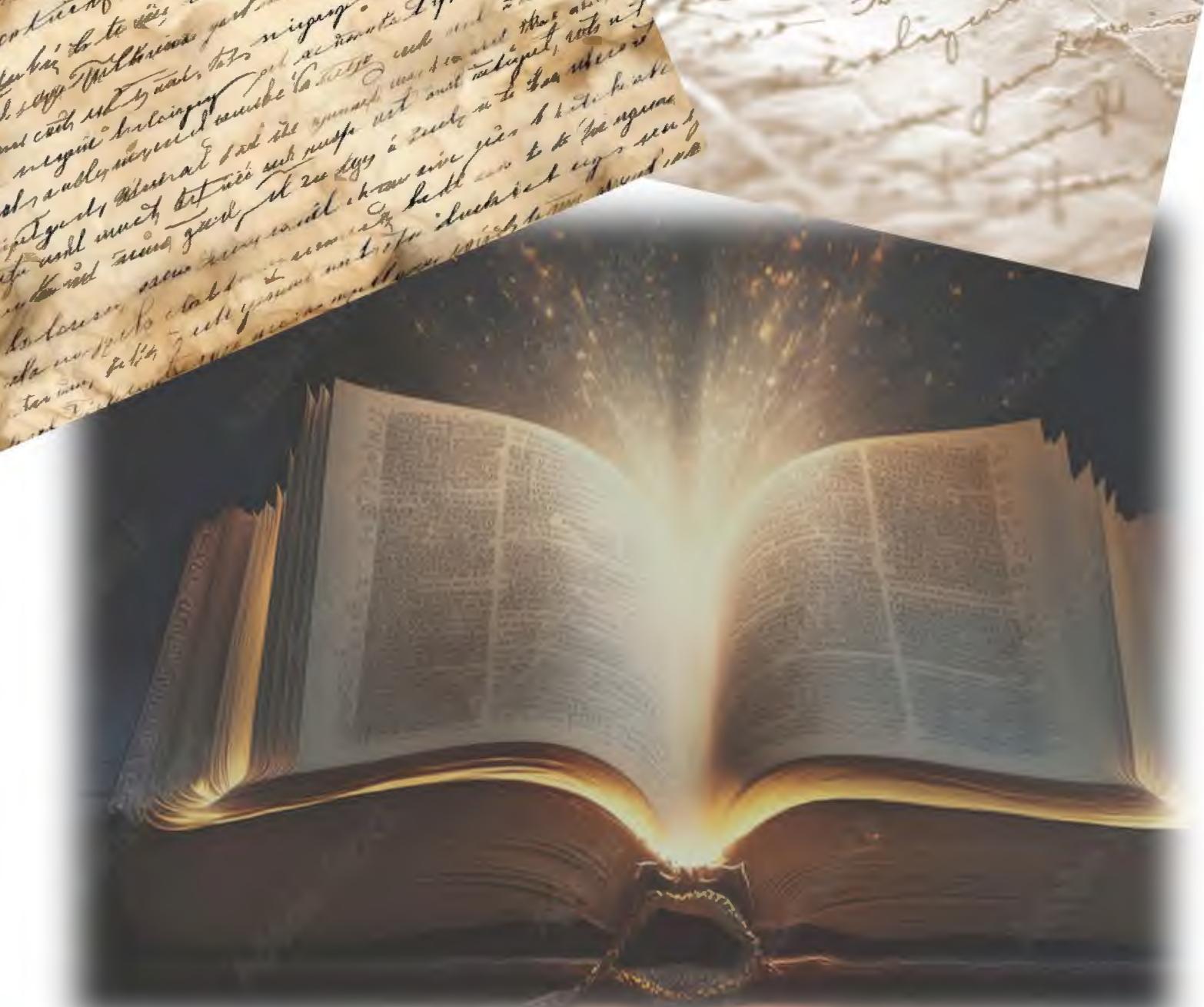


Finding Jesus

...in the words



Volume 28, 2026 Edition

Lenten and Holy Week Worship Schedule ~ 2026

ASH WEDNESDAY "The Promise of Heaven"	February 18	Worship	7:00 pm
Wednesday "The Promise of Comfort"	February 25	Dinner Worship	5:30 pm 6:30pm
Wednesday "The Promise of an Inheritance"	March 4	Dinner Worship	5:30pm 6:30pm
Wednesday "The Promise of Righteousness"	March 11	Dinner Worship	5:30 pm 6:30pm
Wednesday "The Promise of Mercy"	March 18	Dinner Worship	5:30 pm 6:30pm
Wednesday "The Promise of Seeing God"	March 25	Dinner Worship	5:30 pm 6:30pm
Saturday	March 28	Worship	5:00pm
Palm Sunday	March 29	Worship Worship	9:00am 11:00am
Wednesday	April 1	Passover Seder Meal	6:30pm
MAUNDY THURSDAY	April 2	Worship	7:00 pm
GOOD FRIDAY	April 3	Worship Worship	12:00 pm 7:00 pm
HOLY SATURDAY	April 4	Easter Egg Hunt (rain or shine) Easter Vigil	1:00 pm 7:00 pm
EASTER SUNDAY	April 5	Outdoor Worship Worship Worship	7:00 am 9:00 am 11:00 am

LENTEN SERVICE OPPORTUNITIES

Ronald McDonald House Craft Station

Assorted craft items—construction or craft paper, crayons, colored pencils, washable markers, paint brushes, glue sticks, pipe cleaners, googly eyes, cotton balls, popsicle sticks, etc. (NO glitter please)

NKU Opportunity House Student Treat Bags

INDIVIDUAL - powdered drink mixes, water flavoring packets, canned pasta meals, microwave meals, snacks, breakfast bars, fruit cups, candy , crackers, cup-a-soup, cookies, Chap stick, personal toiletries

CareNet Pregnancy Services of Northern KY

RESOURCES NEEDED:

Clothing—18-24 month (boy or girl) - tops, pants, underwear, socks, sweat shirts, pajamas

Diapers - all sizes

Please drop your donations in the marked hallway bins throughout Lent.

Finding Jesus in the Words is a collection of many writers' thoughts, understandings, and prayers for our Lenten reading experience this year.

I have come to expect great insights and stories shared by our writers. And this year is no exception. The devotions herein contain interesting life stores and examples that really connect to the Bible verses.

As you read, think about your own life. Do you have any experiences that also apply with the devotion? Feel free to make notes in the book as you read the devotions. And perhaps, you might just be inspired to write for next year's book. We always welcome new writers to the project.

I would also like to encourage you to attend the weekly Lenten services. Meals are provided beforehand each week. This year's services will explore promises of the Beatitudes. These themes will also intertwine with the devotions contained in this book. These services will focus on:

- the promise of Heaven
- the promise of Comfort
- the promise of an inheritance
- the promise of righteousness
- the promise of mercy and
- the promise of seeing God

Participating in the meal before our Wednesday services, donating a few items to our Lenten Collection Station, reading the devotions, enjoying fellowship with others who are attending or even bringing a friend with you all helps you to focus your mind and your heart on what is important this Lenten season. So, give it a try.

To the writers – I am thankful for each of you that wrote these devotions and took a chance to share your own thoughts and prayers. Your devotions provide insights, and stories of faith that help create a moving and relevant collection of work. I am humbled every year as I read your devotions.

To the readers - I hope you will also appreciate the stories shared this year. May you gain new and beautiful understandings of these Bible verses and devotions as you read your way through Lent.

Ash Wednesday, February 18

Submitted by: Rod Ford

Verse: Joel 2:1-2



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, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains a great and powerful people; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them through the years of all generations.

(Revised Standard Version)

Reflection:

Joel does not whisper—he sounds a loud trumpet blast. This is no gentle invitation to reflection; it is an alarm. Something is coming and God commands our attention.

Lent begins here, not with quiet introspection, but with a trumpet intended to jolt us awake. Joel strips away our illusions of control and comfort. The “day of the LORD” is not first described as warm or reassuring, but as darkness, gloom, cloud, and thick shadow. The language presses in on us. Here, there is no room to hide.

This is the Word of God, doing what it must do: telling us the truth. Joel’s trumpet shatters the lie that we can drift safely through life without reckoning—with God, with sin, with death.

And yet, this alarm is not sounded in cruelty. It is sounded in Zion, on God’s holy mountain, among God’s own people. This warning is mercy for us. God does not remain silent while destruction approaches. He speaks. He interrupts. He calls.

Lent is not about learning to fear God *more*, but about learning to fear Him *rightly*. Not as one who delights in darkness, but as the Lord who exposes the darkness so that it may lose its power; and the Light of God overcomes the darkness.

For Christians, this dark day casts a long shadow toward Good Friday. There, the day of darkness truly arrives. The sky dims. The earth trembles. And the judgment Joel announces falls—not on the repentant people—but on Christ himself.



Lord God, You blow the trumpet and wake us from our sleep. You name the darkness we would rather ignore. In this season of Lent, strip away our false comforts, our excuses, our delay. When we tremble before Your holiness, draw us toward Your mercy. As the day comes near, fix our eyes on Christ, who entered the darkness for us and is the One who is light and life for us. Amen.

Thursday, February 19

Submitted by: Carla Donithan

Verse: Psalm 51:1-2

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity.

(New International Version)

Reflection:

This is an invitation to us for approaching God with honesty and humility, trusting in God's mercy rather than our own perfection. It calls on us to seek inner renewal, allowing God to cleanse our hearts and restore us through compassion and grace.



Lord, we come to You with open hearts, trusting in Your unfailing love. Please cleanse us, renew us, and lead us into lives shaped by Your grace. Amen.

Friday, February 20

Submitted by: Gina Billiter

Verse: Joel 2:12

"Even now," declares the Lord, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning". (New International Version)

Reflection:

To me, this verse speaks of forgiveness. Forgiveness is mentioned in the Bible hundreds of times:

- In Luke 23:43, Jesus forgave the thief crucified by his side on the cross. In this man's final moments Jesus forgave him.
- Romans 3:23, lets us know, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God".
- Psalms 32, David spoke of sins being forgiven and covered by God.
- Psalms 32:1, "Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered!"

