



2026 Lenten Daily Devotionals

Introduction

The season of Lent is a time for us to spend intentional time with God in the "Collective Pause," a time of prayer to be transparent and honest with God. During this season we recognize our nature for sin and our need for God's sustaining grace. These daily devotionals are designed to give us a helping hand as we aim to grow closer to God through the spiritual practices of reading scripture and prayer. As you progress through this Lenten Devotional, you will be invited to read a portion of scripture, read the reflections from your friends and neighbors, and spend time in prayer—in that Collective Pause. As you read the stories and testimonies from your brothers and sisters in Christ, may the Holy Spirit move within your soul. Use these devotionals as a guide through Lent and make the commitment to dedicate 5 minutes a day to reading scripture and prayer.

As we inch closer to the cross on Good Friday and the resurrection of our Savior on Easter Sunday, may the presence of the Holy Spirit provide you whatever you need to grow closer to God. Come and join us in the Collective Pause and journey through the Lenten season with us.

Day #1 of Lent | February 18

Scripture: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

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

¹² *Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;*

¹³ *rend your hearts and not your clothing.*

*Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love,
and relenting from punishment.*

¹⁴ *Who knows whether he will not turn and relent
and leave a blessing behind him,
a grain offering and a drink offering
for the Lord your God?*

¹⁵ *Blow the trumpet in Zion;
consecrate a fast;*

call a solemn assembly;

¹⁶ *gather the people.*

Consecrate the congregation;

assemble the aged;

gather the children,

even infants at the breast.

*Let the bridegroom leave his room
and the bride her canopy.*

¹⁷ *Between the vestibule and the altar,
let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep.*

*Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord,
and do not make your heritage a mockery,*

*a byword among the nations.
Why should it be said among the peoples,
'Where is their God?' "*

The season of Lent has arrived, and it sounds like the trumpet of Zion on the holy mountain! How is it with your soul today? Don't just give the usual answer we tell one another. "I'm fine," "It is what it is," or "I'll get over it." Instead, how are you really doing? If you find your soul is heavy, weighted down with the burdens of this world, then please read these words carefully: you are not alone. Joel tells his readers that all the inhabitants of the land are trembling. They find themselves shrouded in dark clouds and gloom; the confusion and chaos of the world have blinded them from God. It's easy to relate to the emotions Joel's audience may have felt. I surely have felt the dark gloom creep into the corners of my life. If you yourself have not felt the dark clouds, I imagine you can empathize with those who do.

Today, we start our journey into the "Collective Pause," an intentional space where we can simply be present before God and stop pretending. God is much larger than our biggest worries, and we know, by the grace of God, we can freely hand them over to God. Joel supports this when he says, "Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning." God's presence is not dictated by whether we are doing "well" or not. When Joel tells us to give our hearts to God, he means our entire hearts. I remember the words of Psalm 23 and how David proclaims God's protection and strength in the midst of the deepest valley. God, through our Savior Jesus Christ, has experienced our suffering. When the Word became flesh, Jesus walked with us through all the joys and the concerns.

We are called to give God our whole hearts through spiritual practices like fasting. This Lenten season, we are all invited to give God our hearts through prayer. Every Sunday in Lent, you are encouraged to find two new people to pray for throughout the week. Praying for one another, and with one another, not only builds our witness as God's Church, but it draws us closer to God. And as we approach God together, give yourself the freedom and grace to hand over your whole heart to God. Joel asks, "Where is their God?" We know that surely God is in this place.

Prayer: Gracious God, give me the strength to let go of my worries, to stop pretending, and approach you as a faithful servant. When my grip tightens, may your peaceful presence soften my touch. I give you my whole heart, God, and in return, you share with me the abundance of your sustaining grace. For that, I give you thanks. Amen.

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #2 of Lent | February 19

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-12

Shout out; do not hold back!

Lift up your voice like a trumpet!

*Announce to my people their rebellion,
to the house of Jacob their sins.*

² *Yet day after day they seek me
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that practiced righteousness
and did not forsake the ordinance of their God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they want God on their side.*

³ *"Why do we fast, but you do not see?
Why humble ourselves, but you do not notice?"
Look, you serve your own interest on your fast day
and oppress all your workers.*

⁴ *You fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to strike with a wicked fist.
Such fasting as you do today
will not make your voice heard on high.*

⁵ *Is such the fast that I choose,
a day to humble oneself?
Is it to bow down the head like a bulrush
and to lie in sackcloth and ashes?
Will you call this a fast,
a day acceptable to the Lord?*

⁶ *Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the straps of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

⁷ *Is it not to share your bread with the hungry
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

⁸ *Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.*

⁹ *Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;*

you shall cry for help, and he will say, "Here I am."

*If you remove the yoke from among you,
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,*

*¹⁰ if you offer your food to the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,
then your light shall rise in the darkness
and your gloom be like the noonday.*

*¹¹ The Lord will guide you continually
and satisfy your needs in parched places
and make your bones strong,
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water
whose waters never fail.*

*¹² Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,
the restorer of streets to live in.*

Volunteering is a huge part of my life. Because I do not work outside of the home, I enjoy filling my time with non-profit work. There are so many fabulous organizations out there if you take the time to look. I find that the causes I am most passionate about, are those that relate to my life experiences. I am blessed that I was raised in a household where I didn't have to worry about things like food insecurity, or whether I would have a winter coat when the weather changed. Our children are also extremely blessed that they do not have to worry about such things. However, Andrew and I feel that is important for our children to understand not all children are blessed. We believe that educating them on tough subjects will teach them to use their voices and stand up for the things they believe. Some subjects are tough to discuss with our kids, but being transparent allows them to create their own opinions. It certainly has helped me to shape my own views over the years.

In Isaiah 58 : 1-12, God is calling on us to help others who are less fortunate. To open our eyes to the circumstances that others face. But he is also encouraging us to use our voices to tell others to do good as well. Every time that I volunteer, I leave with a smile on my face, and a sense of accomplishment that I have impacted the life of someone else. One of my favorite organizations here in Kansas City works with children who have experienced trauma before the age of five. I assist in filling backpacks with food that go home with them each weekend to provide meals and snacks that they may otherwise not have. To hear these children giggling in the halls, how could I not feel fulfilled? Some of them have endured so much pain at such a young age, but yet they still find light amongst the darkness. God plays a huge role in

helping us all find happiness when things seem bleak. I encourage everyone to find a way that they can get involved with a cause that speaks to them. I am so very thankful that I have.

Devotional by: Anne Cusser

Day #3 of Lent | February 20

Scripture: Psalm 51:1-17

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹² *Restore to me the joy of your salvation,*

and sustain in me a willing spirit.

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

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

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

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

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

If I asked you what the exterior of your car looks like, what would you say? I would say that mine looks yucky, full of sludge and grime and salt from our recent winter storms. I'm lucky, though, because every year for Christmas, I get a booklet of carwash coupons for Charlie's carwash by my house. It feels like such a luxury to stay in my car while the machinery does all the work. Can you relate? A young person is at the entrance of the tunnel guiding you to get your tire into the moving slot. Scary, right? When the tire is just right, they signal and yell at you to stop, and they point to a sign with further instructions. Put the car in neutral, take your foot off the brakes, and remove your hands from the steering wheel. It's kind of like church, because it's an act of faith. Then come multicolored suds and water and swishy things. Now it's starting to get fun. Then comes the glass garage door in front of you, which is closed in the winter. That's when I know for sure the conveyor belt is going to take me right through the glass. However, there is a sign that says to keep my foot off the break. I pray and have a little faith, and amazingly the glass door lifts just in the nick of time as the giant dryers blow all the water drops off the car. There is a final traffic light at the end which turns green and lets me know that it is okay to put my car into drive. The feeling of having a sparky, clean car with crystal clear windows gleaming in the sun is one of the most gratifying feelings to me.

That is what confession feels like. In Psalm 51 King David models repentance and confession for us. He shows us how to turn back to God and ask for forgiveness. David was the greatest king of Israel, and he was also a complicated man who got himself entangled in a web of sin which created terrible consequences from which he could not escape until he turned back to God in prayer. Psalm 51 is the prayer that King David prayed....

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your

abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

When we turn to God and honestly empty and unburden our broken hearts of guilt and shame through confession, we are forgiven by God's grace. Like the multicolored suds, God's undeserved and unmerited love, which is available to all people, seeps into the cracks of our broken hearts so that we may feel cleansed of our brokenness and purified in our hearts. Confessing to God is like going through a "Heartwash." It's not a quid pro quo transaction or formula, as in, we confess, and then God forgives. No, God's love and grace and mercy is ever-present. A gift that is always there for us to receive. The apostle Paul says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." There's something about bringing our broken spirit to God in confession that cleanses and unburdens and expands our hearts so that they are primed to receive the love and forgiveness that has always been there and always will be.

Devotional by: Pastor Nancy Pauls

Day #4 of Lent | February 21

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

We entreat you on behalf of Christ: be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

6 As we work together with him, we entreat you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ² For he says,

*"At an acceptable time I have listened to you,
and on a day of salvation I have helped you."*

Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation! ³ We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴ but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷ truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute.

We are treated as impostors and yet are true, ⁹ as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we are alive, as punished and yet not killed, ¹⁰ as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing everything.

Paul gives the Christians in Corinth a powerful job title—one we can still claim today. He calls them “ambassadors for Christ.” And ambassadors don’t speak on their own authority; they speak for the one who sent them. They carry the words, the mission, and the heart of their leader into the world.

So, if we are ambassadors for God in our homes, workplaces, and friendships, we must stay closely connected to our Sender. Through prayer, Scripture, worship, and life with other believers, we keep ourselves aligned with God’s voice. We remain alert to the work of the Holy Spirit, ready to be led, corrected, and changed. Our ears must always listen for God’s voice. Our eyes must always look for the activity of the Holy Spirit. Our actions must mimic those of our Savior, Jesus Christ, who came to seek the least, the last, and the lost.

Friends, hold tight to your role as ambassador. Speak with confidence and courage, because the one who sent you is faithful.

Devotional by: Pastor Emilyjane Eichman

Day #5 of Lent | February 22

Scripture: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

² *“So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.*

Concerning Prayer

⁵ *“And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others.*

Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Concerning Fasting

“And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Concerning Treasures

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

My grandmother used to go into her closet to pray. I know this because my father told me. This made a big impression on me. When my children lived with me, I would do the same. It was quiet, dark and away from the many distractions of this world. Of course there are times that call for public prayer; however, when there is something really important to me, I do want to take it to God in private without public viewing. It just feels more intimate and brings me closer to God. I believe this is what God ultimately desires from us, to be close to us and us to him and to have our trust in him recognized. This is our reward. This is what the season of Lent means to me.

Devotional by: Cindy Doerr

Day #6 of Lent | February 23

Scripture: Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the Lord God had

made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?"² The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden,³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' " ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die,⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food and that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked, and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

I have never been a fan of the "Original Sin" theology ascribed to the story of Adam and Eve. To me, God embodies love, not guilt, shame or punishment. God is about compassion and grace as Jesus taught us. Still, this Garden of Eden story holds much truth. To me it illustrates "sin" as separation from God.

The United Methodist Church's website defines the Lenten season as a period to reflect on our relationship to God. It's intended purpose is to take our focus off everyday demands and distractions and spend time with God as Jesus did when he spent forty days in the wilderness, enduring Satan's temptation as he prepared for his ministry.

