That's what is important in God's Kingdom, and Christ's agenda should be important for us too.

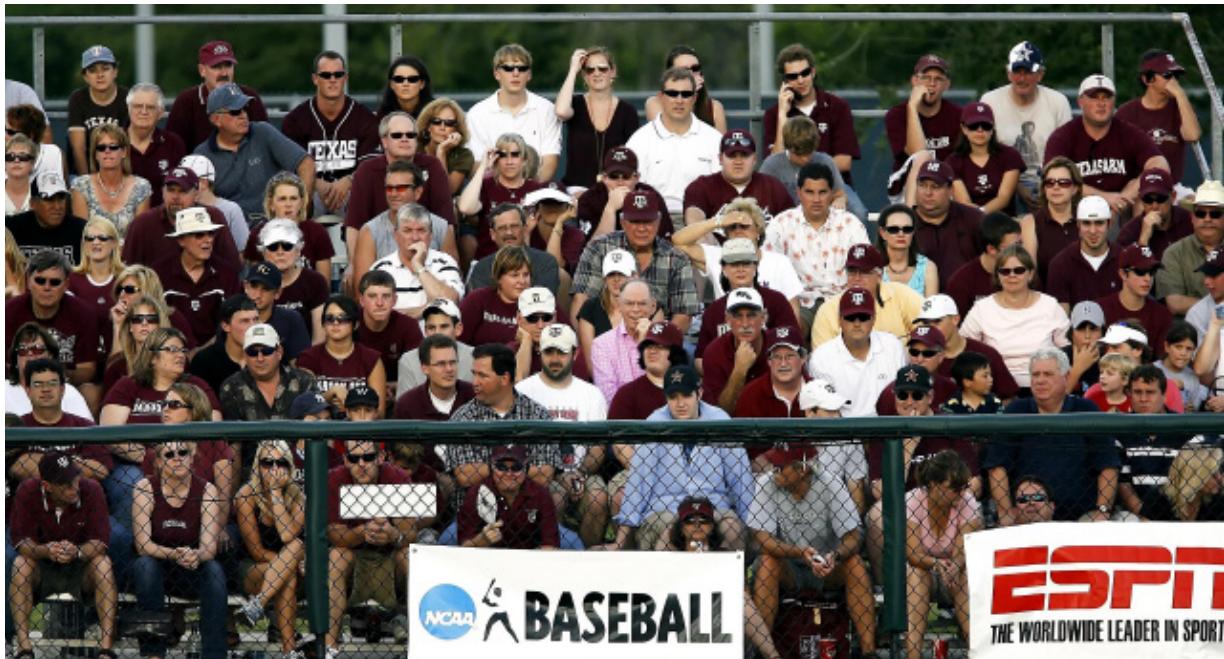
### Questions

- When life is difficult, who do you trust with your problems? Is it a political leader?
- Does God's agenda for our lives (Psalm 148:7-9) comfort you or anger you? Why?

### Prayer

Gracious God, help us to turn away from our willingness to follow others before following you. Give us the wisdom to understand your will and do it. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen





MARCH 17

# Support

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

My husband was diagnosed with lung cancer in his 30s. We had two young children, and even after surgery, chemo, and radiation, it was clear that this cancer wouldn't leave him alone for long. The thought of dealing with cancer on top of house issues, our ministry, medical appointments, diapers, play dates, fears, and lifelong dreams was incredibly daunting. All we had wanted was to provide a healthy, normal life for our kids, but it was clear that our "normal" wouldn't be like anybody else's normal. How would we deal with all of this? It was beyond overwhelming.

Looking back, I can tell you we survived and even thrived because of the support and prayers of so many people. People from our church offered to babysit, mow our lawn, bring us meals, sit in on doctor appointments I couldn't go to. We were wrapped in support and love

like I never imagined. We were profoundly blessed by people of faith, through their prayers and kindness. Almost anywhere I went, I was told that people were praying for us, on their own and in churches we'd never heard of. It was beautiful and so comforting to feel God's love embodied in the hands, feet, hearts, and voices of so many people.

Those prayers got us through the most difficult times. And 16 years later, even though he's now gone, it's those prayers that sustain and bless us so we can also support others in their struggles.

## Questions

- What does it feel like to know that you're being prayed for?
- What people in your life need prayers and support right now?
- What can you do right now to support others?

## Prayer

God, we give you thanks for supportive people who pray for us, lifting us up when we need help. Equip us to support others with our hands, feet, hearts, and voices, that all may know your love. In Jesus' name. Amen



MARCH 18

# Compassion

MATTHEW 9:27-34

In Matthew 9, people come to Jesus carrying needs they cannot manage themselves: two blind men who cannot see their way forward and a man whose voice has been silenced. Jesus does not ask them to explain themselves or prove their worthiness. He stops. He touches. He restores. Compassion here is not an emotion; it is attention given to those who are hurting.