The Bible teaches us that even though we all fall short and are all sinners, we all can be forgiven. This is why Jesus came and made the supreme sacrifice He made.

Jesus endured a terrible and harsh death on the cross as He bared each and every one of our sins.

God wants us to come to Him with all of our heart in request of forgiveness. Even at the end of our life, God's love for us is so great He will still offer us forgiveness if we ask Him.

Isn't this such a beautiful and amazing gift our father offers to us? How very wonderful His love is for us!



Heavenly Father, Thank you for loving us despite the fact that we all fall short and sin. Thank you for your gift of Jesus who carried our sins to the cross for each and every one of us. Let us come to you with all of our heart for forgiveness and let us live our lives daily in your loving grace. Amen.

Saturday, February 21

Submitted by: Jen Ensley

Verse: Matthew 6:1

Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven.”

(New International Version)

Reflection:



I feel like this bible verse is one of the more straightforward ones. The Bible teaches us to be humble and to do good for the sake of doing good, not for what it will get us.

If we do something for someone thinking. *“I hope everyone knows I’m the one that did that”*. Or, if we do something for someone and then use it as leverage for ourself, we are clearly acting for our own personal gain.

So, now that we know how we should act, it’s not always that easy is it? I think we would be lying if we said acknowledgment and praise doesn’t feel good. I am not saying that is a bad thing. It is nice to be recognized for things that we do or achieve. I believe the key is the attitude that we have going into good deeds. If we go into doing for, helping, or giving, thinking, *“This is the right thing to do”* and not, *“I wonder what people will think”* or, *“what will I gain from doing it”*, we will have a much better chance at staying humble.

I don’t know about anyone else, but I would be deceiving myself if I said I didn’t falter with this sometimes. Those are the times I reflect with God and try remember that anything we do is for the glory of God and that good works should always be in his name and not our own.

Sunday, February 22

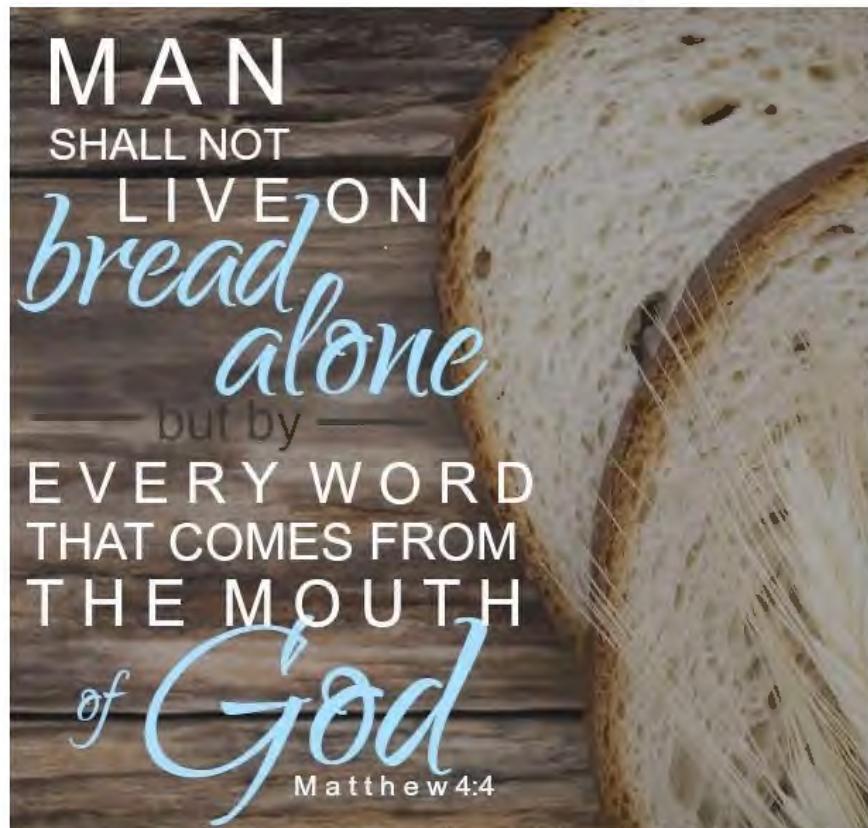
First Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalm: 32 (10)

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11



Monday, February 23

Submitted by: Magdalene Jump

Verse: Matthew 6:17-18

"When you practice some appetite-denying discipline to better concentrate on God, don't make a production out of it. It might turn you into a small-time celebrity, but it won't make you a saint. If you 'go into training' inwardly, act normal outwardly. Shampoo and comb your hair, brush your teeth, wash your face. God doesn't require attention getting devices. He won't overlook what you are doing; he'll reward you well." (The Message)

Reflection:

In this passage, Matthew discusses the importance of humility in our faith. Specifically, he is referencing the practice of fasting during the time of Jesus, and how some individuals would emphasize the appearance of their suffering in order to make sure others knew they were fasting and practicing their faith. However, Matthew reminds us that this is not the way the Lord would want us to serve Him. The act of fasting, which was meant with good intentions to celebrate faith and sacrifice, becomes a self-serving act as people use it to demonstrate their faithfulness. Matthew demonstrates to us that doing so will not make us better people; we are gaining earthly gratification for our actions that are truly meant for the Lord.

I think that this concept absolutely applies to our everyday lives. Sometimes, it can be easy to just go through the motions of being faithful when life gets hard or we don't feel as strong of a connection. However, we have to remember that, though we may not feel it, God is always working in our lives and doesn't need us to put on appearances for Him. He knows us inside and out as our Creator, and always watches over us regardless. Matthew, the gospel writer, emphasizes this fact and wants us to remember what our goal is as Christians, because God knows and will reward those who are his true followers. In this, I think it is important to look at our daily routines with intentionality. We all live very busy lives and have to be in many places at once. It is definitely easy to get overwhelmed; however, I think that Lent is a perfect time to take a step back and reevaluate how we are showing up not only for others in our lives, but also for ourselves.



Dear Lord, We all lead very busy lives. I pray that we will find moments of peace and rest in you, and be reminded of our true mission as Christians. I pray that we will find the time to step back and evaluate how we are showing up in our daily lives, and that you would continue to lead us and guide us to follow your will. Amen.

Tuesday, February 24

Submitted by: Barb Fields

Verse: Joel 2:13

And rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster. (English Standard Version)

Reflection:

I have often wondered if rending a garment actually provides any true comfort or feeling of repentance...or if it was just an outward display for others to see? Rending garments (or tearing a garment) is the biblically historic tradition for someone experiencing extreme, overpowering grief or loss. A person would tear a piece of their clothing to show extreme pain or loss. This tradition is still practiced in many Jewish communities and families.

Rending a garment is certainly a visual act of grief. But, in this verse, God is asking for more than a visual sign of grief or repentance. Joel tells us that God warns His people to rend their hearts, not their garments. He amplifies a physical act of tearing to an ultimate “changing” of one’s inner heart by tearing out the sin or hate in one’s heart.

God goes straight to the heart to test His people’s faith. In this Old Testament reading, God demands to know if they are returning to Him, in body and in spirit, before He grants mercy instead of anger, love instead of calamity upon them.

So, as I think about today’s verse, I can’t help but wonder if our New Testament God has mellowed just a bit? Has God relaxed His strong rhetoric and become a kinder, gentler God? Or, should we still heed those “Old Testament” words from God to rend our hearts?

I feel so blessed with the life I have built. Yet, I have experienced pain and loss. And yes, I feel regret as well. I am sure you have too.

I have also made so many mistakes. I have made bad assumptions about people. I have ignored the needs of others while focusing on myself. I have silently judged others.

So, I now ask: who am I to judge, assume or ignore when God has told us to love our neighbor, and help those can’t help themselves...? I don’t believe God has relaxed His command to rend our hearts when seeking repentance. I need to repent.

So, I lay it here. I have fallen short of God’s desires. My heart is impure and selfish. Yet, I know that God have given us His Son... and this gift is life-changing for those that accept it. Yes, I know that I am forgiven. I am loved and granted compassion over disaster. What a gracious and merciful God we have.



Holy God, thank you for your compassion and mercy although I know I will never be worthy. You love me anyway and in all ways. Amen.

Wednesday, February 25 Submitted by: Carroll Lauffman

Verse: Psalm 42:1-2

*As the deer pants for water, so I long for you, O God. I thirst for the living God.
Where can I find him and come stand before him? (The Way)*

Reflection:

Reading this Psalm I am struck by how applicable it is to many of my late-night experiences. The writer is a Priest in exile from his home and temple, and relates the spiritual challenges he faces (exile in one footnote is described as, “troubles of the devotee” or “exiled from the Lord”). I believe these “troubles” come to all of us in some degree or another.

- The Psalmist is suffering some deep sorrow which causes him to weep, day and night and yet the world mocks him, “where is your God?”
- The Psalmist is downcast and discouraged...
- The Psalmist stands depressed and gloomy....
- Floods of sorrow pour over me like a thundering cataract...

And yet the Psalmist after every lament gathers faith to again and again proclaim, “Trust in the Lord God”. “Hope in God!” “I will praise him again.” “Don’t be discouraged”. “Don’t be upset”. “Expect God to act!”

I know that I’ve gone through times when I felt all the lost feelings noted above. I also acknowledge that at times in my pride I try to “fix” things myself, just tough it out. I believe my soul especially during these times does long for God and wants to stand in his presence... with a need greater than any “fix” the world offers, and often makes this known in the early morning hours.

Lent asks that I reflect on when and why I am less open to Christ despite my soul’s yearning. I know that Christ my Lord perfectly understands me and these feelings, and he is there along with the Holy Spirit to forgive, comfort, and care for me when I reject my pride, repent, and come to Him as a trusting child asking his mercy and help.



I stand before Christ in prayer and repentance and with the Psalmist confirm: “He is my Help! He is my God”. Amen.