Growing up in the Methodist Church, my family never gave up certain foods or drinks during Lent like my Catholic cousins did. I remember my mom cooking a fish dish, something we rarely had, when they traveled to visit us one Friday. There were a couple of years as an adult that I gave up sweets, but it became a test of will power rather than a spiritual experience. For me, it didn't bring me closer to God.

What does? Daily prayer especially about others' needs. Acts of kindness in my community. Intentionally setting aside time daily to read the Bible and reflect on God's will. All of these examples help to shift my focus from me to God.

My Prayer: Loving God, help me to use this Lenten season to focus on you. Let my actions and heart be more like Jesus. Amen.

Devotional by: Shirley Hogenkamp

Day #7 of Lent | February 24

Scripture: Psalm 32

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This is the part that really stands out to me from Psalm 32: You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. What do these songs of deliverance sound like? Here in God's kingdom when we often need to deliver each other? The nurse softly telling you that it is OK to wake up now,

that you are safe. Who offers sips of ginger ale. The friend who sits in silence with you when you have run out of words, but knows to bring your favorite ice cream and knows you will be (re)watching Gilmore Girls when they show up at the door. (A true story of how I was delivered in the church – p.s. one of many.)

One particularly painful Sunday I had a moment to myself in church. My oldest was in the front row with our friends and I found myself falling apart. I knew I was going to feel big and that I needed to start crying and I literally just walked up to a nearby bench in the back, put my head in my hands, and started sobbing. A moment later I felt someone's arms around me, it was a woman sitting next to me who started rocking me and when I looked up to thank her I found she also had tears running down her face. She assured me she would be praying for me. She was holding on tight. She is one of many people whose names I don't even know who have participated in my deliverance. From my doubt, my grief, my skepticism, my lament. From the thousands of people I have encountered in recovery circles, some closely known and some only met once, who have delivered me. From my fears, my shame, my secrets, my lament. Ultimately these are gifts from God and my experience is that if we are very, very lucky we may at times feel directly blessed by God. We may hear the songs, we will feel hidden and protected.

For the rest of the times, for the every day times, we deliver each other. As the hands and feet of Jesus which, if I am to understand correctly, is part of my marching order as a Christian. We offer refuge whether in the form of warm tea, a comforting space, or even an actual hiding space. We sing songs of deliverance over one another, our friends and our neighbors and those who we may not directly know but who are in need. When in doubt of this, I need look no farther than the Gospel. Jesus shows us exactly who He was drawn to, those in the margins. That is most certainly where He found me. You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. This reads like a love letter to God and from God, as it is certainly meant to be. Amen and Amen

Devotional by: Lisa Silverman

Day #8 of Lent | February 25

Scripture: Romans 5:12-19

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned— ¹³ for sin was indeed in the world before the law, but sin is not reckoned when there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin in the likeness of Adam, who is a pattern of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. ¹⁶ And the gift is not like the effect of the one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the gift following many trespasses brings justification. ¹⁷ If, because of the one man's trespass, death reigned through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

¹⁸ Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. ¹⁹ For just as through the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

Lent, to me, is a time to remember what Jesus did for us. It is a season of reflection and renewal of faith, and a reminder that our sins are forgiven because Jesus came into this world, lived as a man, and overcame sin and death to become the ultimate Savior of our souls. I have read these verses from Romans many times, and each time I return to them, I find new meaning and new wisdom.

God originally intended for us to live in communion with Him to walk with Him, to talk with Him, and to live in union with Him. In the Garden of Eden, God wanted to share everything with humanity. But man, being flawed, listened to the narrative of Satan, and in that moment everything changed. Sin, death, and fear entered the world, and Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden. Ever since then, our souls have yearned to return to that place of union with God. Yet Satan continues to work against that union, filling our minds with narratives that are strong, blinding, and misleading.

I try to study the Bible each morning. I've read through the New Testament and am currently working my way through the Old Testament. Recently, I was reading 2 Chronicles 30:17: "For there were many in the assembly who had not consecrated themselves. Therefore the Levites had to slaughter the Passover lamb for everyone

who was not clean, to consecrate it to the Lord.”

That verse stopped me. It reminded me that Lent is the story of the Lamb of God. Jesus came to model for us how we are meant to live as human beings. He showed us the power of love and faith rooted in God. He came with a single purpose: to save us from our sins. He lived above sin, overcame temptation, and resisted every false narrative Satan placed before Him. He showed us what it looks like to live fully human lives while remaining in complete union with God.

In the end, Jesus was sacrificed as the Lamb of God, the ultimate gift of love. Through His sacrifice, he overcame death so that we might live. Sin and death entered the world through one man, and through one man they were overcome. One ultimate sacrifice saved us from our sins even the original sin that brought death into the world.

Each of us is worthy of his love, his sacrifice, and his salvation. Lent reminds me of that truth. It reminds me of what union with God can look like. The narrative we are called to believe is simple but powerful: Jesus loves you. Jesus died for your sins. He paid the ultimate price for you and makes up the difference where you fall short. My prayer is that this Lent, you find that narrative rooted deeply in your heart and hold onto it. Know that God loves you and wants what is best for you. His love is overflowing.

Devotional by: Trent Robinett

Day #9 of Lent | February 26

Scripture: Matthew 4:1-11

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.”⁴ But he answered, “It is written,

*‘One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”*

⁵ *Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple,⁶ saying to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,*

*'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "*

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, ⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

*'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.' "*

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

I grew up with a love of being outdoors. I cannot remember a time our family didn't have a road trip planned that would put us on the water fishing, in the woods camping, or visiting family in the golden farm country of southern central Kansas. My brother and I caught grasshoppers when we lived in Oregon, learned how to pick up crawdads safely in California (I even kept one as a pet in a fishtank for a while), and took what I remember as a harrowing, but beautiful canoe trip in the boundary waters of Minnesota for a week with my dad. "Go play outside" was never a problem for us.

One family camping trip that stands out in my memory had us hand-feeding Cracklin' Oat Bran cereal to squirrels in the Red Wood Forest – or attempting to, at least. I remember sitting on top of a smaller felled tree trunk and holding one of those little 'o' shaped cereal pieces out toward a squirrel, hoping it would take me up on the offer.

As an adult, I realize I feel most connected to God when I am outside. Hearing leaves and sticks crunch underfoot, sitting in the ambient light of the stars, listening to the small sounds of water moving . . . all provide a constant reminder of God's glory.

As I reflect on Jesus being tested in the wilderness, I imagine Jesus the man. Of course he was hungry and exhausted, but as a human being, I can't imagine he wasn't also frustrated and maybe scared. I hope daily his faith was bolstered by the wilderness itself. He could wake up, knowing he was surrounded by what God had created. He could hear those same sounds, see those same stars and feel comforted, reminded that God was with him every step of this challenge.

When Satan appeared, of course the idea of turning stones into bread would have

been agonizingly tempting for a starving man. Of course, being able to show that God would rescue him from death if he jumped might have been an interesting thought - but where the devil really missed the big picture was in showing Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and its splendor. I recognize the reference to wealth, but when I read this piece of scripture all I picture are the times I've hiked to look out over the ocean, or over the desert, or canoed through the woods. All the devil did, in taking Jesus to that high point and showing him the view - was give him the greatest reminder of who his Father was. If Jesus felt his resolve shaken at all up to that point in the temptation, it would have ended immediately. How could we be tempted to own something that God has already freely given us?

God is equally found in the Red Woods and squirrels. He is reaching out to us, hoping we will see his intentions are good, and that we will take him up on his offer of salvation.

Devotional by: Piper Stone

Day #10 of Lent | February 27

Scripture: Genesis 12:1-4a

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him.

Lent, for me, is a season of remembering who I am and whose I am. It is a time to slow down, strip away some of the noise, and listen again for the voice of God that calls me by name.

Genesis 12 begins with a command that sounds simple but is anything but: "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you." Abram is told to leave what is familiar, what is secure, and even what defines him, and to trust that God will meet him on the way. What strikes me every time I read this passage is that Abram is not told to go make a name for himself. God says, "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great."

So much of our world tells us the opposite. We are told to build our own reputation, protect our own legacy, to make a name for ourselves, and prove our own worth. Lent pushes back on that lie. Lent reminds us that before we ever set out, before we ever succeed or fail, we already have a name—and God knows it.

I think about this personally because I changed my name. I took my wife's family name as part of her cultural tradition, and because her father had only daughters. At the time, there were only nine people in the United States with the last name Cueni. The choice wasn't about creating something new as much as honoring where we came from. It was about remembering a story that existed long before me.

Abram's story works the same way. His blessing is tied not to forgetting his past, but to trusting the God who has been faithful through it. God's promise doesn't erase Abram's history; it carries it forward.

Lent asks us to do something similar. It invites us to remember—our roots, our faith stories, the people who shaped us, and the God who has been quietly present all along. Blessing flows not from pretending we started from nothing, but from knowing where we came from and who walked with us there.

There is another comfort in this passage: God never sends Abram somewhere God has not already been. "To the land that I will show you" means God is already there, waiting. God does not point into the unknown and step back. God goes ahead.

I think of the story of Jesus sending the disciples to get the young colt. They are told exactly what to say if questioned: "The Lord needs it." That excuse works because God is already present in that place and in the hearts of the people they meet. God is ahead of them.

This is why Lent is not just about giving things up; it is about trust. Trust that when God calls us to change, to let go, or to step forward, God will be on the journey and already be there when we arrive. God will never send us to a place God has not been.

For me, Lent means walking with that assurance. I do not have to earn my name or defend it. I do not walk alone into uncertain places. I am known. I am blessed. And the God who calls me forward is already waiting on the road ahead.

Devotional by: Buck Cueni-Smith

Day #11 of Lent | February 28

Scripture: Psalm 121

*I lift up my eyes to the hills—
from where will my help come?*

² *My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.*

³ *He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.*

⁴ *He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.*

⁵ *The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.*

⁶ *The sun shall not strike you by day
nor the moon by night.*

⁷ *The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.*

⁸ *The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.*

This is sometimes a misunderstood Psalm. Such misunderstanding happens when it's taken literally. Free will is not mentioned here. However, free will is given to all. Free will is understanding." [Phil 4:7]. Such Peace is needed daily. Particularly, when we face trials, endure pain, life's storms, provide comfort and strength to move through life courageously. God provides Spiritual security with in wavering Love. Nothing can separate us from His Love. The very thought of such Love can be overwhelming and awesome.

During our travels, we prayed for God's protection in our goings and comings. I cannot give any account of actual God moment protection. Although, I have experienced unexplainable moments when we couldn't explain, where circumstances were changed for the good of all. I can assure you, God's Peace and calm during challenging times through delays, unforeseen hiccups and bad attitudes was evident in my responses to God's protection. Sometimes God's protection manifests itself in our own ability to avoid reacting in a manner, less than Christian. God never changes. Likewise, we too must realize, 'we are always a follower of Jesus' teachings, 24/7. This Psalm offers Praise and confidence.

For me? Lent is a time of growth and renewal. This renewal began on the 1st Sunday of the year with the Wesleyan Prayer. Every time I partake of The Lord's Supper, I am invited to recall Jesus' mindset, heart, love and willing sacrifice. Journeying through Lent knowing we'll reach Good Friday and ultimately Easter. I am challenged to live Daily moments in contemplation and reflection. I search myself for each Lent season's aha moments for broadening my perspective, increasing my understanding and deepening my Faith. None of this newness is possible without a heart for God. Richard Rohr encourages "falling in love" with the personal, human face of Jesus to experience the Universal Christ, moving beyond rigid dogma into an intimate, I - Thou relationship.