I really like my dentist, Dr. Eric. No one enjoys sitting in a dental chair, but when I am there, I am cared for. I have a habit of holding my breath when I'm anxious about what he's doing. "Please remember to breathe, Pastor Jason," he says. So while working on my teeth, he also tends to my fear. That, too, is part of his care. I leave each appointment reminded that this applies beyond the chair: breathe. It will be okay.

Jesus meets people not at the point of their strength, but at their helplessness. Healing comes not because faith is impressive, but because compassion refuses

to turn away. Even when misunderstood or dismissed, Jesus remains present.

Compassion, then, is not about efficiency or fixing. It is steady presence with those who are exposed and in need. Matthew shows us a Savior whose compassion is not sentimental, but skilled—willing to stay, able to heal, and faithful all the way to the cross. The root of compassion means "to suffer with." As we hear Matthew's Passion at the end of Lent, we hear of Jesus' ultimate act: suffering with us and for us, for our redemption.

## Questions

- What groups or people or types of situations that involve suffering do you have a particular heart for? Who do you notice you lack compassion for?
- Where in your life do you find yourself holding your breath—bracing for pain, uncertainty, or loss?
- Who has shown you compassion through simple presence, not by fixing, but by staying?

## Prayer

God of Mercy, Give us your compassion—not sympathy from a distance, but love that moves toward others with patience and care. When we are tempted to rush past pain or look away from need, slow us down. Teach us to stay present, to listen, and to suffer with those who are vulnerable, so that they will know your love. Amen

MARCH 19

# Wait

## PSALM 130

Lent is a great time to practice waiting. Each day of this season, we are called to wait. At this point in Lent, we want to reach a conclusion. We are not too proud to ask, "Are we there yet?" The Psalm proclaims that we are called to use God's word as our hope. Let us practice waiting, even when we are tired, hungry, stressed, and frustrated. Even when hope seems far away, we wait with anticipation. We wait for the traffic light to turn green. We wait for a diagnosis or a plan of healing to be revealed. We wait for clarity and direction. Psalm 130

invites us to wait with our whole being. Every cell of our being is invited to wait. "I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits."

Let's turn waiting anxiety into hope by engaging all our senses.

### Questions

- What are you waiting for in life?
- How can you practice waiting with your whole being?

### Prayer

God of Love, thank you for being patient with us. Thank you for leaving space for us to search and find hope that comes in the joys and challenges of life. Inspire us to be a source of hope for all people who are searching in this world. Amen





MARCH 20

# Return

EZEKIEL 33:10-16

Years ago there was a show called *Pimp My Ride*. And while I have questions about its title, I loved the concept. They would take a beat-up old car and “zhuzh” it up, and the before-and-after transitions were stunning. At the time, I was driving a 1987 Mazda B2200 pick-up, which could have used a lot of help, and I dreamed of what it could be when it was returned to me after this treatment. Alas, that never happened, and it was junked and crushed, never rolled again.

The people of Israel cry out under the weight of their sins: “Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us... how then can we live?” Their question echoes the cry of every heart that has felt overwhelmed by guilt, regret, or the belief that they have gone too far to return. Yet God’s response is stunningly full of mercy. He declares that he takes “no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from their ways and life.”

Return is God’s invitation—not to those who have their lives together, but precisely to those who feel lost, burdened, or stuck. Righteousness cannot save those who trust in themselves, and wickedness cannot condemn those who genuinely turn back to God. In God’s grace, the past does not have the final word. God’s invitation is simple, urgent, and filled with hope—turn back... and live. And the before-and-after photos will be stunning! In God’s grace, we are more than zhuzhed up; we are a new creation in Christ Jesus.

## Reflection Questions

- Where do you feel the weight of past sins, and how is God inviting you to return rather than remain in shame?
- What does it mean for you personally that God takes no pleasure in judgment but delights in repentance?
- Is there a step of restoration—relational, spiritual, or practical—that God is prompting you to take?

## Prayer

Merciful God, thank you for being the One who invites us to return, no matter how far we have wandered. Lift the weight of our sins, renew our hearts, and lead us in your ways. Help us trust your mercy more than our failures and live in the freedom of Your forgiveness. Amen

MARCH 21

# Promise

LUKE 24:44-53

"Mom!" I called, as we were delivering May baskets, "This is weird, I feel like I've done this before!" "That's called Déjà vu, hun..." I think I responded with something like "De Ja what?" and I remember mom explaining "déjà vu—it's the feeling you have when you feel like you've done something before." Today I have both that feeling and the sense that I am in a time machine, for in the midst of Lent, we get this post-resurrection reading. I had to double-check the lectionary to ensure I was reading the right lesson! In fact, it's odd that I remember this story about my mother, but this might be the point of this lesson.