Thursday, February 26

Submitted by: Sherry Walters

Verse: Psalm 51:12

"Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me".

(New International Version)

Reflection:



David had sinned with Bathsheba and was confronted by the prophet Nathan. He was feeling pretty distressed in his sinful situation. This verse was the prayer he cried out to God!

We may not have sinned in the way that David had, but one thing is for sure; we have all sinned! If we don't accept accountability, our emotions will cause us pain and get the best of us. We will feel stagnant in our faith and distant from God.

God wants us to share a close relationship with Him. He wants us to confess our wrongs to Him, as well as to our fellow man. Asking for forgiveness is the only way we can live a full, satisfied and complete lives. Even still, we may and probably will, have consequences to pay in our earthly lives. We cannot get off "Scott-free" if we have created great damage! To not acknowledge and accept accountability for the pain or criminal deeds to those we have harmed, is another sin and we will pay the price in one way or another.

What I take away from this verse is that if we don't acknowledge our sins to God and our fellow man, truly and sincerely ask complete forgiveness, then we will not find joy in our relationship with God, nor our relationships with those we share our earthly lives with.

Dear Father we all have sinned. There is no sin that is hidden from you, be it to you or to others in our daily lives. Help us find the courage to open up and acknowledge those wrong doings. Let us be honest in what we have done and left undone. After we confess our sins, please forgive us and grant us the joy of your salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Friday, February 27

Submitted by: Natalie Williams

Verse: *Isaiah 58:6*

"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?"

(New International Version)

Reflection:

The verse seems to be a message criticizing the people of Israel for observing religious practices; such as fasting, while neglecting justice. "Loosing chains" and "untangling cords" emphasizes freeing people from oppression and exploitation, with the "yoke" representing unjust systems.

If you're anything like me, you've read Bible verses over and over but still wondered how they really connect to everyday life now. Last year, I started reading *The Message*, which puts the Bible into more modern language, and it helped those verses feel more relatable and easier to apply to my own life.

Here is *Isaiah 58:6* in ***The Message***:

"This is the kind of fast day I'm after: to break the chains of injustice, get rid of exploitation in the workplace, free the oppressed, cancel debts".

After reading both versions, it makes me think about the idea of fasting. Fasting has always been a fascinating idea to me. Growing up, the only form of fasting I really practiced was not eating meat on Good Friday. As I've spent more time reading Scripture, I've started to understand that fasting was never meant to be just about skipping food or following religious rules. Instead, it is about calling people to pray and reflect on how we treat others.

Particularly, in this verse, the message shows that we are to go beyond just the usual acts of faith and truly care for others. It reminds us that our faith isn't just about fasting and what we give up, but about how we show compassion toward others in everyday life. We are to show up in how we live: standing up against unfair systems, treating people with dignity, speaking out for those who are oppressed, and helping relieve financial burdens when we can. Too often, we do not live up to this. We see people in our communities, workplaces, and even leaders fail to show this kind of love to others. Jesus showed us the power of love and compassion for **everyone**. Let us follow His example and let that love shine through our actions to all those around us this Lenten season and beyond.

Saturday, February 28

Submitted by: Dan Fagan

Verse: Micah 7:7

“But as for me, I watch in hope for the LORD, I wait for God my Savior; my God will hear me”. (New International Version)

Reflection:



This passage is a simple statement to direct us to have patience, faith, and trust in the Lord. However, because it is so succinct and seemingly simple, the power and importance of its message may not be fully conveyed and faithfully adopted. Could it be that we may have heard this advice so many times throughout our lives that perhaps we may have allowed its message to become watered down to apply to minor inconveniences in our lives? I recommend that you also read Micah 7, verses 1-6 as well as chapter 6 of Micah to gain even the slightest significance of verse 7. Better yet, what I truly recommend is that you seriously take the time to read the book of Job, take a moment to reflect on its message, and then after pausing for reflection, reread Micah 7:7. Then you will understand the power and importance of this simply stated message. Adopt it in your heart and mind because this message from God will truly help you in times of serious travails and suffering.

Sunday, March 1

Second Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalm: 121 (1,2)

Second Reading: Romans 4:1-5,13-17

Gospel: John 3:1-17



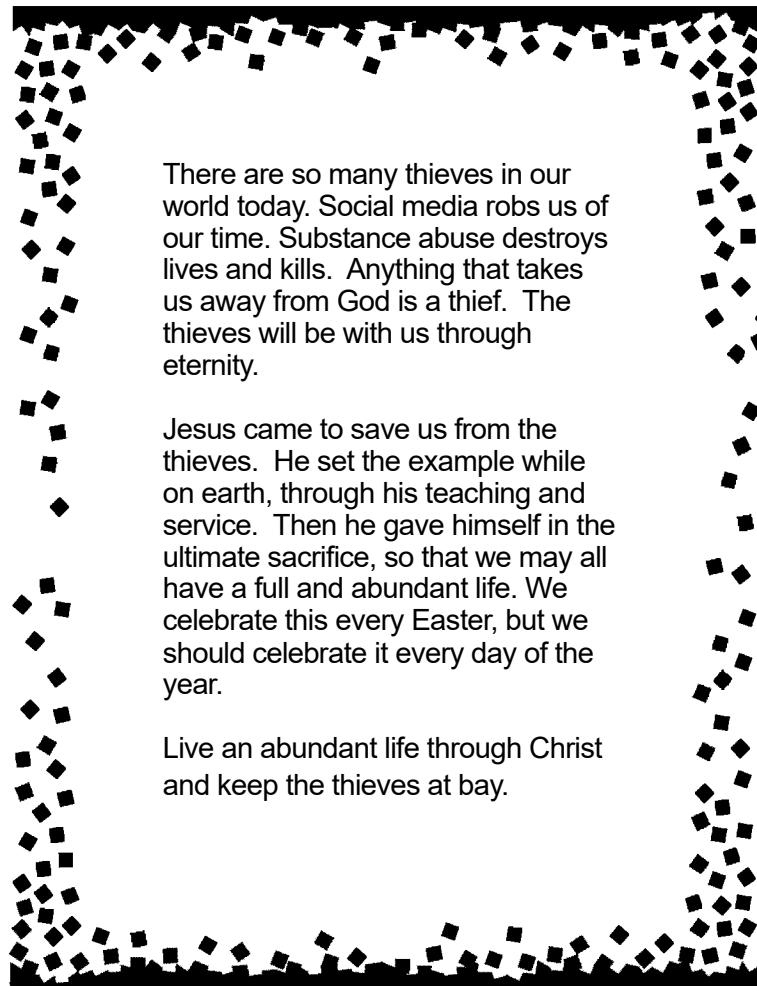
Monday, March 2

Submitted by: Chris Gladwell

Verse: John 10:10

"A thief comes only to rob, kill, and destroy. I came so everyone would have life, and have it fully". (Contemporary English Version)

Reflection:



Tuesday, March 3

Submitted by: Julie Ashley

Verse: Matthew 6:33

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (New International Version)

Reflection:

Let's break this short verse apart. Firstly, "Seek first his kingdom." We must put God first in our lives letting Him guide how we live and the choices we make, instead of focusing mainly on money or status. Secondly, "And his righteousness." We must try to live in a way that pleases God—doing what is right, loving others, and following His ways. We don't have to be perfect, just sincere. Thirdly, "And all these things will be given to you as well." I believe that Jesus is talking about basic needs like food and clothing. He is saying that if we trust God and put Him first, He will take care of what we need. In short, don't worry so much about material things. Focus on God, and trust Him to provide what we truly need.

Here are some practical ways you can apply this verse on a daily basis:

1. Begin each day with prayer or a short Bible reading before checking your phone or planning tasks. This reminds you to put God first and seek His guidance for the day.
2. When faced with choices—at work, school, or home—ask, "Does this honor God?" Choose honesty, kindness, and integrity even when it's inconvenient.
3. When you feel anxious about money, relationships, health, or the future, pause and pray. Remember that God knows your needs and will provide.
4. Show patience, forgiveness, and love in everyday situations—how you speak to family, treat one another, or respond to conflict.



Heavenly Father, we come before You with grateful hearts. Help us to seek Your kingdom first in all that we do. Teach us to desire what You desire and to live in ways that honor You. Give us hearts that choose righteousness—hearts that love what is right, show compassion to others, and trust Your guidance each day. When we feel worried or distracted by our needs, remind us that You know what we need before we ask. Help us to trust You fully, believing that as we put You first, You will provide all that is necessary. We place our lives, our plans, and our concerns in Your hands. May You be first in our hearts today and always. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Wednesday, March 4

Submitted by: Sara Johns

Verse: Psalm 25:4

“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your path.” (New International Version)

Reflection:

Both of my grandmothers lived long lives. My paternal grandma, Julia, died shortly before her 98th birthday. Grandma Gert passed away just a few years ago at the age of 104. While they were different in many ways, what they both had in common was a strong faith. And for both of them, that faith in God was not a stagnant thing. Even as they slowed down and neared (or passed!) the century mark, both women continued to read or listen to devotions and sermons. Prayer was a daily part of their lives. They never stopped seeking the Lord and his path.

Sometimes, following the path that God is guiding us on is hard. We may be struggling with faith or hard times. Taking time for Bible study or to attend church may seem like too much during busy days. False prophets may be whispering and luring us away. There might be a period in our lives where we chose the wrong branch and wandered far away from God and his promises. Living a faith filled life can feel difficult.

Grandma Gert often told me she had a long list of “why?” questions for God about her path through life. Many of us may have those same sort of questions about our path. It can be hard to remember that He is with us during difficult times.

No matter what is happening in our lives, there is always one truth: we are not alone! We need to remember that like David, we can ask for help. God will provide us guidance back to our path to Him. Hearing what He wants us to do might not be easy through all the noise of daily life, but his help will be there. The guidance might be carving 5 minutes out to read a daily devotion. Maybe it's spending time with a friend in prayer, listening to a hymn or song and contemplating the lyrics, starting daily devotion time, or perhaps it's a bigger change. God doesn't promise us the path or the lessons we learn will always be easy, but He does promise us that if we seeking Him and his guidance, He will answer.