Prayer: Gracious and Loving God. I am thankful for your presence in my life. Forgive me when I miss the mark. I am yours and thou are mine. Grant me your Peace and comfort as I journey and reflect through this Lenten season. Amen

Devotional by: John Cushon

Day #12 of Lent | March 1

Scripture: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then are we to say was gained by Abraham, our ancestor according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to one who works, wages are not reckoned as a gift but as something due. ⁵ But to one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, such faith is reckoned as righteousness.

¹³ For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

¹⁶ For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Welcome to today's Lenten devotion. I am Frank Reichart. Our scripture is from Romans 4:1-5, and 13-17. It is the Apostle Paul's letter to the church in Rome and to us as people of faith; that includes you and me.

In the first five verses, Paul cites Abraham of the Old Testament as an example of a man of faith. In Hebrews 11, which is a chapter on faith, it tells us in verse 8, that "Abraham had faith and obeyed God." In Romans 4:3, it says "God accepted Abraham because Abraham had faith in him (God)." Faith and obedience go together.

In verses 13-17, it tells us that God's promise to Abraham and his descendent's future is through faith, not just obedience to the law. God gifted Abraham for his faith with the promise of a new land.

I am reminded that in Ephesians 2:8-9, it says, "We are saved by faith...it is God's gift...not earned."

During this Lenten time, another word, besides faith, stands out for me. It is HOPE. That word has been popping up often in my reading. It is my hope and prayer for people of faith everywhere as we face various uncertainties in these perilous times throughout the world.

Just one example of this hope is for the people of Ukraine. My late wife's nephew is a missionary in Ukraine where war has been going on for four years. My hope and prayer is that the war will end soon for the people of Ukraine.

In Corinthians 13:13, it says, "there is faith, hope," but it also adds "LOVE." My hope and prayer in this Lenten time is that our faith, hope and love will guide us as we prepare and look for a joyous Day of Resurrection on EASTER. Amen.

Devotional by: Frank Reichart

Day #13 of Lent | March 2

Scripture: John 3:1-17

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." ³ Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be

born?" ⁵ Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit.⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.'⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?

¹¹ "Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

What does it mean to be Holy? That was the question posed in our Elementary Sunday School lesson a few weeks ago. Our curriculum writer, Meredith Anne Miller, suggested the definition of "set apart." What makes us as Christians set apart? It's not some magical secret society, but a desire to be more like Christ. As Christians, we are called to a life set apart, and that takes work.

It takes work because in order to be set apart, we must strive to be more like Christ in all we do. It's not a simple task, and there's no checklist on how to be "set apart." Instead, it takes intentionality and focus on living a life more like Jesus. When I think about this, the 90s and 2000s "WWJD?" (What Would Jesus Do?) Bracelets come to mind.

So friends, what would Jesus do? There's a new Gen Z brand that poses an answer to this question with HWLF. He Would Love First. Jesus always chooses grace and love. In a world that feels so filled with hate and division, choosing Jesus' way of grace and love feels truly set apart and Holy.

May we do the Holy and hard work of choosing the path of Jesus, the one filled with grace and love for neighbor.

Devotional by: Ms. Madison Stumbough

Day #14 of Lent | March 3

Scripture: Matthew 17:1-9

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became bright as light. ³ Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him. ⁴ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will set up three tents here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁵ While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!" ⁶ When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. ⁷ But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." ⁸ And when they raised their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone.

⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

If you look around our house, you would realize that I have a real affection for religious art. I tend to collect anything that catches my eye in a thrift shop, handicrafts we find as we travel, and all the sentimental things handed down by family. My husband being Catholic, has added saints and rosaries and antique crucifixes to my collection. When I look at all the images that now seem so familiar to me, I am reminded that my whole life has been spent knowing these stories. I have an understanding of why sometimes a crucifix stirs different feelings in me than an empty cross. After becoming a mother myself, images of Mary and her love and sacrifices have become more real. I know that the saints that have come before us have real lessons to teach us about how we should strive to live lives more and more like Christ.

When reading the passage about the Transfiguration, I was reminded of who Jesus chose to take with him up the mountain. He took his closest disciples Peter, James, and John. These men really knew Christ. By this point in his ministry, these three men had witnessed a lot of crazy, impossible things. They knew Jesus was the Messiah, and Jesus had directly told Peter he would, in fact, have to be sacrificed. These men, who witness Jesus glowing like the sun, seem to take seeing Elijah and Moses in stride. It's just Jesus doing his thing. Then, it's not just Jesus' thing, it's God's thing, and He is speaking right to them. I might know the stories, but I will never know the true fear of hearing God's voice in that moment. They believed Jesus was the Christ, but now God had told them directly, "Obey him!" Jesus knows just how to calm their

hearts back down, and after telling them not to tell anyone else all this has happened, his next words remind them that he will in fact have to die and be raised again. They've heard it before, but Jesus tells them again and again. Jesus still reminds them they will soon be without their most beloved friend.

My love of religious art started with my grandfather who was a Methodist minister. He loved Eugene Burnand's painting *The Disciples* (Peter and John Running to the Sepulchre on the Morning of the Resurrection), and after he retired he loved talking to us about it. It shows two of the friends that had witnessed Christ on the mountain rushing to the tomb. Jesus told them he would rise again, but their expressions are that of hopefully begging that it is true from John, and shocked and excited that it is true from Peter. I realize now that even though I know these stories and believe them, I too need to be reminded over and over that Jesus had to actually die and come back for me. These stories won't take me by surprise, but if I just listen, I might hear God's still small voice guiding me to something new.

Devotional by: Sarah Wunderlich

Day #15 of Lent | March 4

Scripture: Exodus 17:1-7

From the wilderness of Sin the whole congregation of the Israelites journeyed by stages, as the Lord commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried out to the Lord, "What shall I do for this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ The Lord said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile and go. ⁶ I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the Lord, saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

Whenever I hear the sound of rushing water, I'm instantly relaxed. Water doesn't just satiate my thirst - it completely soothes my soul. In reading Exodus 17:1-7, I'm

reminded of how much we learn about God through the imagery of water. By the time Moses and the Israelites reach Rephidim, I can't help but imagine how thirsty, exhausted, and desperate I would be, both physically and spiritually, if I were in their shoes. While I aspire to have the fervent, determined faith that Moses displays in this moment, I know I'm more likely on an average day to have the same kind of fears and doubts like the Israelites did.

I admire Moses for leading faithfully, turning to the Lord for help, following His instruction, and serving as an extension of God's love for others (even to those who weren't offering him love in return). However, I actually admire the Israelites in this moment too! Even after their liberation and being led away from Pharaoh, they still voice their discontent and uncertainty about the path God has placed them on. They acknowledge their suffering, they voice their desires, and they question God's presence. Through this, I learn just as much from their doubts as I do from Moses's faith. Through it all, still, God is with them. Still, God shepherds. Still, God provides.

Through the season of Lent, we see Jesus's suffering and torment leading up to His death and resurrection. We learn that the hope of the cross does not lie solely in light of the resurrection, because see that hope is also found in the dark moments that led us there. I find hope in knowing that as a result of Jesus's suffering, I am fully seen and fully understood in mine. God walks with me in my suffering - not as a distant observer, but as a present friend. When I think of God walking with me through seasons of pain, Lent reminds me that God can handle my fear, my frustration, and my doubt because He lived in those seasons too!

This passage affirms that God does not punish me when I'm scared or leave my side when I voice my uncertainty. He's here, by my side, as a constant source of radical love, holy peace, and spirited renewal. This is available to me every moment, even when I'm discouraged in despair, just like we see in Exodus 17:1-7. When the Israelites have nothing left to give and cannot surmount their worry to reach their faith, God is still with them, guiding them forward, transforming desperation into abundance. In the moments our hearts feel hardened by our hardships, may we remember the love, peace, and renewal God has ready to flow through us, and may we remember to be brave enough to turn towards God and His hope, both in lightness and in darkness.

Dear God,

Thank you for your constant presence. I'm grateful for the ways you rejoice with us when we stand in the light, and lament with us when we face darkness. Thank you for teaching us through the season of Lent that You understand our fears just as much as you understand our faith. As I walk through moments of joy and sorrow, light and dark, faith and doubt, I pray that I'd turn towards you God, knowing that you're present through it all. I pray I'd deeply believe that Your grace and goodness are

always within reach. I pray that in the moments I turn towards you like Moses did at the Rock, and in the moments I turn away like the Israelites, that my faith would ultimately strengthen through it all. I pray that through Your grace, I'll be transformed by the radical love, holy peace, and spirited renewal available to me every moment of every day. May the holy hope found in the season of Lent flow through me so that I may turn towards You more often than I turn away. Amen.

Devotional by: Courtney Jackson

Day #16 of Lent | March 5

Scripture: Psalm 95

*O come, let us sing to the Lord;
let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

² *Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;
let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

³ *For the Lord is a great God
and a great King above all gods.*

⁴ *In his hand are the depths of the earth;
the heights of the mountains are his also.*

⁵ *The sea is his, for he made it,
and the dry land, which his hands have formed.*

⁶ *O come, let us worship and bow down;
let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*

⁷ *For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture
and the sheep of his hand.*

O that today you would listen to his voice!

⁸ *Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah,
as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,*

⁹ *when your ancestors tested me
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.*

¹⁰ *For forty years I loathed that generation
and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray,
and they do not regard my ways."*

¹¹ *Therefore in my anger I swore,
"They shall not enter my rest."*

This is one of those Psalms that we could read every week in worship as far as I'm concerned. It's an invitation to enter into God's presence TOGETHER! That's my favorite part of worship, it's a collective, shared experience. Look at the beginning of these lines:

Come, let's sing out loud to the Lord

Let's raise a joyful shout...

Let's come before him with thanks

Let's shout songs of joy to him.

Come, let's worship and bow down

Let's kneel before the Lord our maker.

Worship is my collective pause. It's the time I set aside each week, away from the noise of this world. In this community on Sundays, I join with others to breathe together, sing together, thank God together and worship together. And on those days when I really don't feel like shouting or singing or praying, I know that there is someone in that room with me that will do it for me and with me. And on other days, I may be able to do it for them, I hope.

There's a song by Jon Baptiste. (If you don't know his music, you should check it out.) It's called "Maybe". This was written during a time of questioning and doubt. It's a song of faith and eventual transformation. In it he ponders...

"Maybe I'm just wasting my time... or maybe it's all by some strange design. Maybe I just need to unwind. Maybe I need to get a job. Maybe I'm just an actor. And maybe this is all just practice for something. Maybe, just maybe"

All the while the music is playing a very steady and grounding rhythm under his questions of maybes. He continues, "Maybe we all just need to take a collective pause" and then his questioning with endless maybes begins to match the music. The words turn into mere sounds and those sounds become one with the underscoring. They are in perfect sync.

So, maybe, just maybe, this is what we're called to in worship... We press pause on our lives, we come together, we question, we spin, we rant, we question again and then we listen to the music playing under us, where the spirit is moving, grounding us. The noise of our "maybes" transforms along with the voices around us, until we are one. One with each other, one with God.