In his post-resurrection appearance, he seems to be saying... remember all those things I talked about, all the promises of God for you... yup, fulfilled, it's all

true. Daily we, like those first disciples, remember, read, and pray in a sense of Déjà vu as God comes to us to remind us that in the midst of the struggles and ups and downs of life, God's grace is for you, the promises have been fulfilled, and we are freed in Christ to live into the fullness of those promises for the sake of our neighbors near and far.

## Questions

- Where in your life right now do you need to be reminded of God's already fulfilled promises?
- What truths about Jesus have you heard many times but need to "remember again" in this season?
- Lent often emphasizes what is lacking or broken. How does this resurrection scene reframe your understanding of the season?

## Prayer

Lord Jesus, daily as we remember our baptisms, remind us again of your fulfilled promises. Steady our steps, strengthen our hope, and send us out as witnesses of your grace. Amen



# Life

## EZEKIEL 37:1-14

Recently, I had the misfortune of my thyroid medication not being auto-filled at the same time my vitamin B-12 and D levels plummeted. To add insult to injury, I then either caught a stomach bug or gave myself food poisonin—the kind that makes all food unappetizing for weeks afterwards. The combination gave me a new appreciation of the phrase, “bone tired.” Physically, fatigue permeated every molecule in my body.

The Judeans were bone tired. They had been conquered, removed from their homes, and seen the Temple and Jerusalem reduced to rubble. They lived in exile as outsiders and strangers in a strange land. Their spirit, the very breath of God flowing through them as a people, seemed to still. A numbness has settled into their very being.

Ezekiel was exhausted. Serving as a priest to a people who were fully convinced that the Lord had abandoned them is a step past challenging. He was tasked with prophesying hope to a people lacking the energy to hope. Even the prophet was bone tired.

God led Ezekiel out to a valley for his very own personalized object lesson. Ezekiel’s vision showed him that God’s faithfulness and love conquer human exhaustion. Ezekiel’s weariness necessitated a dramatic vision. While our own visions might not be as dramatic, the resulting life that God gives is just as miraculous.

God’s power is always greater than your weariness. God’s promise of life is always stronger than your own mortality. The Holy Spirit infuses you with the breath of God—granting you life.



### Questions

- In what aspect(s) of your life have you sensed a ‘deadening’ or exhaustion of spirit lately?
- Where have you witnessed awakening? In nature? In yourself? In others?

### Prayer

Lord, fill us always with your Holy Spirit. Awaken our hearts and minds to bear witness to life in and around us. Banish apathy and doubt that we may trust your promise of life in Christ rings true among us. Amen

MARCH 23

# Refuge

PSALM 143

I have a special spot—my refuge. When the weather is nice, I can retreat to the corner of our deck. An ivy plant trails from the pergola, a table with other plants sits near me, and I can see the entire back yard. In the winter I choose a corner of my office near the bookcase and a few other plants. These are the emotionally safe spaces I retreat to when I need a respite. I can let my guard down and open myself to God and nature.

In our Psalm today the writer is fleeing some form of enemy. I am struck by the language, “the enemy has pursued me, crushed my life to the ground, and makes me sit in the darkness like those long dead.” Can you feel the pain? Can you hear the anxiety? “Answer me quickly, do not hide from me, let me hear of your steadfast love.” We join in the cry, “where are you Lord, how long must we wait?”

These cries of anguish are very real. They are also very personal. Who is the enemy? It might be an illness, maybe a struggling relationship, financial trouble, or the overwhelming nature of the news we hear around us.

We may feel crushed, yet the Psalmist gives us hope. “I have fled to you for refuge.” The Psalms are consistent. No matter what the struggle may be, the writer trusts in God. God’s refuge is a place of pure grace.

## Questions

- Where is your refuge? It may be physical or emotional.
- Who or what is your enemy today?
- Imagine yourself journeying on the path in our picture today. What is in the little cabin?

## Prayer

God you are our refuge. Protect us from the enemies that pursue us. Calm our busy and troubled minds. Hear our prayer. Amen





MARCH 24

# Together

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

Did you ever have that one friend? The one where the two of you were basically one unit, inseparable and synonymous? Those are usually the friends we have the greatest adventures... and the ones with whom we get into the deepest trouble together. I can remember my best friend and I staging a (minor!) revolt in junior English class, which resulted in being sent to the head of the English department for reprimand. As we both walked in to face the music, the department chair looked at us, shook their head and said, "Of course you're in this together."