Many people have heard Matthew 7:7

“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”

Verse 8 isn't always quoted as much, but it continues to reiterate the promise: “For EVERYONE who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” We just have to have the courage to ask.

As we move through the Lenten season and beyond, my prayer for you all is this: Remember to ask the Lord to guide and teach us. Trust He will answer us and provide guidance to lead us to our ultimate goal of eternity in heaven.



Lord, it is not always easy to see the path before us. Open my heart to hear your words and guidance. Forgive me for my mistakes and times when I do as I please, instead of following you. Lead me back to the path, guided by your Word and light. In your name we pray, Amen.

Thursday, March 5

Submitted by: Chloe Donithan

Verse: Romans 12:9

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.”

(New International Version)

Reflection:



This verse is a reminder to live with authenticity. We're called to love people genuinely, not out of obligation, appearances, or convenience. At the same time, it encourages us to have strong values. We shouldn't excuse or tolerate what harms our heart, our faith, or others. Instead, actively choose what is good and hold onto it tightly, even when it's hard.

It speaks to being real in our relationships, setting healthy boundaries, and aligning our actions with what we truly believe. Loving well doesn't mean accepting everything... it means choosing goodness with intention and integrity.

Friday, March 6

Submitted by: Sandra Gates

Verse: Ephesians 2:13

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ." (New International Version)

Reflection:

Through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, the once impassable chasm between a holy God and a spiritually distant people caused by sin, has been permanently bridged. For those formerly identified as "Gentiles"—strangers to the covenants of promise—the sacrifice of Jesus serves as the ultimate invitation into the heart of God's family. This invitation was not earned through religious striving or ethnic heritage; it is a divine reconciliation that dismantles every "wall of hostility" and barrier of shame. Today, no matter how "far off" we have been or feel, we can be drawn "near," transformed from outsiders into beloved children who now enjoy direct, unhindered access to God as a loving Father. What an amazing gift!

This new reality brings with it spiritual unity, where the old divisions between Jew and Gentile are swallowed up by the grace of God revealed in the gospels. You and I are no longer guests or strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints and vital members of God's household and beloved children. We are included because of salvation by grace, reminding us that our belonging rests entirely on Christ's finished work rather than our own human effort. I am so glad that God does what we are not able to do, no matter how hard we try. In this household, the peace of Christ reigns, turning former enemies into brothers and sisters, and building us together into a dwelling place for the Spirit.

Heavenly Father, we stand in awe of the extravagant grace you reached out to us when we were lost and far off; when we were sinful, ashamed, and guilty. Thank You for the precious blood of Jesus, which tore down every wall of hostility and bridged the gap that our own efforts could never cross. We praise You that we are no longer strangers or outsiders, but beloved children and fellow citizens in Your eternal kingdom. Thank You for the gift of redemption and freedom from our sin, shame, and guilt!



Lord, help us to live in the reality of this reconciliation today. Soften our hearts toward others, just as You have shown mercy to us, and let the unity of Your Spirit be visible in our lives. May we walk with the confidence of those who have full access to Your presence, resting in the peace that Christ has established for us. We thank You for making us Your own and for the gift of belonging to Your household. In the mighty name of Jesus, Amen.

Saturday, March 7

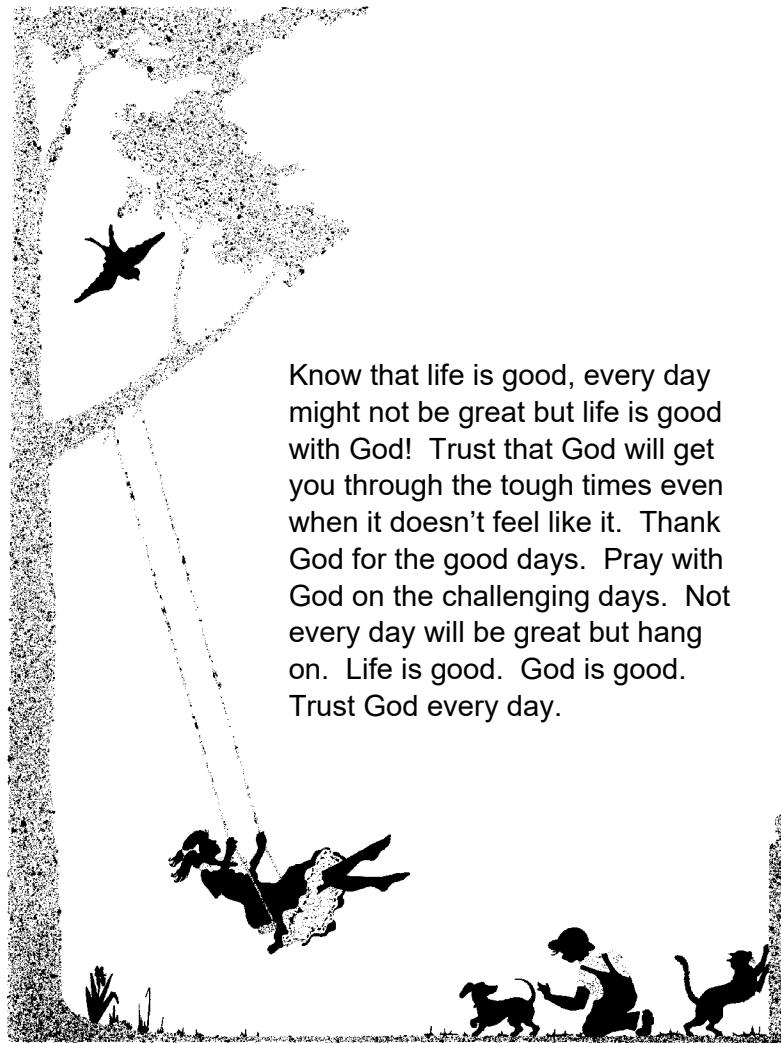
Submitted by: Sue Bivins

Verse: Romans 12:12

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.

(New International Version)

Reflection:



Know that life is good, every day might not be great but life is good with God! Trust that God will get you through the tough times even when it doesn't feel like it. Thank God for the good days. Pray with God on the challenging days. Not every day will be great but hang on. Life is good. God is good. Trust God every day.

Sunday, March 8

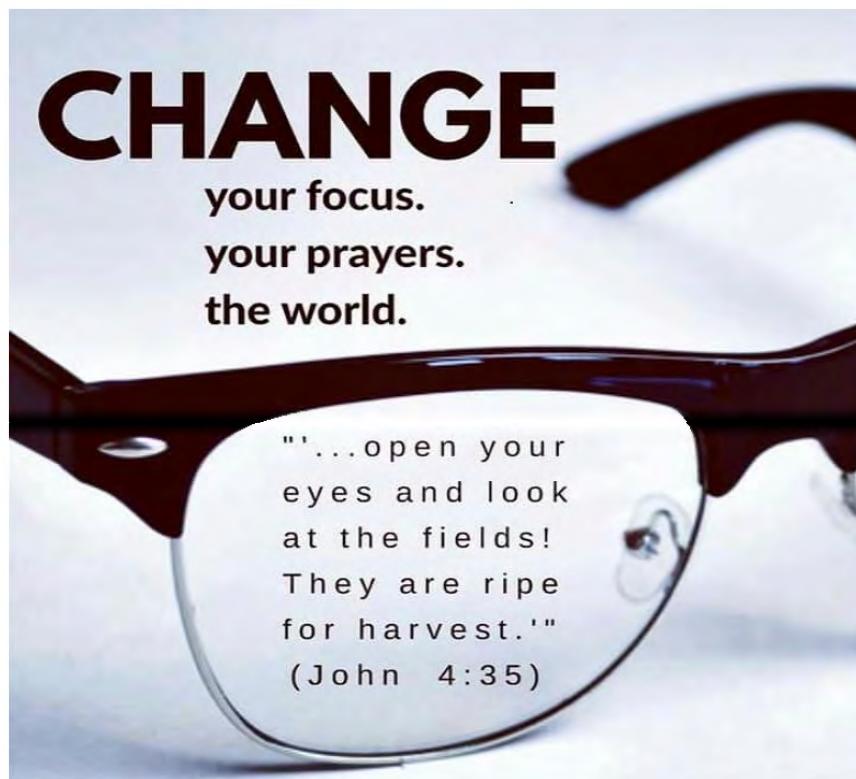
Third Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

Psalm: 95 (1)

Second Reading: Romans 5:1-11

Gospel: John 4:5-42



Monday, March 9

Submitted by: Sherry Walters

Verse: Matthew 11:21

"Woe to you! Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes." (New International Version)

Reflection:



Tyre and Sidon were ancient cities that each had a reputation for wickedness. Each were destroyed by God for its evil. The people in Korazin and Bethsaida had seen the powerful miracles Jesus had performed of healing and casting out demons. Yet, they refused to repent for their sins and accept him as the Messiah. Jesus told them they would then suffer punishment.

We can look religious outwardly. But, if we don't have a genuine heart of belief, repentance and transform our lives against rejecting God's will, then we also will pay a price on judgement day. True salvation comes from Jesus, not earthly power.

Is our heart in a place of prayer? Do we truly act on our faith and trust God's promises? True discipleship means repenting and actually doing God's will in our daily lives and not merely giving lip-service. Jesus offers everlasting peace and forgiveness. However, it is within our power to accept or reject it. The day of judgement WILL come for all of us. There will be no excuse if we don't repent and believe.



Dear Father in Heaven, it is so easy to accept your son, Jesus, as our savior. Yet, for some it's so hard to give up total control of their lives and trust that he will work all things out for our good and that he will never abandon us in times of grief, trials and perils. Please help those who just can't let go and trust. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Tuesday, March 10

Submitted by: Dave Crigler

Verse: Psalm 91:2

I say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.

(New International Version)

Reflection:

Even though I enjoy contemporary Christian music, I sometimes miss some of the old standard hymns, like *The Old Rugged Cross*, *Beautiful Savior*, and *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*, just to mention a few.