Devotional by: Karen Eisele

Day #17 of Lent | March 6

Scripture: Romans 5:1-11

Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, ² through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God. ³ And not only that, but we also boast in our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, ⁴ and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, ⁵ and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

⁶ For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. ⁸ But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. ⁹ Much more surely, therefore, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from the wrath of God. ¹⁰ For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. ¹¹ But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5 contains the well-known verses about, depending on the version you read, boasting, rejoicing, or taking pride in suffering, because “suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope”. Maybe you can view it as the biblical version of “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger”. Or instead take meaning from the verses that follow, that the hope this produces can be relied upon because it’s God’s love for us, through Jesus Christ, who died for us, not because we are righteous but because we are not. It’s an understanding that, despite whatever hardship we face, we can always turn to God and rely upon this unearned love that we’ve been given to endure and grow through it.

Lent to me is a season to reflect specifically on the hardest parts leading up to Easter. To think about the sacrifice, or suffering, that puts everything into perspective. That is what Lent is about: creating a context to better understand the meaning of Easter, what it meant for Christ to die for us.

I like to think I would appreciate this just fine if nothing bad ever happened to me, ever. I would love that in fact. As with everyone, that’s not the case. And everything is relative; one person’s suffering is not the same as another’s. There are plenty of people whom I know do not feel like their suffering is producing much of anything. In

my job, I work primarily with patients dealing with vision issues after traumatic brain injuries. I see car accidents, falls, assaults, or work injuries that cause debilitating pain and completely uproot lives. When I see these patients, they don't usually seem to be appreciating the character building or hope that may come from it, understandably. It can be difficult to find hope while in the midst of your suffering.

But difficult times are often when we can take the most comfort in these words. As the verse says, there is suffering, then endurance, then character, then hope. There is a process to getting through hard times, and it may take time and effort to get to a place of appreciation, but it is always there for us in the end. It's the framing that reminds us there is love and salvation, no matter how hard or bad things are. Through Christ's own suffering, we have been given the ultimate gift, and that is something we can carry with us no matter what.

Devotional: Emily Kyle

Day #18 of Lent | March 7

Scripture: John 4:5-42

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

⁷ A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no

husband,' ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

²⁷ Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" ²⁸ Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, ²⁹ "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" ³⁰ They left the city and were on their way to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. ³⁶ The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' ³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

Lent originates from an old English word meaning springtime. Most of us view Lent as a time for spiritual renewal and growth. The scripture passage today has several stories that are well known to us. They are central to the ministry of Jesus and the early spread of the Good News. In fact, these events may even be related to why we are believers today.

The story of the Samaritan woman at the well, has several take aways that seem very relevant today. I think it offers opportunity for renewal and reflection.

First, I am struck that Jesus met the Samaritan woman where she was as she carried out her daily responsibilities. How often does God try to reach me in the middle of my everyday life? Am I looking for Him and ready to engage?

Second, Jesus spoke with her rather than walking away. How often do I find it easier to not engage with strangers as I focus on my daily responsibilities instead of relationship? Do I miss easy opportunities to share encouragement or share living water that quenches eternal thirst?

Third, Jesus does not judge the woman. How often am I caught up in judgement rather than mercy?

Finally, Jesus describes true worship in verses 23-24. God is seeking those who worship in spirit and truth. We are now living in the time that Jesus described. Am I worshipping with a pure heart? Am I living in such a way that I am abundant with living water and sustained by the food from God's Kingdom?

The over-arching theme of today's scripture reading confirms that God is our provider and sustainer. Lent is an excellent time to remember that He provides everything we need and we have an opportunity to share this Good News with others.

Devotional by: Tim Steele

Day # 19 of Lent | March 8

Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."² Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do, and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you."⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?"⁵ He said, "Peaceably. I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them

to the sacrifice.

⁶ When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely his anointed is now before the Lord." ⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him, for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him, for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him, for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

I miss the prayer vigil that used to take place during Lent in our church. This church prayed for each family by name, and for every concern on our hearts in 30 minute time slots from noon on Good Friday until sunrise on Easter Sunday morning. Sometimes there were no words to express the burdens we carried, so we'd simply sit in the Meditation room and read the Bible or quietly sit with an attitude of prayer.

Prayer is the core of our faith. Whatever we're going through, God will speak to our hearts. One year I was so heavily burdened that when it was my turn to pray, I entered the room and asked the couple that was ending their prayer time to pray for me. They didn't ask why, they just prayed. Although God listens and already knows what's on our hearts, it makes us feel so much better knowing that someone is petitioning God on our behalf. Scripture says, "the prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (NIV-James 5:16).

Samuel's mother petitioned God for a child before she conceived and God heard her, and as he grew, God used Samuel even as a young boy to deliver His devastating judgement to the High Priest, Eli regarding his corrupt sons. This tells me that the practice of listening for God's guidance was not a rare occasion. In today's scripture God told the prophet to tell King Saul that he was rejecting him as king of Israel because he had not followed God's orders, and Samuel feared that Saul would retaliate by killing him. Apparently, the king had not yet learned that "to obey God is better than sacrifice."

My first manager used to take me out to the lake—a place that I loved—before she

would give me the news that one of my contracts would not be renewed. I thought that if I performed well, drew a crowd, kept a good professional, kind and courteous character that I'd be successful, and they'd continue to hire me again. But that was not always the case. It stung but there was nothing I could do except trust in God. Imagine how I'd have felt if I really had done something wrong. I trusted that His purpose—whatever that was—would be fulfilled through me and my band members in each concert. Like David, I sang to “soothe the savage beast” in man in case my audience had been battling their own demons.

Through a steady diet of prayer and scripture, we can trust that God will be there for us. That's called “a relationship”. How is your prayer life?

Devotional by: Oleta Adams-Cushon

Day #20 of Lent | March 9

Scripture: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² *He makes me lie down in green pastures;*

he leads me beside still waters;

³ *he restores my soul.*

He leads me in right paths

for his name's sake.

⁴ *Even though I walk through the darkest valley,*

I fear no evil,

for you are with me;

your rod and your staff,

they comfort me.

⁵ *You prepare a table before me*

in the presence of my enemies;

you anoint my head with oil;

my cup overflows.

⁶ *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me*

all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord

my whole life long.

Psalm 23, a Psalm of David, has been showing up in my life when I needed it most for a decade now.

I have lived with anxiety for as long as I can remember. But for a long time before I got professional help, I really struggled with understanding my confusing feelings. Psalm 23 first showed itself to me when I was a senior in high school. That year, our music department went on a trip to London to perform in their New Year's Day Festival. The choir sang an arrangement of the Psalm of David. It was my favorite song of the entire festival. Back then, I would've told you that I was drawn to this song by its musicality and intricacies. However, I would've struggled to explain the wave of peace that washed over me while singing it. Yes, musically it was a beautiful song, but there was something within the lyrics that spoke to me like an old friend. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; You will comfort me." My anxiety casts a shadow on my life that, when I was introduced to this Psalm, felt lifted. This reminder of a constant, unconditional loving presence in my life, even before I started attending church and understanding my faith, was something that I didn't know I needed until I felt that peace while singing this song.

Most recently, after we found out we were expecting our son, Wesley, I was filled with this overwhelming anxiety about pregnancy and all of the looming changes to our existing life. One of the first gifts we received was a picture book of Psalm 23. The book itself is simple, with its words as nothing more than the Psalm and illustrations using colors to guide the reader through the message. But this was again a time when my anxiety felt overwhelming, and the Psalm of David was placed in front of me and reminded me that God is with me through it all, bringing comfort and guidance. And now I have the most beautiful book to read to Wesley and share with him the Psalm that brings me peace amidst darkness.

Devotional by: Claire Seifert

Day #21 of Lent | March 10

Scripture: Ephesians 5:8-14

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

visible is light. Therefore it says,

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

Around the fifteenth year of my teaching career, my principal asked me to participate in a pep rally to hype state testing. She explained that I would be part of a skit, playing a nervous student who was apprehensive about taking the test. My role required me to act hysterical and even pretend to cry.

Teaching in front of students had never been an issue for me, but performing in front of the entire school was a completely different matter. I’ve always considered myself an introvert, often worried about what others think of me. I hesitantly agreed to participate, mainly because I felt honored that she had asked.

As the day of the pep rally approached, my anxiety grew. My body tensed, my heart raced, my thoughts scattered, and sleep became difficult. I questioned whether I had made the right decision. On the day of the event, filled with fear, I wondered if I was about to make a complete fool of myself in front of students, parents, and colleagues. As I slowly walked from my seat to the front of the gym, I silently hoped for some kind of natural disaster to interrupt the moment.

The skit began, and somehow, I did it. I acted my part, even shedding a few convincing fake tears. When it ended, the audience cheered. As I walked back to my seat—still shaking—I felt an overwhelming sense of relief and accomplishment. I had faced something I never thought I could do, and I came out on the other side unharmed and unembarrassed.

When I later read Ephesians 5:8-14, that experience immediately came to mind. Before the skit, I was living in “darkness,” consumed by fear and self-doubt. Afterward, I stepped into the “light,” realizing I was capable of more than I had believed. I learned that it was okay to relax, trust myself, and even have fun. That moment helped me see that I didn’t have to live controlled by fear.

In Ephesians chapter 5, the apostle Paul calls believers to change. In the opening verses, he urges Christians to love as God loves and to leave behind immorality, impurity, and greed. In verses 8-14, Paul explains why this change matters: once we were darkness, but now we are light in the Lord. As children of the light, we are called to live lives marked by goodness, righteousness, and truth.

Those who believe in Jesus are different—not because of perfection, but because of transformation. Our lives should reflect the light of Christ in how we live, love, and

respond to the world around us. Stepping into the light often requires courage, obedience, and trust, but it also brings freedom and growth.

Prayer: Father God, we live in a world filled with distractions, pressures, and guilt that can easily lead us away from righteousness. We ask for Your continual guidance as we seek to live the life You created for us. Help us walk as children of the light, reflecting Your love in all that we do. Amen.

Devotional by: Jenn Price

Day #22 of Lent | March 11

Scripture: John 9:1-41

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. ² His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” ³ Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God’s works might be revealed in him.” ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” ⁶ When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man’s eyes, ⁷ saying to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam” (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. ⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, “Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?” ⁹ Some were saying, “It is he.” Others were saying, “No, but it is someone like him.” He kept saying, “I am he.” ¹⁰ But they kept asking him, “Then how were your eyes opened?” ¹¹ He answered, “The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, ‘Go to Siloam and wash.’ Then I went and washed and received my sight.” ¹² They said to him, “Where is he?” He said, “I do not know.”

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. ¹⁴ Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. ¹⁵ Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, “He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see.” ¹⁶ Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath.” Others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. ¹⁷ So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”

¹⁸ The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹ and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" ²⁰ His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹ but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." ²² His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. ²³ Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

²⁴ So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." ²⁵ He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." ²⁶ They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" ²⁷ He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" ²⁸ Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Spiritual Blindness

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. ³⁹ Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

This scripture presents the miracle of Jesus's healing of the blind man on the Sabbath. It is the well-known miracle where Jesus passes a beggar who was blind from birth. Jesus places some mud over the man's eyes, directs him to wash from a particular spring, and upon washing from the spring the man is able to see. The rub arises because the miracle is performed on the Sabbath. There is a lot to unpack in this story—more than can be discussed here.

The passage focuses not on the miracle, but rather on the interactions between the Pharisees and the community about the fact that the event occurred on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were the rule keepers of the Hebrew community; it was at times an ugly job, but it provided them with prestige and prominence. We know from other scripture passages that the Pharisees could be corrupt, and in this instance it is apparent that this group of Pharisees governed with fear: (1) the townspeople felt obligated to report the incident; (2) the parents of the blind man were afraid to answer; and (3) the blind man himself gave evasive answers to the Pharisees' questions.