In the writing in the letter to the Ephesians today, Paul points out the togetherness of our human state. Unfortunately, it's a togetherness in the deepest type of

trouble—being dead through our trespasses. And all of us are together in that state. As we draw close to the end of Lent, that reality is here, and clear.

But the good news is, God doesn't leave us there. Instead Paul reminds us that out of great love, God has made us alive together with Christ. There is no getting out of this one without Jesus, and Jesus' love means that of course, we're in this together with Christ, through death, into new life.

## Questions

- Who was/is your "ride or die" friend? How have they supported you when things were rough?
- Where do you feel the most together with Jesus?
- What are some ways to remind yourself that Jesus is together with you no matter what?

## Prayer

God, you have called us through death together with you in new life. Help us live in a way that reflects the truth that you are always by our side. Amen

MARCH 25

# Test

MATTHEW 22:23-33

In many ways, the Sadducees get an unfair rap. They had a little hang-up with whether the resurrection was literal or figurative. Their 'test' for Jesus was basically whether Jesus agreed with their understanding or the Pharisees. For them, the test of Christ's authenticity as the Messiah was his explanation of resurrection. The root question had nothing to with resurrection, but in the identity of Christ.

True to form, Jesus explains that neither group really had a grasp on what the resurrection would be. Implied is the expectation that the only way to 'get it' is to experience it. Like many aspects of the divine, the true expression of resurrection was (and is) greater than human imagination.

It is easy to become distracted by doctrinal differences and get stuck on one thing. Church history is a chronicle of faithful people disagreeing with one or more doctrines. Luther talked about the hidden and revealed

God. There is a lot about God that is beyond our human capacity for comprehension. Asking questions does not weaken faith. Doubt is only sown when we try to limit God to our own comprehension or worldview.

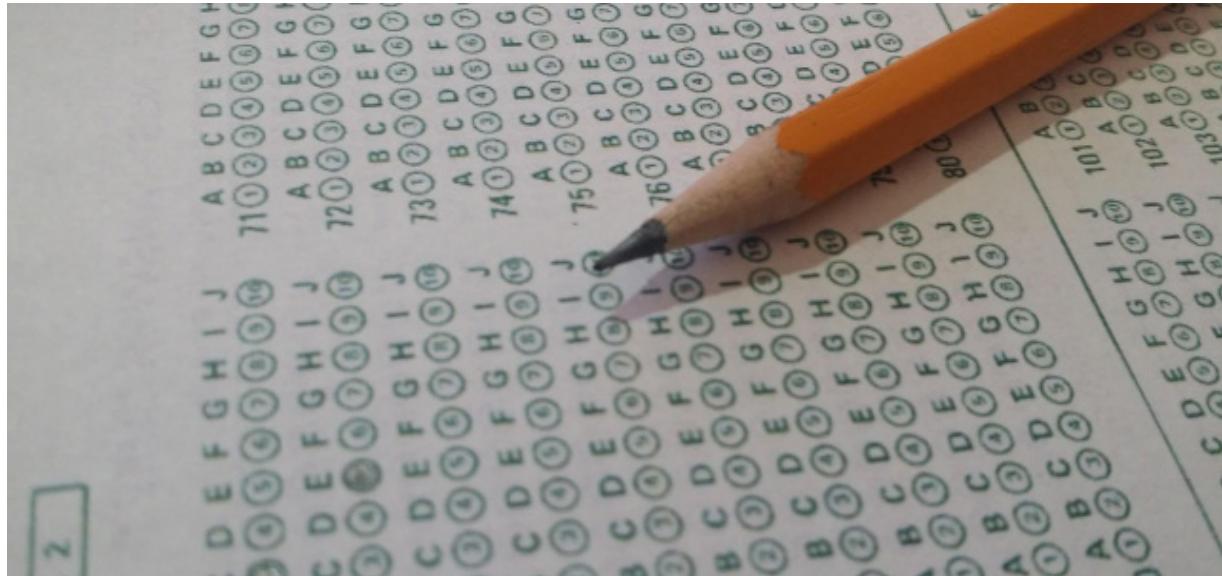
God's grace surpasses our understanding. God's capacity to bestow mercy transcends all human logic. The love with which God blesses humanity in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ exceeds our wildest imagination. Sometimes the questions lead us to more questions. Sometimes the 'tests' steer us right into the loving arms of God.