Do you wonder why the psalmist referred to our God as a fortress? And why Martin Luther considered God to be a mighty fortress?

When I think about a fortress, I picture in my mind an old-time fort like the Alamo, or an Army fort like Fort Knox where the nation's gold is stored and kept safe and protected.

Today's text says to me that when Jesus told His disciples He was going to heaven to be with God His heavenly Father, He would not abandon them—that He would send to them a helper, an encourager, a protector. He would send to them the Holy Spirit. So, on the first Pentecost He did so. And to this day the Holy Spirit lives, reigns, and dwells in all hearts and minds of all who call on Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

Yes, He is our rock ("On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand"). He is our fortress and our refuge, a place to go when confronted by the evil one that daily tries to consume us.

Our fortress can be many places—maybe Sunday morning worship, or a Bible study class, or a daily Bible reading time, or a time of personal prayer and meditation. Or perhaps all of the above.



Lord God, thank You that You told the disciples and us that You would not leave us orphaned. Thank You that You gave us Your Holy Spirit to be our refuge and our fortress. Amen.

Wednesday, March 11

Submitted by: Gil Duchow

Verse: Jeremiah 29:11

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

(New International Version)

Reflection:

God's Plan to Prosper You:

The ads urge us to get busy planning for our retirement, so we can have a prosperous future when we can enjoy “the good life.” Do you have a plan for your life—now and in the future? If so, is it focused on prospering you or on serving your Lord and the needs of others?

More important, does God have a plan for your life? This verse indicates that God's plan is to prosper us and give us hope and a future. However, those words are often misused to promote a “prosperity gospel,” indicating that God wants to prosper us materially instead of spiritually.

The Hebrew word translated as “prosper,” here and in verse 7, is “shalom,” which is usually translated as “peace” or “wholeness.” God's ultimate plan is for us is to receive by faith in the crucified Christ, that peace which the world cannot give. God's peace and wholeness point us ultimately to our sure hope of eternal life, which Jesus earned for us on the cross.

In the meantime, through the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit, our words of witness and caring actions point others to the Prince of Peace--and the shalom that he freely gives to all who live by faith in him.

Thursday, March 12

Submitted by: Randall Donithan

Verse: John 7:16

My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.”

(New International Version)

Reflection:



People were surprised by how Jesus taught. He did not have the kind of training they expected, yet His words carried wisdom and truth. Jesus explained that what He taught did not come from Himself. It came from God. He was not trying to impress anyone or gain attention. He was simply being faithful to what God had sent Him to do.

During Lent, we are reminded to slow down and look at our own heart. Like Jesus, we are called to listen to God and follow His will, not our own plans or desires. Lent is a time to let go of pride and to remember that our lives are meant to reflect God, not ourselves.



Lord, help us listen to You. Teach us to follow Your ways with humble hearts. May our words and actions honor You. Amen.

Friday, March 13

Submitted by: Magdalene Jump

Verse: Ephesians 5:1-2

"Watch what God does, and then you do it, like children who learn proper behavior from their parents. Mostly what God does is love you. Keep company with him and learn a life of love. Observe how Christ loved us. His love was not cautious but extravagant. He didn't love in order to get something from us but to give everything of himself to us. Love like that." (The Message)

Reflection:

Original Artwork by
Magdalene Jump



Children are truly one of the most beautiful creations. When they are little, their innocence and excitement about the world is so encouraging to those around them, because they know none of the negative parts that pervade so much of our daily lives. I think that I want to take the time this Lent to remember the joy and excitement of childhood. Celebrate the small wins, and look at life through the lens of happiness that children do. We are all children of God, no matter our age, and the world God created for us is meant to be celebrated despite all the faults of human will. God's will triumphs over all, even if we don't see it or feel it. I think that this passage describes our true mission as Christians, and emphasizes the message Jesus brings to us when he delivers his new rule, right before he is crucified. He wanted us

all to love one another unconditionally, just as he did and as children love, without judgement and bias. In this message from Ephesians, we are meant to learn from Jesus and continue his work in our world today. I encourage you this week to introduce yourself to someone new, give someone a compliment, or even just smile at someone!

Dear God, Please walk with us during the course of this week. I pray that we can remember the beauty of the world that has been created for us, and love one another unconditionally, just as Jesus taught us. I pray for all those who are suffering, that you would be with them to support them, and that we can be reminded to live life as you did. In your name we pray, Amen.



Saturday, March 14

Submitted by: Barb Fields

Verse: John 1:4-5

In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. (English Standard Version)

Reflection:

I have always loved the Christmas Eve Candlelight service. The light spreads over the room until everyone's candle is glowing. I love singing "Silent Night" as I look across the room at the faces. They are glowing from the candle being held so close. I feel the love in that room and the love I felt in my childhood church singing that same song. It becomes such a spiritual experience as the generations almost seem to combine, everyone alive again as the glow of those candles and voices singing brings it all together.

I really can feel those connections over the generations that have come before and will come after I am long gone because I see how God's light will continue. I believe that is Jesus alive in our hearts as we go forward trying to live the life God intended.

Bringing life and God's light to all people was Jesus' reason for being here. He was sent to share God's love by being the very light that God placed in His heart and soul. Jesus carried that light in every step of His life and that life was a testament to God's plan. He brought the light so that no darkness would overcome it.

So, my question is, how do we find that in our own lives today? Here are a few suggestions:

1. Go to church. It is that simple. Going to church might feel passe' or outdated. But we can absorb the love within the church family by worshiping and enjoying the fellowship together. Watching church from home is good when we can't get there. But nothing replaces being at church where we can actually feel the love of Christ. It can be felt in a song being sung or the candles burning on Christmas Eve. It can be found in the prayers being lifted to God or in God's forgiveness after confession.
2. Read your Bible and find a Bible Study to join. Take time to find the light among the words. Take time to discuss them with others to help find meaning, connections and purpose in your daily walk in God's word.
3. Find a way to serve others. Life is busy and it is easy to think we can't add any more to our plate. But, I have found that just doing anything is better than not trying. Who knows what could come from your idea...? Just look at what Barb Zumbiel has created with her love of sewing AND helping others. The Quilting Ministry at Hopeful has touched hundreds of people all around world and just around the corner. This group has taken up God's command to wrap one another in the warmth of God's love.



God of light and life, help me follow your light to be a light for others.
Help me to always recognize Jesus' life of light and love. Amen.

Sunday, March 15

Fourth Sunday of Lent

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm: 23 (5)

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

Gospel: John 9:1-41



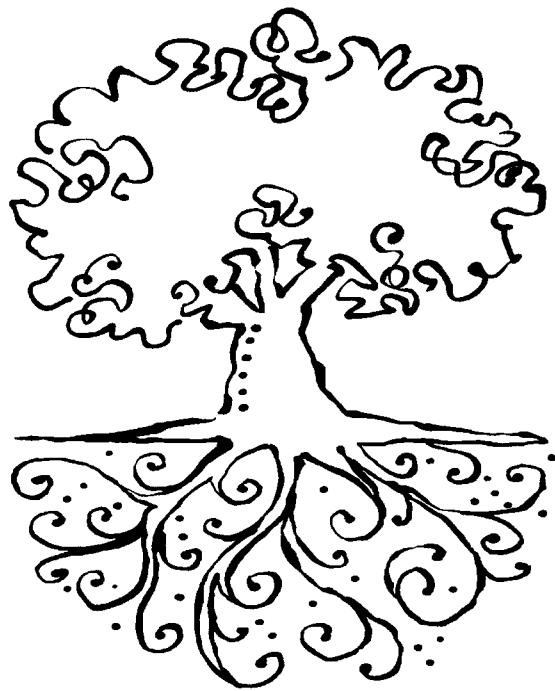
Monday, March 16

Submitted by: A Child of God

Verse: Psalm 146:8

The LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are weighed down. The LORD loves the godly. (New Living Translation)

Reflection:



Praise the Lord!

“The Lord” is repeated three times in this one verse. It jumps right off the page. It’s hard to miss seeing it. I believe this verse is ultimately about our heart and His presence in our lives.

The Lord opens the eyes of hearts to spiritual blindness. Spiritual sight can be found through the saving message of the Gospel. The Lord speaks to the hearts of the blind what is true. Jesus is the Lord of the Gospel.

When we are weighed down with life’s struggles, His peace, that is divine and holy, rests on our heart and on our emotions. His presence is essential in our lives, and His presence is felt in our hearts. We can look to Him and let the joy of the Lord be our strength.

How can we live a godly life that God loves? One certain way is through daily prayer of thanksgiving to God. The impact of this helps to keep us continually mindful that we are walking in His presence and in His ways which contribute to living a godly life. It’s about our transformed hearts and renewed minds being centered on God.

May we fix our eyes on the Lord so that we never miss seeing Him!



Here's my heart, Lord. Speak what is true. Here's my life, Lord.
Speak what is true. Amen.

Tuesday, March 17

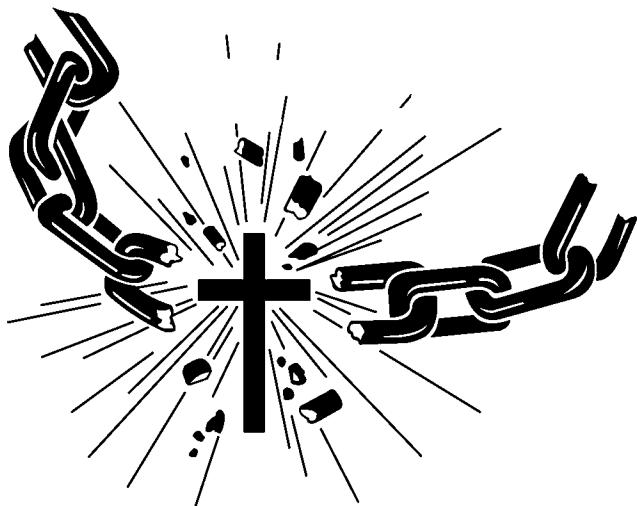
Submitted by: Dan Fagan

Verse: John 16:33

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world".