It is no wonder the Pharisees showed so much interest in the event because it posed a direct threat to their fear-based control. After all, Jesus's miracle occurred through "light" and "love" in direct conflict with the Law of the Sabbath which the Pharisees had to enforce. Allowance of this instance could have the domino effect of eliminating their power and authority. The passage concludes with Jesus's admonition that the miracle should be viewed as a metaphor for the Pharisees' own blindness to God's will—a blindness caused by obedience to law without the light and love Jesus taught.

I am tempted to treat this story as a lesson for those who, like the Pharisees, are in positions of power and authority and not directed at me. But consider that each of us in our own ways are in positions to exercise authority. Perhaps it is as a parent or family member; perhaps it is as a supervisor in the workplace; perhaps it is simply because others respect us. Do we exercise that authority based simply on how we were taught, or do we seek a path through light and love? Do we rely on the rules just to preserve our authority? Society's rules are baked into our thoughts and decisions; I fear that too often we, like the Pharisees, rely on those societal rules instead of seeking God's will. Jesus taught that we should look beyond those rules to act through light and love.

Prayer: Lord, grant us sight to act in light and love.

Devotional by: Ed Peterson

Day #23 of Lent | March 12

Scripture: Ezekiel 37:1-14

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

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

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

Most of us remember the incredible upheaval of COVID and 2020, but by the spring of 2022, it seemed like our lives were returning to normal. That spring, the kids returned to in-person school, our family was adjusting to me working full-time as a teacher, and I was about to finish my master's degree (yes, during my first year of teaching—it was a lot). I was looking forward to finally taking a breath during the summer when we'd get to spend some time relaxing and being together.

That Easter Sunday, my husband told me he wanted a divorce.

It was like the air had been removed from my lungs; I felt completely disconnected

from my body. So when Ezekiel describes being in a valley of dry bones, I see myself there, except that I don't picture myself in Ezekiel's sandals. I was the one who was dead and scattered, without hope. Fortunately, God sent so many Ezekiels my way. My family rallied around me; friends gave me hugs, sent letters, issued invitations to dinner on nights the kids were at their dad's; my neighbors cut the grass and took my daughter to school when the bus didn't come. Each word, kindness, invitation or action was part of God's work to knit my bones and cover me again. The timing of my marital separation means that my Lenten reflections may always be about this story. But my Lenten seasons are no longer focused on the pain or loss, but remembering the great army of prophets who reminded me that God's work was not done. It's likely that all of us will experience that valley at some point in our lives—it may be a personal loss like mine, or national divisions that seem insurmountable. As I write this in 2026, I am feeling echoes of that dry season, but instead of losing myself to hopelessness, I see so many Ezekiels. Ezekiels are showing up to bring food, do laundry, demand justice—reminding us all that this story is not over. This Lent, I am committed to listening for and spreading Ezekiel's message of hope and new life as God repeats his resurrection story.

Devotional by: Sarah Hill

Day #24 of Lent | March 13

Scripture: Psalm 130

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.

² *Lord, hear my voice!*

Let your ears be attentive

to the voice of my supplications!

³ *If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,*

Lord, who could stand?

⁴ *But there is forgiveness with you,*

so that you may be revered.

⁵ *I wait for the Lord; my soul waits,*

and in his word I hope;

⁶ *my soul waits for the Lord*

more than those who watch for the morning,

more than those who watch for the morning.

⁷ *O Israel, hope in the Lord!*

*For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is great power to redeem.*

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

Waiting is hard, no matter how old you are. Waiting for Christmas, or the last day of school (especially as a child) or the first day of school (especially as a parent). But the hardest type of waiting is when things aren't going well.

We always knew we wanted to be parents, but it wasn't easy for us. We waited for a positive result and then were shattered when we learned our baby had a life-threatening birth defect. We waited for every medical test, scan and appointment to discuss news with the doctors. Then we waited for delivery day. Then we waited while he was on life support, had multiple surgeries. We waited until his second week of life when we could finally hold our baby. We waited until the breathing tube was removed and we heard his hoarse little voice cry, just shy of his one-month birthday.

Whatever trials and tribulations one goes through, waiting can be such a daunting process. However, it can also provide moments to pause and reflect, allowing for introspection. Are we nervous from the anticipation or waiting for what we trust to be the right path for us?

Like the watchman in Psalm 130, parents do not question that morning will come, they just don't know when. That is the posture of Lent. When you sit in hospital rooms, wait on test results, or watch your child struggle to breath on his own - you are in the night shift like the watchman. You cannot make the sun rise. But morning has never failed to come. Faith is not about outcomes. It is about confidence in God's will. Even when the future is unclear, even when the path looks different than we prayed for, the sunrise of God's steadfast love is certain.

Just as the sun will rise, God is there for you. You can't rush the sunrise, but you know it's coming. Are you waiting with anxiety or with expectation?

Devotional by: Barb and Andrew Carr

Day #25 of Lent | March 14

Scripture: Romans 8:6-11

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷

For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law—indeed, it cannot,⁸ and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ But you are not in the flesh; you are in the Spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you.

“What can we do for you,” asked my cousin Sheryl to my cousin Deanna, who was fighting her second bout with breast cancer.

“I won’t make the next family reunion. Do you think our cousins would do a weekly zoom chat?” As a Physician’s Assistant, Deanna knew exactly what it meant that her cancer had spread all over her body.

We started the cousin’s zoom chat November 11, 2025. We caught up with family news. We talked about our grandmother’s kitchen, where so many family dinners occurred. Deanna talked about her doctor appointments.

Between 6 and 8 of us joined the cousin’s chat each Tuesday. Sheryl, a retired Lutheran pastor from Seattle, never missed a week. David, a Brethren pastor from Virginia, used his lunch hour each week to join us. Sheryl and Deanna planned a visit at Sheryl’s Hawaii condo. “If I already feel bad, I might as well feel bad on the beach, looking at the ocean,” Deanna explained.

In January, Deanna started talking about her death plans. She wanted us to hear what she needed to talk about. We talked about faith, and how her faith was not shaken. Deanna’s plane ticket to Hawaii was never used, she died January 27, 2026, surrounded by family and by God.

Dear God,

Thank you for the peace and calm at the end of our lives when we follow you. The Lent season teaches us just as Jesus died for us and was reborn, so we can trust that death is not the end for us.

Devotional by: Tammy Truex

Day #26 of Lent | March 15

Scripture: John 11:1-45

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill.³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill."⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus,⁶ after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?"⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world."¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them."¹¹ After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him."¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right."¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him."¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

Jesus the Resurrection and the Life

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away,¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother.²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home.²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day."²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Jesus Weeps

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you."²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw

Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there.³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."³³ When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved.³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see."³⁵ Jesus began to weep.³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!"³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus Raises Lazarus to Life

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it.³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days."⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me.⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!"⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

The Plot to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.

Snowdrops: Each year in the heart of winter, our family looks forward to discovering snowdrops blooming in our backyard! For those of you unfamiliar with snowdrops, they are perennials that pop up overnight and bloom at the first hint of warm weather. In our yard this usually happens during the first week or two of February when snow is still on the ground! All in our household want to be the first to notice the white blossoms and to rush out and pick a bouquet of the tiny flowers! After the dead of fall and winter, it is delightful to see the snowdrops emerge as a sign of new life and resurrection!

Antiques: Ric and I love antique furniture. We thoroughly enjoy the process of restoration, especially if the piece is broken or covered in darkened, cracked varnish. We love using chemical strippers to remove the layers of age to uncover the beautiful wood patina below, revitalizing the piece and giving it a new life. As many of our items came from family or other loved ones, we especially treasure the stories that seem to give each piece of furniture a soul. We love the process of resurrecting something old and watching it transform and become new again.

My dad: I was honored to be with my dad as he passed six years ago. My dad was a man who lived his faith, voraciously studied scripture, and taught Bible studies. Unfortunately, after suffering a fall, dad lay nearly paralyzed in his bed for days, unable to move, speak, or even open his eyes. Our family surrounded dad closely because we had been alerted to his imminent passing. Ever the teacher, just moments before he died, dad suddenly started to wiggle his eyebrows excitedly, as if to communicate one final lesson: the resurrection and promise of eternal life are truly real, and he was seeing the glory of it!

The Resurrection: John 11:25 says that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. The word “resurrection” has two definitions:

1. the action or fact of restoring a dead person to life, or of being restored to life
2. the revitalization or revival of something

Both of these definitions apply to us as Christians. Because of Christ’s resurrection, God invites us to a life of faith leading us toward heaven, stripping us of our former selves, and revealing our surprising, new, unexpected, and beautiful character as he fulfills his promises to us of resurrection and eternal life.

Look for ways this Lenten season that God is bringing resurrection to your life, either by restoration or by revitalization or both! Give thanks for God’s resurrecting power in your life and in our world!

Devotional by: Jessica Brockmeier

Day #27 of Lent | March 16

Scripture: Genesis 9:8-17

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”¹² God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant

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

Reading the story of Noah and the Ark as an adult, I was shocked to learn that although it rained for 40 days and 40 nights the water didn't magically recede after that 40th night. As a kid, I had heard this story many times and had visualized the water disappearing quickly. It did not, “The underground springs were shut off, the windows of Heaven closed and the rain quit. Inch by inch the water lowered. After 150 days the worst was over” (Genesis 8: 2-3). Almost 200 days they spent going through life's storm.

At the end God provides a covenant that he will never destroy the earth like this again. He didn't promise no more storms or an easy life after this very hard storm. He promised no more storms like this and a reminder in the form of a rainbow, his covenant. God knew more storms would come, and he would be there with them when those storms happened.

Rainbows are special to me, they remind me of a little girl who went through a storm of her own. Just shy of her first birthday, finding out she had terminal cancer and fighting hard to make it 7 more months, a little over 200 days. Her name is Marloe Rain, and her mom used rainbows as a symbol for her throughout her entire cancer journey.

I think about the parallels between Noah and Marloe. They both experienced something scary, unknown, and unimaginable. They spent days, weeks, months, not knowing how it would all end. Their stories ended a bit differently, one with Noah arriving on dry land and the second with Marloe walking into the arms of Jesus. Yet, at the end of both there was a rainbow, a reminder that God is there through the storm.

As we face our own storms in life, let us remember God's covenant, he will be with us through those storms. Rainbows can only form if there is rain, as a beautiful reminder that beauty can come from a storm. For Marloe's storm, beauty came in the form of a community rallying together. People who never knew one another before were now working together to support her family and help them make as many memories in those final 7 months. The beauty of the storm was when that community raised enough money for Marloe to put her tiny toes in the ocean a few weeks before

passing.

The storms may not end the way we want; we may feel like there are more storms than we can handle. Yet God will always be there. The next time you see a rainbow, I hope it serves as a reminder that God is there, creating beauty in the storm.

Devotional by: Bekah Durar

Day #28 of Lent | March 17

Scripture: Psalm 25:1-10

To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

² *O my God, in you I trust;*

do not let me be put to shame;

do not let my enemies exult over me.

³ *Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;*

let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ *Make me to know your ways, O Lord;*

teach me your paths.

⁵ *Lead me in your truth and teach me,*

for you are the God of my salvation;

for you I wait all day long.

⁶ *Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,*

for they have been from of old.