## Questions

- With what teachings of the Bible or church do you struggle? (What doctrines or traditions 'test' you?)
- How do you witness God's assurance of Christ's faithfulness as your Lord and Savior defying the doubts of our hearts and/or minds?

## Prayer

Lord, your foolishness is wiser than our wisdom. Where the world sows doubt, remind us of your faithfulness. Fill us with faith in the veracity of your promises that your Spirit guides us to trust in you and you alone. Guide us to both follow and bear your light in the midst of darkness. Amen





MARCH 26

# Completion

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

Lent can sometimes make us painfully aware of how unfinished we feel. There is always more growth to do, more healing needed, more love we wish we could offer. In Philippians, Paul speaks directly into that tension. He gives thanks not because the community is perfect, but because God is still at work among them.

Paul's confidence is striking: "The one who began a good work in you will bring it to completion." Notice he doesn't say might. He says will. This is not a promise that life will be easy or that growth will be quick, it is a promise that God does not abandon what God begins.

Lent is not about rushing toward completion. It is about learning to trust the process. We practice patience, confession, and prayer not to speed things up, but to stay connected with the One who is shaping us. Growth

often happens quietly, beneath the surface, long before we see the results.

Paul's prayer centers on love that overflows with knowledge, discernment, and depth. Completion, in God's economy, it is not about flawlessness but about love taking deeper root. It is about becoming more open to God and more grounded in compassion for others.

As we journey toward the cross and resurrection, we remember that the story is not finished yet. God is still working, shaping, and bringing life where we least expect it.

## Questions

- Where do you feel most unfinished right now?
- What would it look like to trust God's ongoing work in you this Lent?

## Prayer

Patient God, thank you for not giving up on us. When we feel incomplete or weary, remind us that you are still at work. Help us trust your timing and rest in your promise. Amen

MARCH 27

# Courage

PHILIPPIANS 1:21-30

The little boy in the picture looks like he's ready to step into thin air, trusting in the ties that bind him to safety. He has courage because he trusts in something bigger. That's how Paul is. He trusts so completely in his relationship with Christ, even death does not scare him. Christ is bigger. Paul's imprisonment has allowed him to proclaim the gospel to a whole new audience! As long as he's alive, he'll continue to preach and write and encourage his brothers and sisters to live lives of courageous faith in spite of opposition, united in spirit and striving side by side.

There are places in this world where Christians DO have reason to fear for their lives. Here in the U.S., our lives are not threatened. And yet we do experience opposition, more often from within the Body of Christ itself, as different factions spar and divide over who is correctly following Jesus and what really is true. What does

courageous faith look like in our current setting? Somehow, it must be about love ... love that connects us even when opinions divide us ... love that seeks truth even when it disturbs ... love that leads us out of our comfort zones, out of our fear of rejection and into the world, forgiven and empowered by God's grace. It can feel like stepping into thin air. But then we have the unshakable promises of God in Christ to give us courage to speak and act in God's love.

## Questions

- Is there anything you are afraid of when it comes to sharing your faith in Jesus? What do you have to lose? How can the ties that bind you to Jesus give you courage?
- In what ways are you standing firm and striving side-by-side with others in a community of disciples? Is God calling you to do something new?

## Prayer

God of grace and love, some of your children here are broken and frightened and others are more than sure of themselves. All of us need courage to follow you when the worldly tides of sin and evil push against us or pull us away from you. Make us trust in you above all. Amen





MARCH 28

# *Deliver*

PSALM 31: 9-16

In these words of David in Psalm 31, I am also reminded of David's words in Psalm 22. It is the Psalm that may be read during the stripping of the Altar on Maundy Thursday. David writes, "Many bulls surround me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me." (Psalm 22:12) David in many of his Psalms like the word in Psalm 31 and 22, are said out of fear. His life is being sought and he is afraid. Psalm 22 are David's words but are used as if they are Christ's words from the cross.

I am sure there are times when it feels like the world is out to get us, or that someone is out to destroy us. Truth is, because of sin, evil is out to get us. It seeks to pull us away from God, it seeks to destroy our lives, our trust in God and our faith. When we feel like this, it often feels as if we are abandoned and alone. This, too, works on our

faith, and we question whether God is as near as he has promised. David felt the same.

But look at his response. His focus and faith remain on God, and David asks God to deliver him from his enemies. And God does and will continue to deliver us from all evil. In this Lenten season, we continue to see how God delivers through Jesus Christ because of his death and resurrection. God is always in control and delivers us when we least notice it.

## **Questions**

- In times of trouble, where do you find God delivering you?
- When feeling alone, what resources do you use to see God delivering you?