(New International Version)

Reflection:



This is the final verse of Chapter 16 of John. I recommend that we read the entire chapter to get a better feel and understanding of this verse. The chapter deals with a conversation that Jesus had with his disciples during the Last Supper. He wanted them (and us) to understand that believing, having faith, and trusting God does not

mean we will live peaceful lives. In fact, quite the contrary will likely occur. We will suffer, and possibly persecuted for our beliefs. Life will be difficult and painful. What HE wants us to understand is that this mortal life is not an easy one, nor the important one. What truly matters is to have faith, trust, and belief in God and that it is the life after this one that matters – the eternal life, the one where true peace is attained and suffering ends. That is the goal for which we should strive. Jesus lived a mortal life and overcame the temptations of sin. He suffered, died, and overcame death to rejoin God in everlasting peace and life. THAT is what awaits us – IF we believe, have faith, and trust in God.

Wednesday, March 18 Submitted by: Miranda Mullins

Verse: Matthew 9:28-30

When He reached the house and went in, the blind men came to Him, and Jesus said to them, Do you believe that I am able to do this? They said to Him, Yes, Lord.

Then He touched their eyes, saying, According to your faith and trust and reliance [on the power invested in Me] be it done to you; And their eyes were opened. And Jesus earnestly and sternly charged them, See that you let no one know about this.

(The Everyday Life Bible, Amplified Version)

Reflection:

Can you image what different lives these blind men would have had if they would have doubted that Jesus could restore their sight? Can you imagine living in Jesus' time; hearing about these miracles, even seeing them for yourself? If you needed a miracle, knowing Jesus can do them, would you believe He would do it for you, or would you doubt? I'm totally guilty of this. I 100% believe that God can cure cancer, restore a brain injury and heal a severed spinal cord. But when it comes to my broken relationship with a family member, I can't see it. Maybe that's because it's not about the fact that Jesus/God CAN do miracles, it's about the fact that my lack of faith in that miracle for myself, is the problem. You see those blind men were not healed because Jesus is a miracle worker. They were healed because they said YES LORD. Their FAITH restored their sight. That's a hard pill to swallow. Why is it so easy to believe in someone else's miracle but not for our own? We are all God's children and He loves us all the same. He wants the very best for all of us. My friend once told me when doubt enters in, to pray this prayer, "I believe LORD, help my unbelief."

Then there's verse 30. He tells the people not to tell anyone of this miracle. This reminds me that He doesn't want us to seek Him for what He can do for us. We are to seek his face not his hand.

There's so much in these 3 short verses. I think that when we become so focused on the fact that our miracle hasn't happened yet; that's when we lose faith. Unfortunately, it will happen in Gods time and not our own and we don't get to know why or when. However, if we keep our eyes fixed on God and his love for us, that's when we're reminded that he **is** taking care of us, he **is** working. There's no need to doubt or worry. It's easier for me to keep my faith when I hold on to Gods love for me.



God I know you love me. I believe you are a miracle worker. When doubt enters in, help my unbelief. Help me to turn my focus to you. Help me to remember that you know better than me and that your timing is perfect. Help me to keep my faith strong so that I do not miss out on the miracle you have for my life. Thank you Lord for always showing up for me. I love you Lord. In Jesus' name I pray, AMEN.

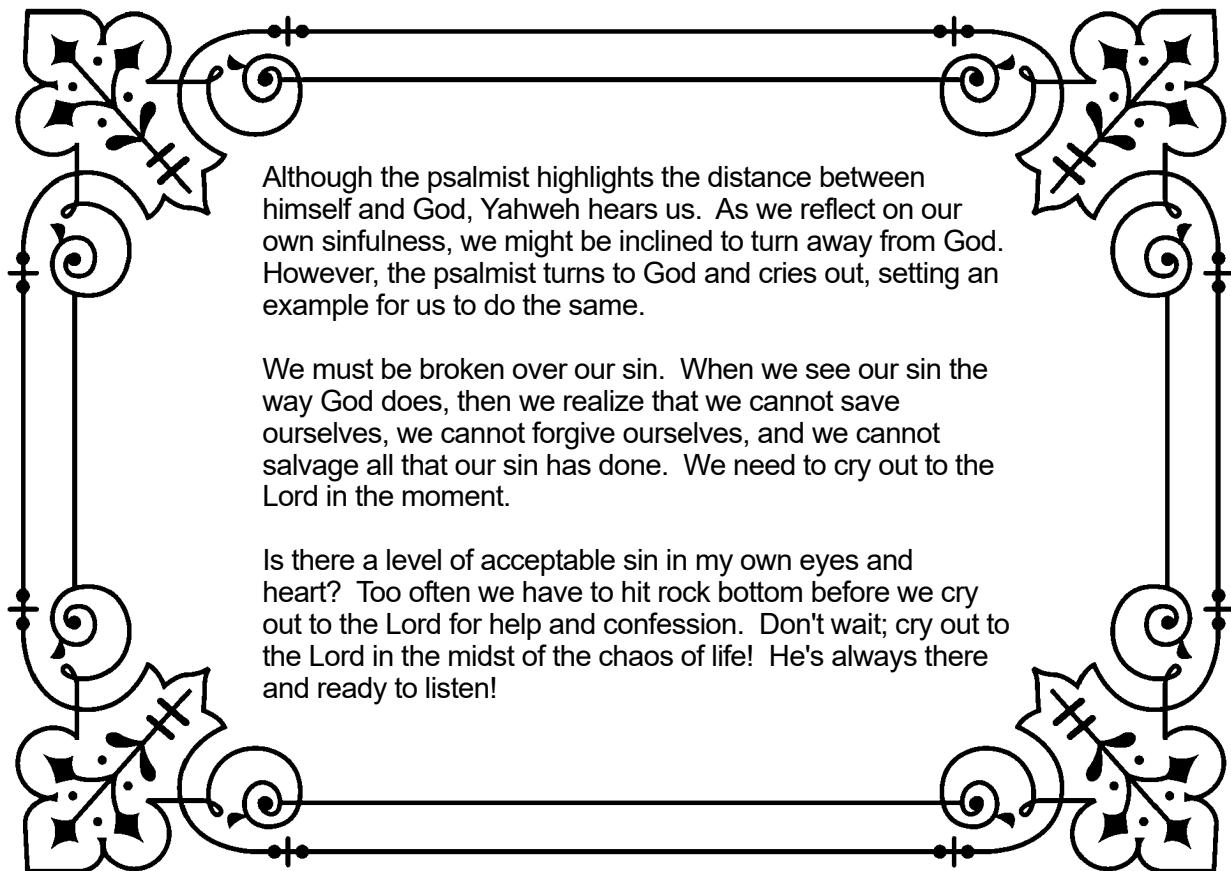
Thursday, March 19

Submitted by: Kim Heidel

Verse: Psalm 130:1-2

"Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry." (New International Version Application Bible)

Reflection:



Although the psalmist highlights the distance between himself and God, Yahweh hears us. As we reflect on our own sinfulness, we might be inclined to turn away from God. However, the psalmist turns to God and cries out, setting an example for us to do the same.

We must be broken over our sin. When we see our sin the way God does, then we realize that we cannot save ourselves, we cannot forgive ourselves, and we cannot salvage all that our sin has done. We need to cry out to the Lord in the moment.

Is there a level of acceptable sin in my own eyes and heart? Too often we have to hit rock bottom before we cry out to the Lord for help and confession. Don't wait; cry out to the Lord in the midst of the chaos of life! He's always there and ready to listen!



Dear Lord, help me cry out to you especially, when I sin. You know my heart and my thoughts. Help me to not be okay with the things you are not okay with in my life. Help me to be intolerant of my own sin. Thank you for always hearing me and for loving me and forgiving me! Amen.

Friday, March 20

Submitted by: Barb Fields

Verse: Romans 8:6

Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them—living and breathing God! Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. (The Message)

Reflection:

Here God is telling me that I simply need to allow God's Spirit to live in me. In other words, hand the reins over to God. For me, that is not so easy. I like to feel like I have control over my situations. I don't like relying on someone else and admittedly, I struggle with the idea of asking God to take over. It almost feels like failure or inadequacy on my part even though I know that it is my own insecurity I'm trying to manage. I have learned to hand over bigger parts of my life to God lately. But, when it comes to planning my life, I still struggle.

Have you heard the popular song by Carrie Underwood, "Jesus, Take the Wheel"? The chorus goes something like this:

 *Jesus take the wheel... Take it from my hands. 'Cause I can't do this on my own.
I'm letting go. So give me one more chance. Save me from this road I'm on...
Jesus take the wheel.*

These words are sung in desperation by someone at the end of their rope. But, It doesn't have to be that way. We don't have to wait until the world is falling apart to hand over the wheel to God...

I have learned much from my young grandkids. Their faith is simple and unadulterated. They sing their prayer before meals and remind us if/when we forget. Each of them has asked me questions about God like, "Does God like strawberries?" Or, "Does God know who I am?" Oh, how I pray that their pure faith is never extinguished in those precious little hearts.

And I pray that I could simply trust like they do with no expectations, no conditions and no concern.



Dear Father, why do I always think I can handle everything on my own? I should know by now that it doesn't work that way. You are there for me at every moment of the day. Yet, I try to handle it all on my own and fail miserably when I do. Help me release that stronghold on control. I know it is really yours anyway. In all these things, I pray, Amen.

Saturday, March 21

Submitted by: Sherry Walters

Verse: Hebrews 11:1

"Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see".

(New International Version)

Reflection:

This is one of my favorite verses. When I was a child, I just knew Santa Claus would bring me gifts on Christmas Eve. I didn't see him bring them, but I knew he would! Then Christmas morning I woke up to lots of my favorite things that I had requested. His character never disappointed me!