⁷ *Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;*

according to your steadfast love remember me,

for the sake of your goodness, O Lord!

⁸ *Good and upright is the Lord;*

therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ *He leads the humble in what is right*

and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ *All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,*

for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

In the reading today the psalmist does not merely seek rescue from trouble; but

desires instruction. This reflects spiritual maturity. Rather than asking only for circumstances to change, the psalmist asks to be shaped and directed.

This passage takes me back to our family vacation last summer. We spent two weeks hiking the Camino de Santiago in Spain. The Camino is a pilgrimage that Christians (and non-Christians) have been making for centuries to honor Saint James. There are many paths across Spain that all meet in the city of Santiago at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela. Our entire family did the hike together. We carried our clothes and supplies in backpacks on our backs and hiked 8-12 miles per day. We spent our nights in Airbnb's in small towns along the path. We hiked over 100 miles and never lost our way on the path. Every time there was a turn or a divide in the path, there was a granite marker with a yellow arrow showing the way. These markers also had the shell icon of the Camino and a kilometer marker showing how much further you had to go.

Each morning, Jessica had a Bible verse for us to read with a question for us to contemplate during the day's hike. At the end of the day as we gathered for the evening meal, our family would reflect on the morning's verse and question that we had thought about during the day. We very much enjoyed these conversations and insights shared with each other. I found that the daily verse and question helped me to center my thoughts and to focus on God's direction for me throughout the day.

Today, I have a small granite souvenir of a Camino trail marker in my office to remind me of my trip. When looking for direction and instruction from God, I remember back to my time hiking the Camino and spending long parts of my day focusing on God, His creations, and His message. I then focus on how God might shape and direct my thoughts and my actions rather than asking for my circumstances to change.

Devotional by: Ric Brockmeier

Day #29 of Lent | March 18

Scripture: 1 Peter 3:18-22

For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison,²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight lives, were saved through water.²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body

but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

While doing a little research on this verse, I stumbled upon this quote, “1Peter 3:18-22 is among the most challenging passages in the Bible to interpret.” I guess now I know how our daughter feels reading Shakespeare in English class!

What hits me first is this passage: “He was put to death in the body but made alive in the Spirit. After being made alive, he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits-.” The only reason he was able to make that proclamation, was because he was put to death. He learned things that he never would have had he not gone through that ordeal. To put it a simpler way... He changed perspectives.

Perspective is the lens through which we view our world. For our younger crowd, it's the Snap Chat filter of your life! This is something that I've recently spent a lot of time and effort on. These past few (maybe more than a few) years have been trying for all of us. And sometimes, life seems harder than it should be! But you can't control the world around you. You can't control that driver speeding past you on I-35 while looking at their phone. You can't control whether your favorite team wins or loses. (Although, those of you who follow me on social media know how “helpful” my Chiefs onesie has been these past few seasons. Sorry about this year...) You can't control what someone posts online. You can't control the job market. You can't control health care. You can't control how people act. The list could go on and on. But what can you control? How you respond. And what I've found is that changing your perspective goes a long way.

We have a saying in our house, “Good Things Happen To Me Unexpectedly Every Day.” (Or GTHTMUED for short. Really rolls off the tongue doesn't it?!) My wife has said this for years, and I used to just roll my eyes every time. “Yes, good things, babe.....totally.” And then I would go about my day, getting so frustrated at all the things I KNEW should be different, but I had no control to change. You want to talk about rough mental health?? There's a guaranteed way to make sure you're miserable all the time.

Eventually, I started listening to my wife. (Seriously, people, the quicker you do this, the happier you'll be!) And I started to say GTHTMUED once a day. And I'll be honest, it was a real “fake it til ya make it” situation at first. But the more I said it, the more I found myself finding the good in almost any situation, big or small. And that change in perspectives has given me a sweet “filter” to view my life through.

During this season of Lent, I invite you to try it. You'll be surprised how something as

simple as Perspective can change your life. GTHTMUED

Devotional by: Mike Ott

Day #30 of Lent | March 19

Scripture: Mark 1:9-15

The Baptism of Jesus

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. ¹¹ And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

The Testing of Jesus

¹² And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him.

The Beginning of the Galilean Ministry

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

To me, the season of Lent is a little more than just being the sacrifice of something you like. It's about recognizing that Jesus sacrificed and devoted his whole life to us, and pushed through 40 days of an empty stomach and a dry throat. It's like asking for a small card as a thanks for a big birthday present, except he's not asking for the thanks, he's not asking for anything; but out of respect, we're giving up something to show him that we care, and that we recognize what he did for all of us. All we have to do to show him that we care and love him is give up something small for a short time as a thanks for everything he ever did for us.

Devotional by: Thompson Beahm

Day #31 of Lent | March 20

Scripture: Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless.”² And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous.”³ Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him,⁴ “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations.⁵ No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations.⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.⁷ I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.

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

These passages in Genesis suggest to me that God is more interested in who we are becoming than in who we are at any one moment. God’s covenant with Abram and Sarai wasn’t a reward for perfection, or for reaching some spiritual finish line (at the young age of 99 years old!) God initiates a covenant and gives Sara and Abraham new names as a signal that their transformation is ongoing.

During Lent, this can be a helpful reminder that faith isn’t about having everything figured out, but about staying open to growth and change.

A lot of us tend to spend time measuring ourselves by where we are right now—our mistakes, our doubts, or the things we haven’t done yet. In this passage, God doesn’t wait for Abram and Sarai to improve before making a promise. God names them for who they will grow into. Lent invites us to loosen our grip on the need to be “perfect” and instead trust that God is still at work in us.

And, God’s covenant reaches beyond Abraham and Sarah to future generations they’ll never meet. For the church today, that can shift how we think about faithfulness. What we do now—how we pray, how we treat others, how we show up—can help shape something bigger than ourselves. Even small, imperfect steps can matter.

At its core, this passage encourages patience. Becoming takes time, and it’s rarely neat or predictable. Lent gives us space to sit with that reality, to be honest about

where we are, and to trust that God isn't finished with us yet. We're invited to keep walking forward, even when the change feels slow, believing that growth is happening along the way.

Devotional by: Lane Allison

Day #32 of Lent | March 21

Scripture: Psalm 22:23-31

*You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!*

²⁴ *For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me
but heard when I cried to him.*

²⁵ *From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who fear him.*

²⁶ *The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord.
May your hearts live forever!*

²⁷ *All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.*

²⁸ *For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.*

²⁹ *To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.*

³⁰ *Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord*

³¹ *and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.*

This passage reminds me of the phrase, “if it’s not good, it’s not done.” We suffer in this world, but when we seek God and offer praise, we are comforted by his love. Heavenly Father, remind us that you do not wish suffering on us, but work to turn the face of all those who suffer toward you. We praise you and rejoice in the joy of being close to you.

Devotional by: Angie Hendershot

Day #33 of Lent | March 22

Scripture: Romans 4:13-25

God’s Promise Realized through Faith

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression.

¹⁶ For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸ Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said, “So shall your descendants be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. ²⁰ No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² Therefore “it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” ²³ Now the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Have you ever had an experience that forced you to rely on your faith and not your own actions? In our culture today, there has been a growing sentiment that we are all called to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and work ourselves out of poor

situations. And while the virtue of hard work is certainly something we should all strive for, our scripture reading today reframes our understanding of the tension between the law and faith. For the last 14 weeks, I have been teaching a course on “Disciple 1,” a 24-week Bible study that takes its participants through the entirety of the Bible while exploring different themes we find in God’s narrative history. The first 6 weeks or so had a lot to do with “the Law,” that being the law passed down from God to Moses during the time of the Exodus. The Law was not simply rules or principalities that dictated law and order, but rather the Law was deeply ingrained into the cultural and religious components of life itself. For the ancient Israelites, the Law was their lifeline to religious expression and God. Abraham plays into this story because it was he who created the foundation of obedience to God, and in return, he was promised to be the father of “a great nation.” The identity of the Israelites was traced back to Abraham and his covenant with God, and for the next millennia, God’s chosen people upheld the Law accordingly.

Abraham’s unwavering faith in God’s covenant gave him the blessings of a great nation, so today, when we read about a place that does not know the Law, Paul tells us we should rely on our faith. Jesus came as the embodiment of the Law, and through his life and teachings, he made a new covenant so others may come to know Christ. Jesus paid the price with his life, but through the resurrection, we have received the gift of faith in the One who comes in the name of the Lord. There are times in our lives when the “law” around us falls short. The cultural practices and our religious expression may prove unable to liberate us from situations or circumstances. This isn’t to say we cannot overcome the challenges, but rather, we are called to fortify ourselves with our faith. Our faith is the embodiment of the Law we came to know as Jesus, and when we live out our faith in accordance with scripture, we begin to serve as a living testimony of God’s new covenant, a faith gifted to broken people for the salvation of the world. When you find yourself unable to overcome a situation by your own actions alone, call upon God to strengthen your faith. There will be opportunities to share your faith through your words and actions; grab them by the horns. Embrace the discomfort of expressing your faith more clearly, and witness how God shows up in the most unlikely of places.

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #34 of Lent | March 23

Scripture: Mark 8:31-38

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

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples and said to them, "If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. ³⁶ For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷ Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Richard Rohr interprets this passage as a call to move beyond ego-driven, "civil religion" toward a transformative, "liminal" spirituality based on "necessary suffering" and losing one's false self to find true life. He emphasizes that Peter's rebuke represents the human tendency to control outcomes, which Jesus rejects as a barrier to divine, transformative love.

When Peter rebukes Jesus for predicting his suffering, Rohr interprets Jesus' response ("Get behind me, Satan") as a dismissal of the human desire to avoid pain and control life's outcomes.

To mature spiritually, we must embrace suffering rather than avoid it. This is "liminal space, "where true transformation occurs. We must die to the "false self" or ego, allowing for a deeper, authentic existence in the "Universal Christ". True discipleship involves letting go of the need for comfort and success to embrace the path of service, vulnerability, and surrender. Mere comfortable, superficial religion blocks the journey into the "Mystery, into the Paradox, into ecstasy, into Universal Compassion" that Jesus is calling for in this passage.

Peter "Satan" was no small thing. Remember, the disciples are also hearing this perplexed. We're not blindsided by this news. Living today, on this side of the cross, we are all assured. God's loving Peace is always available for us to receive in our own suffering(s).

I didn't grow up participating in Lent. One of the most rememberable times is when I

was in New York City. We saw people walking down the street with dirty foreheads. It wasn't until we approached St. Patrick's Cathedral that we noticed exiting parishioners with the ashes on their forehead. What an aha' moment! We were traveling so extensively in our early days at Old Mission. Yes, we gladly blocked out Holy Week into Easter on our manager's calendar. But we hadn't yet experienced the 40 days of Lent.

I'm so thankful for The United Methodist Church and its focus on observing Jesus' journey during these 40 days. On Good Friday, I recall walking into our sanctuary with the cross completely covered in a black shroud. Wow! I stood and just looked at it, pondering and imagining, 'what if?' That is so impactful even now, as I recall it. Can you imagine a world without Christ? I have no desire to live in a Compassion-less, Grace-less world.