## **Prayer**

Gracious and ever-loving God, we praise you for all that you promise to your children and that you follow through it is all. Deliver us when we find ourselves abandoned and alone. Show us your presence through your Holy Spirit and guide to deeper faith in you. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen

MARCH 29

# Humble

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

Thirty-two years ago today my firstborn son breathed his first breath. Contractions had brought us in two mornings earlier, but we weren't there yet. All the same, since he was already ten pounds plus change, it needed to be soon, and we were asked to schedule a day to induce. You see, it was Holy Week, and I was a pastor. So, we got to see his human appearance in person on a Tuesday. There is something humbling about being in the presence of your newborn, one borne in your image.

You see, it was the Empire's Census Week, and Joseph had to report to the city of David. And there, he and Mary were the first-angelic moments before the shepherds—to see he who had existed in the form of God now found in appearance as a human (as the ancient song in Philippians swoons). With the pregnancy calls that God

had made to Jesus' parents, the whole thing must have felt holy humbling. Just as we all are created in this image, so, too, he humbled himself into humanity, to the point of life, to the point of death.

Being humble is the easiest thing to do. It is nothing more than being yourself—what God created you to be.

Being humble is the hardest thing to do. When everything tells us not to be humble, one of the hardest things in life is to humbly be yourself. Who you are—what God creates through you.

## Questions

- What does it feel like to know that God did this for you?
- Where might others see God in your image?
- How might we see Jesus' image in the least of these?

## Prayer

Creator God, your grace is in our image. Help us to see it in you, and in our neighbors as ourselves. Amen



MARCH 30

# Prepare

JOHN 12:1-11

I am a big fan of sumo wrestling. Six times a year, I spend two weeks glued to online coverage of each match and the twists and turns of the title race for each Grand Sumo tournament. Now, sumo is interesting in that individual matches are usually over in a matter of seconds, the preparation for each match takes much longer. For example, the championship playoff match in the January 2026 tournament lasted 14 seconds, but from the time both wrestlers were announced until the bout started was four minutes and 40 seconds. In preparation to fight, wrestlers stomp their feet, they show that they are not holding weapons, the receive power water and power paper, they throw salt to purify the ring, they bow to their opponents. It takes a lot of preparation!

And, this is what Mary is doing in this portion of John's gospel today. By anointing Jesus' feet she is preparing him for the saving work that he is about to accomplish. Mary shows Jesus honor by anointing his body, showing him hospitality. Mary sets Jesus apart for the work of salvation, anointing him like the kings of God's people in the Old Testament. As we follow Jesus in the way of grace this Lent, may we honor Jesus in the same way. May we prepare, like Mary, to experience the saving work of Jesus.

## Questions

- What is something in your life that takes a lot of preparation?
- How do you feel when you prepare for something exciting or important?

## Prayer

God of Grace, as we prepare to experience your saving work, help us to prepare our hearts and our lives, so that we might know the fullness of your grace. Amen.





MARCH 31

# *Shelter*

PSALM 71:1-14

I grew up in Tornado Alley. Every spring and summer, I would watch the powerful thunderstorms roll across the plains, destroying crops, damaging homes. I was fascinated with the booming thunder and blinding bolts of lightning. I have lost count of times when I would be caught outside as torrential rain and strong winds would soak my clothes and force me to turn to avoid the stinging on my face. Shelter was a reprieve that I would gratefully enter, where I could watch the destruction without fear of being hurt. I remember trusting that I would survive with God's help, praying that I was safe inside.

I am fortunate that I have not needed to be sheltered from wickedness or cruelty like the Psalmist. I do not have people in my life who are violent and abusive, causing me to fear for my life and well-being.

But I know that there are many who do live in fear of what others will do to them. I imagine reading this

Psalm from that perspective, turning to God when life is dangerous. I imagine praying for refuge, for those brief moments to feel safe even though the world is not safe. Or for shelter to keep the danger separate from safety. I imagine taking a moment to rest and recover from the fear that overwhelms, trusting that God is the source of safety as refuge and shelter amid the dangers of life, the one who will bring me safely to see another day. And then praising God for keeping me safe in an unjust, dangerous world.

## **Questions**

- How do you define shelter, refuge, or safety?
- What does safety look like in your life?
- Who in your life could use shelter? How can you help them feel safe and protect them?

## **Prayer**

God our refuge and strength, I pray that you will keep all your children safe in a world that is not safe. I pray that you will be the shelter and fortress in the middle of dangers and violence. I pray that you will change hearts of those who are the enemies of those who trust in you. May all your children live without fear of danger. Amen



APRIL 1

# Example

HEBREWS 12:1-3

Almost every weekend, if you are in worship, you might publicly affirm, "I believe in the communion of saints." It is a declaration that you believe in the shared connection of Christians in and through Christ.