Faith, to me is kind of like Santa, only it's not Santa, it's Jesus. God's character makes promises. He is who He says he is. Can I see Him... not really, but then again, yes I can. I can see him in His gifts to me each day in my very life. His love is something I know I can count on, even when others fail me. I can see him in the gifts and talents he has given me to use to His glory: my family and friends, all of the tangible "things" in my life, the beauty of the earth, right down to the very air I breathe. He brings me peace and I know He is the only place I can find peace. He hears my prayers and answers every one, maybe not quite as I want, or as quickly as I want, but He does answer my prayers! I absolutely know He is always there. Santa let me down when I grew to adulthood. I know Jesus is ever present in my life and will never let me down.

I have been through things in life that have shaken me to the core of my being. My son almost died. Scary events have happened out of the blue. Medical events and illnesses of people I have loved have shown me another side that I never knew existed and caused me great sadness and distress. But, we know that all of these things are "life" and we all go through many of the same things.

For my friends who are agnostic, or flat out say there is NO God; how do they survive the trauma? Where do they go for comfort and assurance? Where do they find a person or a place that is available and will always be available? We have to believe and put our trust in the only one who **will always** be there. We may not see His face, but if we believe, we **will** feel His presence!

I am going to go out on a limb and tell a story that I have told few people privately, let alone publicly. I rarely share this story because I know I will get looks like they think I am crazy. And, haven't we all had moments where people think we are "crazy"?

When my son was in the hospital and on life support, things were looking grim. A couple of doctors were implying that we needed to be making a "decision" (as in pulling the plug). Can you imagine how upset I was? I posted what was going on Facebook. I'm not sure why. Maybe I was looking for support. To my surprise around 1000 people responded that they were praying for him. I'm grateful and blessed to have a lot of friends, but I never dreamed I would receive this kind of response. I even had many people messaging me daily to see if there was any change.



Ok, here goes what some would term as “crazy”. Things were looking bad with my boy. I always got to the hospital very early, even before daylight. One morning I was on Houston Road enroute to the hospital. I was at a stoplight and looked to the sky, praying non-stop as I did. I saw a face in the heavens. I couldn’t make out all features, except for the eyes, very kind and loving eyes. Then the middle part of the face was blank. There was kind of a nod, as if it were to say yes. Along with the nod was a beautiful and brilliant smile. It quickly faded away along with all of the face. This whole thing lasted maybe 10 seconds. I even wondered myself if I was hallucinating. I firmly believe that **it was** Jesus, and I will always believe that it was. He gave me a sign that everything was going to be ok.

When I arrived to the parking lot and got out of my car, I saw a rainbow. It wasn’t even fully daylight, but, there it was. *“How could that be?”* Not only did I see it, but another person got out of his car and asked, “How can there be a rainbow in the dark?” I said to the man, “Do you see that too?” He said, “yes”.

I went into the hospital and my boy had suddenly taken a turn for the better. He was finally breathing on his own. Of course the ventilator was still in place until the breathing tube could be removed. To those nay-sayers and those who question my sanity, I **do** understand. I even have the picture of the rainbow on my phone. **YES I DO!** My faith, along with the prayers of many, and the peace that Jesus had filled my soul with, brought us all through!

God assures we believers that He will always be with us. He gives us the promise that living our life with Him in the center, the day we depart this life we will be with Him in Heaven. His promises always materialize when we demonstrate true faith!

To the nonbelievers... where do you go for comfort and assurance and know there is one who will always have your back?

This was a long (almost a novel) and very personal story I have told, to just a handful of people before now. It is a devotion written about my story of faith (with more I carry inside). It is my profession of faith that I carry deep within my being. So, the sometime silliness you see on the outside of me, is not the only part of me.

Dear Father in Heaven, you have brought me through so much in my life. I know I could never have survived many of my trials without my faith in you and the assurance you have given me so many times that you will never leave me; and you never have! It is my prayer that the many who share stories like mine will not be afraid to make them public as a witness to their faith and perhaps lead others to a faith of assurance and comfort. I thank you for your faithfulness to me, even though I know I have fallen short of the person you have intended me to be. In Jesus’ Name I pray. Amen.



Sunday, March 22

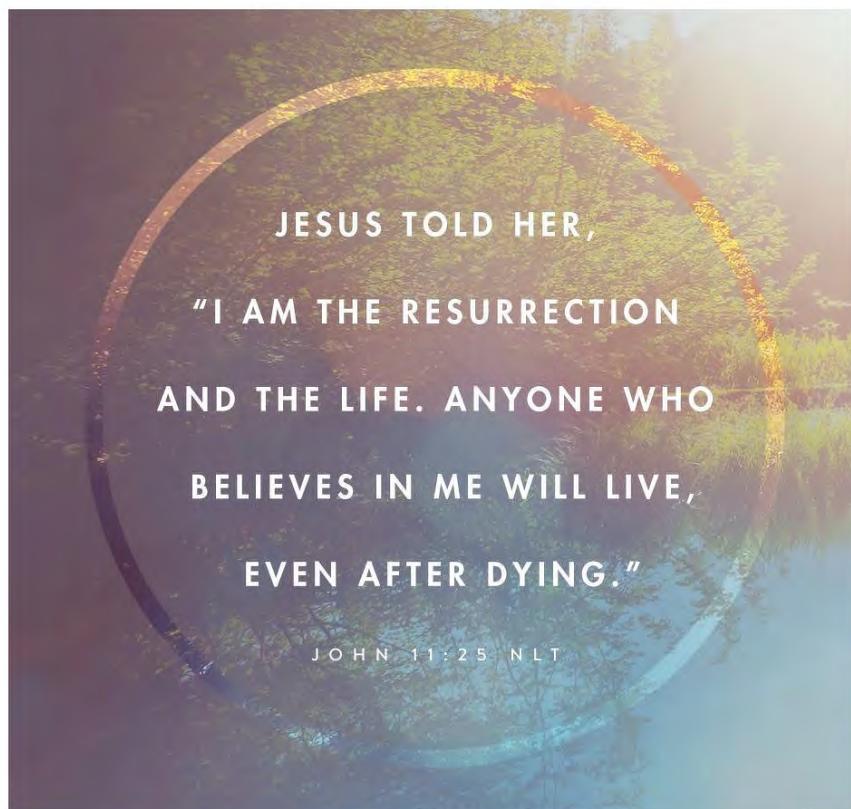
Fifth Sunday of Lent

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm: 130 (5)

Second Reading: Romans 8:6-11

Gospel: John 11:1-15



Monday, March 23

Submitted by: anonymous

Verse: John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (Eastern Standard Version)

Reflection:

I am pretty sure you have heard or read this verse before. In fact, I'm guessing you have seen it pop up in all kinds of places: like a billboard on the side of a road, or a sign held up at a sports event or show. It makes so many appearances all over the world that the words are not even needed. We just see "JOHN 3:16" waving above the field of corn or held above the heads of people in their seats. I have seen it written on walls, bathroom doors, and even sidewalks. It is everywhere.

But I wonder how many people really think about what this verse is promising. Do they know what that verse says? Do you know it? Read this verse (above) now.

I have heard it said that this verse provides the entire Gospel in a nutshell.

- * God loves us so much.
- * He gave us His only Son Jesus.
- * We just believe in Him.
- * Then we will have eternal life!

It sounds so simple, yet we find ways to complicate it or lose it in the busyness of our lives. It might be easy to say, but do we really commit our lives to following and believing in Jesus? If so, that requires more than holding up a sign or painting John 3:16 on a wall. It requires commitment and action to worship God, to serve and help others, to read God's word in the Bible and to love God with all our heart, soul and mind.

Are you ready to take that step and commit your heart, soul and mind to God?



Heavenly Father, I truly do love Jesus and believe in Him. I believe that you will protect me so that I will not perish but have eternal life with you.
Amen.

Tuesday, March 24

Submitted by: Laura Mitchell

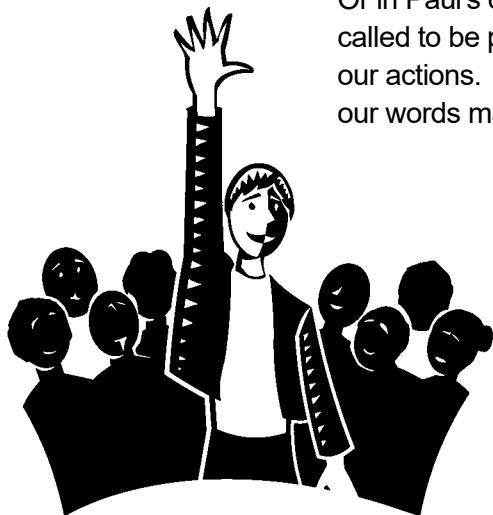
Verse: Acts 24:12

My accusers did not find me arguing with anyone at the temple, or stirring up a crowd in the synagogues or anywhere else in the city. (New international version)

Reflection:

Paul was accused of causing riots among the Jews all over the world. He was accused of trying to desecrate the Temple. Paul's preaching of the Gospel was actually peaceful. Even though his preaching was peaceful, it was passionate. So much so, that it was enough to scare the Jewish elders into lying to get him arrested. When Paul was defending himself to Felix, it was in a reserved manner. Paul's defense wasn't dramatic, but it was full of heart and convincing. Felix granted him permission to have his friends visit him and care for him. Actions can speak louder than words.

Or in Paul's case, his actions amplified his words. Not all of us are called to be preachers. However, we can all preach the Gospel through our actions. As Christians we are most powerful when our actions and our words match.



Heavenly Father, help us to live our lives in a way that shows the world we are living as a reflection of You. Amen.

Wednesday, March 25

Submitted by: Julie and Steve
Petterson

Verse: Romans 8:28

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”. (English Standard Version)

Reflection:



It's easy to trust God when things are going smoothly without glitches or road bumps in your life. But when there are difficult times, we may question God as to why He lets bad things happen. In Kelly Clarkson's hit song "Stronger", some lines of the song include: "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger, stand a little taller, makes you a fighter, and footsteps even lighter."

Becoming stronger and more resilient doesn't have to come from situations that we feel might "kill us". When we go through any difficulty in life, we learn through God's help as he develops us, making us stronger.