As a Caring Connections Minister I have experienced people in their final stages of life. Carolyn Tebow welcomed us into her rehab facility during her pre-transitioning phase. We entered her room with slightly sad curious faces, not knowing what condition she might be in. She was frail and asleep when we entered. We were about to exit without waking her, when suddenly Carolyn woke up, looked at us, immediately gauged our mindset, smiled and greeted us warmly. She told us, "Don't you worry about me." We chatted for a brief moment. Next, she Blessed us and gave us a few last nuggets of life wisdom. She led us in prayer and we left feeling even more confident going forth, serving God without her. Carolyn radiated God's Peace throughout her life, even in impending death. Her faith in her resurrection was never questioned and she would share her resurrection faith (lovingly) with anyone.

Lenten season is a wonderful opportunity to empty ourselves, reflect, collect and be rejuvenated. We (too) can first, embrace God's presence in our own suffering. Then, we can go into the world, equipped to share His love with others, daily.

Christ's presence helps us endure and remain faithful. Ordinary sufferings can be endured in (as John Wesley puts it) an 'altogether Christian' manner. Wesley final words were, "The best of all is, God is with us."

Prayer: Gracious and Loving God, I am thankful for your presence in my life. I'm thankful for your faithful servants who have helped and continue to guide me along this life's journey. Give me a compassionate heart, open and willing to be filled with Your Peace, even in my suffering(s). Remind me, to keep my ego in its proper place, not allowing or desiring control. Fill my emptiness with Your Loving Spirit of compassion. Let me be used for You with radical Love every day, in every way. In Jesus Name, I pray. Amen.

Devotional by: John Cushon

Day #35 of Lent | March 24

Scripture: Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words,

² *"I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; ³ you shall have no other gods before me.*

⁴ *"You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me ⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.*

⁷ *"You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.*

⁸ *"Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work. ¹⁰ But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it.*

¹² *"Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.*

¹³ *"You shall not murder.*

¹⁴ *"You shall not commit adultery.*

¹⁵ *"You shall not steal.*

¹⁶ *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

¹⁷ *"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."*

When I was little and sitting in church, I remember hearing the Ten Commandments and memorizing them for my Sunday school points and thinking "Wow, God has a lot of RULES!" and if I want to receive all of the good things in life I have to make sure I

follow the RULES. As I grew in life and in faith, I grew to understand that the rules matter a lot less and that the relationship with God matters a lot more and now having a Pastor for a wife I now know that my understanding of this transactional relationship is called Retribution Theology. =) God has since the beginning of time been giving us ways to be in relationship with Him. So many of these commandments seem disproportionately easy. Thou Shall not Murder. Thou shall not Steal. Thou Shall not commit adultery. Honor your father and mother. Thou shall have no other gods. I think the most important part to having the RELATIONSHIP with God is that we take the time to stop. Pause. Pray. Honor the Sabbath and keep it holy even in the midst of all of the insanity that the world brings. The irony in this for me is that the thing that occasionally prevents a Sabbath is having another full time job and also working for the church. It means I'm working seven days a week. We all have something similar that could prevent our time in prayer. We have to be creative and find creative ways and times to have the pause to connect with God and to be in His presence. Small moments in the car in worship or in prayer. A rest in silence at the end of a class or work. The moment of peace when the kids fall asleep. My confirmation verse was "be Joyful always, Pray Continually, and give thanks in ALL circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus". Work to find the JOY and PEACE and LOVE of God in everything you do everyday. Take the time to honor the Sabbath. To pray and to pause and to be in HIS presence.

Devotional by: Brett Eichman

Day #36 of Lent | March 25

Scripture: Psalm 19

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

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

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

⁴ *yet their voice goes out through all the earth
and their words to the end of the world.*

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

There is a quote that says, "Preach the Gospel at all times, and when necessary, use words." Nature seems to declare God's glory in all that He has created. Think of the many times that God's creation has rendered you speechless. The vastness of the universe when gazing at millions of stars, or the Aurora Borealis seem to declare, "How Great Thou Art". Seeing such Wonders makes you want to simply say, "Amen!" The Grand Canyon made me weep and I felt so small and so in awe of God's creation. The glaciers and majestic mountains all celebrate God's order. The Cedar waxwings, Yellow-bellied Woodpeckers, Cardinals and Orioles that visit year after year outside

my windows—not to mention, the bald eagles that I’ve enjoyed watching while on vacation— their very presence proclaims God’s order and goodness.

Human beings are pretty amazing creatures, too, but human beings must be carefully taught how to manage their God-given intellect, ego and free-will in order to have a civilized existence. Many have found that there is wisdom in following God’s order, and we learn what that is by reading scripture.

We turned one of the four bedrooms in our home into a prayer room when we first got married, and every morning except Sundays, we’d go upstairs and pray and then study for thirty minutes before breakfast. Those minutes turned into hours because we were thirsting for God’s living water. Over the years when life got so busy as we traveled from place to place for business, we could feel a spiritual dehydration when we stayed away from the Word too long. We decided to come home and join groups that held in-depth studies on how we could be the people God wants us to be. Again, we’d get filled and fired up. The Psalmist said of these scriptures, that they are more desired than gold, and are sweeter than honey from the honeycombs.

The disservice that technology and social media has done is to make so many believe that it is necessary to say everything (and anything) that’s on one’s mind. How much better it would be if we talked less and let our actions speak for us (hopefully good ones). Most mature Christians have heard enough sermons to last a lifetime, (present pastors excluded, of course) but some have not yet mastered the art of preaching silently. Before we speak, perhaps we too should pray: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.”

Devotional by: Oleta Adams-Cushon

Day #37 of Lent | March 26

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.¹⁹ For it is written,

*“I will destroy the wisdom of the wise,
and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”*

²⁰ *Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scholar? Where is the debater of this*

age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of the proclamation, to save those who believe. ²² For Jews ask for signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³ but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵ For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

When Brian and I were first married my beautiful, wonderful mother in law, Clarris, who had a deep faith, realizing that I had not had church in my life as I was growing up, encouraged me to take time to read the bible and told me not to try to digest too much at one time but just take one or two passages at a time and prayerfully reflect on them. She told me at the time, and I have found it to be true, that over the years Bible passages that I have read in the past sometimes speak to me differently when I read them today. As I grow older and life experiences change, I find a need to go back to many of the passages that I have always found comforting. Years back when I took all the Disciple bible study courses that were offered here at Old Mission and led a few of them, I found deeper meaning and reflection in conversations with the others who took the study. A mix of ages and knowledge was a definite asset. Christians are reminded that the purpose of Lent is a time to more intentionally reflect on our life, repent of our sins, take time to read our bible, to spend time in prayer, and to perhaps give up something that has been a hindrance to our faith and/or to reach out more to others. I am grateful for the wonderful people through the years: my beloved mother-in-law especially, many church members over the years not only at Old Mission but also Washington Ave. Methodist, Trinity UM in KCK, that have helped me grow in my faith. Never fully grown, I need to keep growing!

Devotional by: Linda Sisney

Day #38 of Lent | March 27

Scripture: John 2:13-22

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, with the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples

remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body.²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

How guilty were those who turned the Lord's House into a marketplace? To be honest, growing up, I thought they were bad people! After all, Jesus' reaction after arriving at the market was to rebuke them, scold them, tell them how they were corrupting the Temple, and eventually overturning their tables and whipping them out of the Temple courtyard. As a child, it's easy to read these words and think, "Well, surely they must have been evil people for Jesus to react that way, right?" Now that I'm older and have experienced more this world has to offer, I find myself grieving for those Jesus drove out. I'm sure some of them in the Temple courtyard were doing ill-will on others, taking advantage of the Law for their own personal gain. But I can't help but think some, if not most of them, didn't think they were harming others. They were simply "doing their job."

I think I feel empathy toward those who were driven out because they are all too relatable in my everyday life. Just your ordinary people conducting their day-to-day tasks and responsibilities. And yet, they lacked the critical eye to see how they have harmed sacred ground. The marketplace in the Temple courtyard placed barriers between people and God. Once, the Temple was filled with prayer, and now it had transformed into something akin to a busy, consumeristic market. As I reflect on our Lenten journey, I wonder when I have unintentionally placed barriers in life instead of preparing the way for others to enter the Lord's house. I've never intentionally meant to cause harm, and yet I imagine there have been moments in my life where I looked more like the marketplace than a house of prayer. I believe this story is a good reminder for us this Lent to remain self-aware of our actions and our words. As you live out our days, we may think we freely welcome others into the Lord's house through our actions and words; however, as we read in scripture, our lack of critical awareness may blind us from the unintentional harm we cause. John concludes this passage in saying Jesus didn't need anyone to testify about him, "for he himself knew what was in everyone." Jesus knows the goodness inside every one of us, and he longs for us to enter the Temple as a house of prayer. Let us be mindful of our thoughts and deeds, and let them be a testimony to our Savior, for he will build up this Temple in three days. Amen.

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #39 of Lent | March 28

Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9

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

After reading this passage, I can't be the only one to think, "Why would God send poisonous snakes on the Israelites?" It says the people began to speak out against God and Moses while they were wandering in the wilderness. The snakes came, people died, and after repenting, God provided the solution to the problem. If you recall one of Pastor Hyemi's sermons a little while back, she was discussing the Book of Genesis, and she spoke about how these early texts, like Numbers, aren't necessarily narrative books. That being said, they may not be an account-for-account retelling of the journey through the wilderness. However, Pastor Hyemi shared a different perspective that Genesis is a theological text, meaning the central purpose of the book is not a step-by-step retelling, but rather its purpose is to share the nature of God. As I read this passage from Numbers, I read a telling of the harm we experience when we push ourselves away from God. When the Israelites spoke out against God and didn't trust in God's protective presence, they experienced harm. Now, today, we hopefully won't come across any poisonous snakes in our daily lives, but the fact remains the same. While we may not directly speak out against God, we may do so in our actions. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we are called to act out of faith to others as an example. When we are not attuned with the presence of the Holy Spirit, we find ourselves straying further from the path.

However, like the bronze serpent, God provides the solution for our suffering. Through the resurrection, we have received the gift of God's prevenient grace. All that is required of us is to accept that grace into our lives. Once we have accepted God's grace, we are called to nurture our spirit and seek to grow closer to God in love. We worship to fill our cup, we pray for peace and compassion, and we seek God's wisdom in scripture. When you're wandering in the wilderness, and you feel as if

God's presence is not with you, don't speak out against God. Instead, seek the solutions God has provided through fasting, prayer, and scripture.

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #40 of Lent | March 29

Scripture: Mark 11:1-11

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

"Hosanna!

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

¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!

Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

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

I have a vivid memory of being eight years old, laying down palms during children's study on a Sunday morning in spring, preparing to hear the story of Jesus arriving in Jerusalem. Back then, picturing a grown Jesus riding on a donkey always felt a little silly to me. I imagined this small, steady creature just moseying along, carrying someone far too important for its size. As an adult, that image hits different. Jesus is incredibly intentional. He chose that donkey, not a flashy stallion or any creature that would make Him look powerful or impressive. He let himself be carried into Jerusalem at the pace of humility. He knew what lay beyond the gates, He knew the crowd before him wanted a king and still, he moves forward in the modest way He knows is true to himself.

I see how often I try to hurry through the uncomfortable parts of my life, wanting a quick resolution, hurried clarity or an easy escape. I see how easily I slip into wanting God to show up in big, dramatic ways that I assume will make everything just a little bit easier. But Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem reminds me that God's way is often slower, quieter and more grounded than my expectations. Lent, for me, is the season that invites me to slow down at the pace of the donkey. To stop rushing through what makes me uncomfortable and choose my actions based off what others feel they need from me. I aim to choose humility over hurry, to let God lead me gently, steadily, even when the path before me feels big and scary.