The third article of Apostles Creed can feel like a jumble of words, but I find great comfort in knowing "we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses." Not just nameless Christians throughout history, but family and friends! People I will get to see again one day in heaven.

I firmly believe these faithful are cheering us on in this life. They silently encouraging us to run our race of life with perseverance.

When you take the time to remember a faithful friend or family member who has past, also remember the example they set for you in life. We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us, including the author and perfector of our faith: Jesus.

This Holy week, let us remember Jesus our King who came to us to show us that God cares. Jesus came to not only clear up any misperceptions about God's infinite love, but primarily came to remove the one barrier between us and our Heavenly Father: sin.

Jesus ran his race for us and for all humanity. He showed us the trail of life that is clearly marked for us to follow. If you are unsure of that, let me tell you clearly and plainly. Jesus told us to always love one another, including those you disagree with. Remember you can always be loving even when you don't love someone.

## Questions

- Besides Jesus, who set a Christian example of living for you?
- How is your race of faith going?
- Do you need to do any course corrections?

## Prayer

Lord, thank you for putting people in our lives who help guide and grow our faith. Help us to hold on to the example they set for us and remember we are connected to them always because of the Communion of Saints. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

# Instructions

## 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

We live in troubling times, struggling to know how to make things better. There's so much division in our world, so many reasons to cut ties and walk away from those we disagree with. When we get together with people with varying opinions, should we stay away from talking about difficult issues? Or should we confront the tension head-on? How do we deal with these issues? If only there was an instruction booklet for these challenging times.

Jesus had been celebrated and welcomed into Jerusalem with palm branches earlier that week. But as the days went on, Jesus felt tension rising. Some demanded his arrest. Others wanted him to prove he was the Messiah. Some were trying to hunt him down. The disciples were confused and anxious. One had already decided to betray him. It wasn't the ideal time to celebrate a holiday. Maybe they should scatter and go into hiding

until things cooled down. But amid all this tension, Jesus invited his followers to gather for the Passover meal.

Despite the fact that Jesus was about to be betrayed, arrested, and denied, he gathered with his disciples. They ate, they drank, they prayed. And Jesus instructed them to keep doing that in remembrance of him. It was this meal that united them that night and would unite Christians of every time and every place. So during these fractured times, we meet again at the table, united by Jesus to eat, drink, and pray together in remembrance of him.

### Questions

- What in life do you wish came with instructions?
- This Maundy Thursday, what does the Lord's Supper mean to you?
- How can Jesus' instructions unite us during difficult times?

### Prayer

Lord Jesus, we give you thanks for instructing us to share in the meal you shared with your disciples. Unite us through your body and blood to fully experience your love and grace. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen





APRIL 3

# Conduit

HEBREWS 10: 16-25

"The internet is a series of tubes" is a famous line from a 2006 congressional debate. While it's not literally true, the image works: information moves from one place to another before it ever appears on our screens. Data has to come from somewhere and get to us somehow.

Today's word, conduit, paired with the photograph of, well, a series of tubes, teases the imagination. What's inside them? What kind of substance needs that sort of transport? Water? Oil? Chemicals?

A conduit is not the source of power; it is the channel through which power flows. Pipes don't create water. Wires don't generate electricity. Their job is simply to remain open and intact so that what already exists can move where it's needed.

In Israel's life of faith, the high priests functioned as a conduit. They represented the people before God through ritual, sacrifice, and the purification of the sanctuary. These actions were part of a larger conduit: the covenant God made with Israel to sustain faithfulness and preserve the relationship.

In today's passage from Hebrews, however, the writer invites us to shift our focus. We move from the laws and

covenants of old to Jesus Christ, "the great high priest" (verse 21). The curtain has been lifted. God's presence is no longer mediated through layers of ritual and representation. The conduit gives way to the source itself.

We see the crucifixion as a conduit. The cross is a tangible, historical act where divine presence meets human brokenness. Like a conduit, it connects the "source" (God) with the "receivers" (us), allowing what exists in God to flow into the world in a way God can access us, and we can access God.

## Questions

- How does thinking of Christ as the source—not just the mediator—change the way you approach prayer? Worship?
- Where do you notice yourself trying to be the source rather than the channel—in your work, relationships, or faith?
- Who has been a conduit of God's grace for you lately? How has that made a difference? (Please don't say your pastor, everybody says that, dig a little deeper).