This year, Lent also invites me to intentionally notice the people around me. When I rush, I miss details that might seem small but could help me to understand others in a big way. Becoming more intentional with how I assess the world around me will help me to appreciate the small signs of weariness in someone's eyes, the quiet heaviness in a friend's voice, the unspoken needs of the people I love. Even during His own path toward suffering, Jesus moved with a deep awareness of others. He saw the people, all of their hopes, their misunderstanding, and their pain. He moved through Jerusalem without letting the noise distract Him from the hearts of the people who created it.

Where is Jesus inviting me to slow down, notice more, be present no matter how it makes me feel? As I walk through the season of Lent, I hope He helps me to slow down and have faith that even when the road is difficult, I am safe with Him.

Devotional by: Amy Foulk

Day #41 of Lent | March 30

Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

From Death to Life

2 You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, doing the will of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else, ⁴ but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the

ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast.¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

I absolutely love this passage from Ephesians because it shows us a vivid description of God's amazing grace. We first read about our lives before we come to know the grace of God. "We were dead through the trespasses and sins which you once walked, following the course of this world." Before we come to know the grace and mercy of God, the burden of our sins can make us feel as if we are end. Caught in a liminal space. When we come to know the grace of God, we are given the gift of God's sanctifying grace. It's a gift that is freely given to all who wish to know the goodness of God. Right now, today, we are living out this passage of Ephesians. Verse 7 tells us, "so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." We are active participants in this story. Given the time period when Paul wrote these words, we are a part of that "in the ages to come."

Lent is a season that puts us in a better position to recognize the immeasurable riches of God's grace. Despite our nature of falling short of the will of God, despite the world's lack of love and compassion, God still reaches out to us like a gentle parent. God extends their hand out and offers us to take hold. God doesn't demand it, and They don't take our hand by force. Instead, God patiently waits for us to notice Them, and in turn, extend our hand as well. We are made from ashes, and to ashes we will return. These are the words we recite at Ash Wednesday, and it marks the start of our journey toward repentance. As we inch nearer toward the cross, let us not forget about the immeasurable riches of God's grace around us. So go forth, sharing the Good News of God's amazing grace. Amen.

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #42 of Lent | March 31

Scripture: John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

¹⁷ *“Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned, but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God.”*

How can you not like John 3:16? I know it's perhaps the most recitable piece of scripture in the entire Bible, but how often do we consider the rest of this memorable exchange between Jesus, the Pharisees, and the crowd? We recognize God sent Their only Son so Jesus could live in the flesh and guide us toward the cross of salvation; however, the light of Christ serves a higher purpose than just lighting the way forward. Jesus said, “For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.” The light of Christ has a way of bringing to light all that shrouds us from God's grace. Scripture calls them “evil people,” but I think we can all relate to having something within us that we don't want to bring into the light. Perhaps it's anxiety or depression. A short temper or traumatic past. Maybe we struggle with relationships. These are things we shove into the darkness. Shame convinces us to hide things from others and from God in hopes that we can maintain a façade long enough to get by. However, the darkness of shame cannot extinguish the flame of hope we find in the light of Christ. When we finally find enough courage, we take that first step into the light. Inch by inch, we take another painful step forward, thinking, “Surely this will not work out for me.” And yet, over time, we become comfortable in the light as our shadows dance on the walls. We begin to notice the warmth we feel as we get closer to its source, and when we arrive there, we aren't met with stern criticism or disappointment. Instead, we are received by the Lord of Lords who embraces us with compassion and grace. Whatever evil deeds or sins we've committed fall off our shoulders. If darkness feels like a heavy burden, then the light of Christ makes us feel weightless. It's there that we feel the transformation of being reborn in the love of God. And as transformed people, our roles now serve to usher those who are still in the darkness to take that first step into the light.

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #43 of Lent | April 1

Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34

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

Tomorrow marks Maundy Thursday, the night where Christians recognize the hosting of the Last Supper with Jesus and the Twelve. In that moment, when the bread of life was broken and the cup of salvation poured out, Jesus not only entrusted the Twelve with the foretelling of what was to come, but he proclaimed the start of a new covenant, paid for by the blood of God's only Son. Jeremiah, a great prophet from the time of exile from the Babylonian Empire, prophesied about the Last Supper some 600 years prior. Jeremiah told the Israelites, “I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors...This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” The old covenant was handed down through the Law, and for centuries God's people followed the Law (with varying degrees of success...) which sustained their connection with God through the rituals, social laws, and customs. Jeremiah's prophesy of Jesus' new covenant goes against what the cultural norm was for the time. One does not embody the Law, you follow it obediently. However, Jeremiah knew Jesus would come to fulfill the Law. Jeremiah knew through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ his disciples and all who witnessed his authority on earth and in heaven would be mobilized to embody this new covenant with it etched into their hearts.

It's powerful to see how God's plan for salvation and eternal life was already in motion 600 years prior to the birth of Jesus Christ. Even more so, Jeremiah spoke with such conviction about a promise he understood. A gift of salvation he would not get to witness here on earth. Jeremiah serves as a good reminder to us today that God has always been an active participant in the salvation of humanity. Even more so today, the presence of God goes with us as we continue this work of carving the new covenant into our hearts. What are we called to proclaim? Love your God with all

your heart, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. This is the lens with which we see the world, and just like Jeremiah, we are called to shout that message from the mountain top for all to hear. As Good Friday comes, ask yourself this: how are you embodying the new covenant in your heart, and how do you share the Good News?

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #44 of Lent | April 2

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

The Institution of the Lord's Supper

²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

²⁵ *In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Communion Sundays are by far some of my favorite worship services to partake in. As a life-long United Methodist, the open table of our theology and the gift of grace we receive from the bread and cup speak volumes to my core beliefs as a Christian. Think about it for a moment. On Communion Sunday, we gather in worship to partake in God's grace, which is freely given to us. No membership is required. You don't need to be baptized. You don't need a deep, mature faith to receive God's sustaining grace. Instead, all you simply need is the desire to know God and grow closer to our Creator. The humanity of Christ informs us that Jesus must have felt the immense sense of connection we share through the sacrament of communion. I imagine Jesus also felt the presence of the Holy Spirit in that upper room as he blessed the elements and ate with his closest friends. Jesus knew he would be betrayed that night. He knew he would be humiliated, beaten, flogged, and forced to carry his broken body to the place they would crucify him. And yet, the divine nature of Christ dictates that Jesus knew the true nature of the gift he was giving us. Jesus not only gave the Twelve a glimpse into the Kingdom of God, but he also gifted us the means to partake in God's unending grace. Jesus told his disciples, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Every time we join together

for communion, we remember Maundy Thursday and the gift we received through Christ Jesus. Next time you receive communion, imagine yourself in that upper room with Jesus. Think of all the harm humanity has caused, the brokenness of the world, and remember that Jesus gave us the ultimate gift of grace despite our shortcomings. That is the true meaning of “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #45 of Lent | April 3

Scripture: John 18:1-19

After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place because Jesus often met there with his disciples.³ So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” ⁵ They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus replied, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again he asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these people go.” ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.” ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

Jesus before the High Priest

¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year.¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

Peter Denies Jesus

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter

was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in.¹⁷ The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not."¹⁸ Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

The High Priest Questions Jesus

¹⁹ *Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching.*

What's so "good" about this day when Jesus was arrested and punished for his miraculous deeds? When I re-read this portion of scripture, my blood still boils at the thought that Jesus Christ, the only one free of sin, was condemned as an innocent man. I think back to Darryl Burton and his powerful story of being wrongfully convicted of a crime he did not commit. When the innocent suffer at the hands of the corrupt, it births a special type of evil. When everything within us is screaming, "He's innocent," or "He didn't do it! Leave him alone," that's when our hearts break as Jesus is arrested for loving humanity too much.

My reaction would have been much like Peter's. The instinctual urge to protect the ones we love drives us to do irrational things, and I would certainly say slashing another human being with a sword counts as a drastic action. So again, what's so "good" about this day? Despite being betrayed by one of his closest friends, Jesus spoke with stillness and compassion while being arrested. He urged his companions to instill peace in that moment. Jesus didn't fight his oppressors even though he had all authority in heaven to call down an army of angels to protect him. And that is at the center of what is good about this day. We do not celebrate the wrongful conviction of Jesus Christ, and we certainly don't celebrate his brutal punishment and murder. However, we seek the goodness of God in Jesus' response during this encounter. When Jesus spoke about the forgiveness of sins and salvation for all, did he exclude those who punished him? No. Instead, Jesus drank from the cup the Father gave him, and even as Jesus wrestled with his calling and begged God to take the cup from him, he faithfully lived out God's will, not his own.

In the face of death, Jesus chose to share compassion and peace to those who sought to harm him. It's perhaps one of the most vivid descriptions of God's grace in scripture, and yet we too often forget that God's grace is freely given to our enemies just as much as it is given to us. Jesus' divine nature did not buckle in the face of hardship. He obediently followed God's will to fulfil the prophecy and proclaim God's authority through the resurrection. With Easter Sunday quickly coming, consider to yourself how you uphold your faithfulness in the midst of hardship. Remember that

death does not have the final say; rather, the promise of eternal life and the mystery of faith beckon us to move forward with the same peace and compassion Jesus gave to all.

Devotional by: Pastor Josh Seifert

Day #46 of Lent | April 4

Scripture: John 19:16b-30

So they took Jesus,¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself he went out to what is called the Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.¹⁸ There they crucified him and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them.¹⁹ Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city, and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek.²¹ Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.' "²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."²³ When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top.²⁴ So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says,

*"They divided my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots."*

²⁵ *And that is what the soldiers did.*

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son."²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ *After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty."²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

A prayer at the foot of the cross:

O Holy God, the hosannas have died away, the palm branches have turned brittle. Now, today, there is only this –each of us, all of us, sitting in the darkness, the hymns of lament in the air, the mumblings of our own feeble confession, on this Friday which we tremble to call Good. What is good about Good Friday? What is good about the innocent one nailed to a cross? What is good about the darkness of war that persists today? What is good about our devastation of the planet?... about people living in poverty?... about the fog of addiction, depression, disease, and despair? What is good about the crushing weight of hunger, racism, scapegoating, apathy?

No, there is nothing good and desirable in these things. Yet you, O God, are Good. When suffering reigns, yours is the first heart to break. When despair lurks about, we remember that you were there first, peering into the abyss and crying out, incredibly: “Father, forgive them.” When we feel forsaken, we remember that in your last moments, you cared for your mother and your beloved disciple, binding them to one another as a new family. When we feel overcome by guilt, we remember that you spoke grace to a thief: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Your love for us is just that boundless, and ever-present, and Good.

Thank you. What else can we say here, in the dimness, in the darkness, but thank you. Amen.

Devotional by: Cited from UMC Discipleship

Day #47 of Lent | April 5

Scripture: Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. ² And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. ³ His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. ⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. ⁵ But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. ⁶ He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. ⁷ Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” ⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. ⁹

Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Easter people, Christ is risen! God is doing a new thing!
Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Life has conquered death! Love has overcome fear!
Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

God has transformed a dead end into a new start!
Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

Easter people, raise your voices! Christ is risen!
Christ is risen indeed! Hallelujah!

Go now in the blessing of God, who meets death with life, hatred with love, and hopeless endings with abundant possibilities, to build a community of life, love, and flourishing as Easter people, followers of the Risen Christ! Amen.

Devotional by: Pastor Hyemi Lee Jones