## Prayer

Loving Jesus, I treasure this moment of direct communication with you. My heart hungers for a deeper relationship with you. Speak to my soul, help me endure my burdens, and continue to give me hope to meet the duties and obligations of this day. Make me a conduit of your grace and love. In your precious name I pray. Amen

APRIL 4

# Hope

LAMENTATIONS 3:1-9,19-24

We are almost there. We know that love prevails in all things, even death. For us to be transformed by the gift of God's love, we must take our hands off the wheel and surrender. We are reminded in the third chapter in the Book of Lamentations, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness".

During this Holy Week, our gatherings for worship have reflected on Jesus' surrender of his life to God, both through prayer and in his final moments during His crucifixion and death. In our urgency to reach the finish

line of this season of Lent, we are called to sit and linger in the surrender of our humanity's failings and our need for God's love to dwell in our lives. It is in our confession that we surrender. The journey of Lent propels us to this moment, where human control ends, faith in God begins.

## Questions

- Where have you refused to give up control in life?
- Where has the hope of God been revealed to you in this season of Lent?

## Prayer

God of life, we give thanks for the invitation to cling to hope even when the path of life is not clear. May our self-reflection lead us to a place where we can release control and power and make space for the hope of Christ to dwell richly in our lives. Amen





APRIL 5

# Grace

ACTS 10:34-43

Grace sits at the center of Easter—God's unearned, undeserved, unimaginable kindness poured out through the death and resurrection of Jesus. On Good Friday, grace looked like sacrifice: Christ taking on our sin, our shame, and our separation so that we would never bear them alone. But on Easter morning, grace took on glory. The stone was rolled away, not so Jesus could escape, but so we could see that death had been defeated and new life was now possible for all who believe.

Easter reminds us that grace is not a soft sentiment or a vague idea. It is power. It is victory. It is the transforming work of God breaking into human history—and into our own lives. Grace meets us in our failures and lifts us into

hope. Grace covers what we cannot fix and restores what we cannot heal. Grace welcomes us when we return, strengthens us when we stumble, and sends us out as people who carry resurrection hope into a broken world.

Because Jesus lives, grace is not just something God gives; it is something God keeps giving. Every morning is a new invitation to walk in the freedom, forgiveness, and future that the risen Christ secured for us. Christ is risen... He is risen indeed. Thanks be to God!

### Reflection Questions

- Where have you experienced God's grace most clearly in this season of life?
- How does Jesus' resurrection reshape the way you view your failures or regrets?
- What step of renewed faith or obedience might the risen Christ be inviting you to take?

### Prayer

Risen Lord, thank you for the grace revealed at the cross and confirmed at the empty tomb. Let your resurrection life fill our hearts with hope, healing, and trust. Shape us into people who reflect your grace in all we do. Amen

# Thank You

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# Grace to Go

FEbruary 18	MARCH 2	MARCH 14	MARCH 26
<i>Clean</i>	<i>Faithfulness</i>	<i>Witness</i>	<i>Completion</i>
FEbruary 19	MARCH 3	MARCH 15	MARCH 27
<i>Respond</i>	<i>New</i>	<i>Visible</i>	<i>Courage</i>
FEbruary 20	MARCH 4	MARCH 16	MARCH 28
<i>Live</i>	<i>Restore</i>	<i>Trust</i>	<i>Deliver</i>
FEbruary 21	MARCH 5	MARCH 17	MARCH 29
<i>Change</i>	<i>Aligned</i>	<i>Support</i>	<i>Humble</i>
FEbruary 22	MARCH 6	MARCH 18	MARCH 30
<i>Gift</i>	<i>Family</i>	<i>Compassion</i>	<i>Prepare</i>
FEbruary 23	MARCH 7	MARCH 19	MARCH 31
<i>Snack</i>	<i>Reminder</i>	<i>Wait</i>	<i>Shelter</i>
FEbruary 24	MARCH 8	MARCH 20	APRIL 1
<i>Perfect</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>Return</i>	<i>Example</i>
FEbruary 25	MARCH 9	MARCH 21	APRIL 2
<i>Found</i>	<i>Stubborn</i>	<i>Promise</i>	<i>Instructions</i>
FEbruary 26	MARCH 10	MARCH 22	APRIL 3
<i>Encourage</i>	<i>History</i>	<i>Life</i>	<i>Conduit</i>
FEbruary 27	MARCH 11	MARCH 23	APRIL 4
<i>Delight</i>	<i>Perception</i>	<i>Refuge</i>	<i>Hope</i>
FEbruary 28	MARCH 12	MARCH 24	APRIL 5
<i>Amazed</i>	<i>Transform</i>	<i>Together</i>	<i>Grace</i>
MARCH 1	MARCH 13	MARCH 25	
<i>Blessing</i>	<i>Abundance</i>	<i>Test</i>	