In Romans, God's promise of Hope assures us that He is always with us. He does not **let** bad things happen. He is with us always, making the best and good out of all we experience.



Dear God we Love you. Help us to remember your promise of Hope.
Let us be patient in trusting your perfectly designed plan for each of us.
Amen.

Thursday, March 26

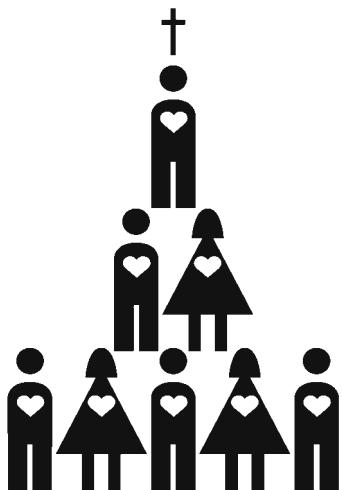
Submitted by: Gina Billiter

Verse: Colossians 3:14

And overall these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.

(New International Version)

Reflection:



If we read Colossians 3, verses 12-14, it mentions to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. It says to bear with each other and forgive one another, but above all the virtues, put on LOVE.

As I look around our world today, it seems I see too much hate instead of love. Even though we might feel what we fight for is good and virtuous, sometimes we might lack love in how we are responding. This verse tells us love is our greatest virtue, above all others.

No matter our differences of what we do or don't agree on, we should always lead with love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (New International Version)

Jesus loved us enough to take the punishment for our sins to the cross and he died for us. "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends." John 15:13 (New International Version) I believe this is the kind of love God intends for us to lead our daily lives.

Before we react, share an ugly meme, or argue with our friends, let's always think how we can lead with the example of love Christ has shown us.



Heavenly Father, please help me to lead with love. There are times I might get angry, disagree, have hurt feelings, and instead of me reacting with my feelings at that moment, please help me remember to clothe myself in love first. Help me lead with love so that I might be an example of your love to others around me.

Amen.

Friday, March 27

Submitted by: Paul Kegley

Verse: 1 John 1:7

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us of all sin. (New International Version)

Reflection:



When I hear this verse, I think it means doing what God would want us to be doing and to treat others the way that we would want to be treated. For example: If our friend has a peanut allergy, we shouldn't show up to the Superbowl party with food that contains peanuts! As much as we want to stay in the light, we are sometimes going to get off track and make mistakes, whether we notice them or not. Jesus desires us to walk with him even when we make mistakes. Walking in the light doesn't mean being perfect, but it does mean trying our best. It means being honest with God and other people about our mistakes and asking for help and forgiveness.

This verse also talks about fellowship, which means doing more than just reading our Bible or watching church on TV. Fellowship means showing up and contributing to our church family by helping with things at church like being an acolyte or a communion assistant, cooking breakfast, packing Christmas boxes, stocking the food pantry, and the quilting ministry.

Before I took first communion, I thought it was just about eating and drinking stuff and sitting back down. But, I have learned that it has more to do with us being honest and having a relationship with God and apologizing for things we have done, or things we might not even know we have done that are offensive to God or other people. I am thankful that I know that God forgives me and loves me because it helps me to try to walk in the light more often.



Dear God, Thank you for forgiving us when we mess up. Help us to walk in the light with you and with others more often. Help us get out of our comfort zone and volunteer more often, even when it feels tough. Amen.

Saturday, March 28

Submitted by: an early riser

Verse: Lamentations 3:23

The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

(English Standard Version)

Reflection:



Thinking about this verse, "Great is thy Faithfulness" came to my mind. A beautiful hymn that stirs the soul every time I sing or hear it. Then other songs started popping into my mind, many of which are sung by Christian singers. But there are also many other songs using that theme of a new dawn or a new day. I have no way of knowing if any of those were influenced by the Bible or God's Love. But it does seem to be an inherent human understanding as the morning light brings a newness of spirit or a chance to start again.

I write this morning while the sun is shining and it is bitterly cold outside. I enjoy the warmth of my coffee, and my sweater. I look out the window and see 2 deer making their way through the woods. They carefully and slowly step through the snow as they make their way to the creek for some water. What a beautiful scene I just witnessed from the warmth of my home...and I

realize God has created this beautiful world for me and you. We just need to acknowledge His amazing and never-ending love.

Unfortunately, I know there are too many times that I totally miss God's love. He offers love and mercy to me to enjoy every single day, and I ignore those gifts too often. Life just gets too busy with family or job responsibilities that demand our attention. Before, I know it, I am ignoring God's love messages most of the time and I lose sight of His faithfulness to me because of my unfaithfulness to Him.

Life continues. But I am missing so much of the best part because I have stopped paying attention to God. (It is almost like eating the meal but missing the dessert.) However, this verse reminds me that God's Love never leaves, so I can re-open that door anytime. How GREAT is His faithfulness!



Dear Heavenly Father, I know that your love never ceases no matter how often I forget to love and praise you. I will watch as your merciful love blesses my life in so many and various ways. How great is your faithfulness every single day. Amen.

Palm Sunday, March 29

Submitted by: Toni Stelle

Verse: Matthew 21:10-11

“And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, “Who is this?” And the crowds said, “This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee.” (English Standard Version)

Reflection:

A WELCOME FIT FOR A KING!



Picture this: You are a big football fan or soccer fan. You are attending a pro football game or pro soccer match featuring your favorite team. Your team enters the packed stadium to loud and enthusiastic cheers and praise! Or, imagine that you are a huge fan of a very popular singer songwriter, or maybe a rock band. You've been lucky enough to go to one of their sold-out concerts. The moment that person or group steps out on to the stage they are greeted with wild applause and approval!

Now compare this to Matthew's account of Jesus' triumphal entry through the gate and streets of Jerusalem. To paraphrase today's scripture verse... "the whole city was stirred up, in an uproar, about this prophet Jesus, from Nazareth." Old Testament prophecy is being fulfilled at this moment. The prophet Zechariah wrote, "Rejoice greatly, O people of Zion! Behold your King is coming to you!" (Zech 9:9) Those that witnessed Jesus' grand entrance saw devoted followers laying down palm branches and cloaks, as he rode into the city on a donkey. The symbolism of these images vividly portrays the kingship of Jesus, and that he has come to rule in peace and with humility. Matthew 21: 9 described it this way, Jesus was in the center of the procession, and the people all around him were shouting, "Praise God for the Son of David! (Hosanna!) Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God in the highest heaven!"

Yet, not everyone was convinced. There was also division in the city. While many recognized Jesus for who he truly is, the Messiah, others had a different perception of Jesus. Some people were perhaps curious or confused. They may have thought of Jesus as just a popular figure... aka celebrity. Then there were the political and religious authorities. They saw Jesus as a threat to their own power, and they rejected him. A few days later, a majority of these same crowds would desert Jesus; giving in to political and popular pressure. Let us be reminded of the fickle, here today-gone tomorrow, kind of admiration that only people and things of this world can offer.

Instead, let's celebrate with confidence that our King Jesus, our Savior, was and forever will be triumphant over sin and death! Today, live for Jesus, experience his Passion for you, and know that he cares for you as one of his dear children.



Lord, we praise you and thank you for ALL you have done for us. Amen.

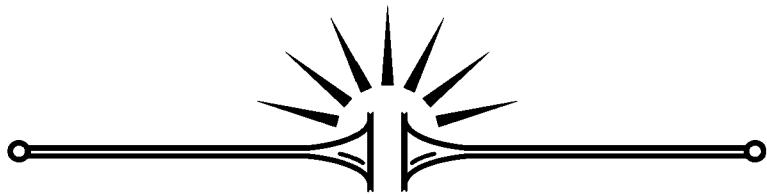
Monday, March 30

Submitted by: a friend

Verse: 1 Corinthians 1:27-29

But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (English Standard Version)

Reflection:



Wow is my reaction when I read this passage. God really knows how to put me in my place. He specifically chose the foolish and weak, the low and despised people in the world to carry His message to the world. I don't know about you, but I don't like to think of myself as any of those things. So what am I missing?

It is so easy to get wrapped up in my own tiny sliver of the world. I focus on my family, my friends, and my church. The rest of the world fades into the background too easily as my life seems full. I like to believe I am concerned and dedicated to my neighbors in need. I sign up to help with various causes and try to make a difference. But, after reading this verse, I know I am guilty of believing I am the one who is strong and smart and just. But, let's read this again.

Here is this verse from The Message Bible: *"Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies"? That makes it quite clear that none of you can get by with blowing your own horn before God. Everything that we have—right thinking and right living, a clean slate and a fresh start—comes from God by way of Jesus Christ..."*

WOW! It doesn't matter how hard I try, if I don't listen to God. I need to stop tooting my own trumpet and play my trumpet for God. It is that simple. I am nothing without God.



Heavenly Father, you are God and you provide all that I need in life. All my achievements are yours alone. I praise you. Amen.

Tuesday, March 31

Submitted by: Claire Gates

Verse: Psalm 70:1

Hasten, O God, to save me; come quickly, Lord, to help me.

(New International Version)

Reflection:

For the director of music. Of David. A petition.

The year 2026 has just begun, and with the trials of the last few years, many have struggled through life and have started to give up hope for a better life. But, there is a way to a better life, and that better life is in God. Back when Jesus walked the Earth, Christians were oppressed by the Roman Empire. They were persecuted for their beliefs and feared that they could not be saved. A great deal has changed in two thousand years.

Christianity is now widespread in the United States of America, and many follow the teachings of God. So, why is it that humanity feels so helpless? The truth is that helplessness is something we all experience, and we often push back against this helplessness. We are so intent on showing our independence that we often hurt ourselves in the process. Therefore, we should remember that the only one who can save us is the Lord.

In David's time of need, he called out to the Lord to send help to him, stop his enemies, and bring joy to his friends. God is always there for us, whether we can feel His presence or not. It is His presence that brings beauty into the world and helps give it meaning. I am aware that the world often has troubles going on, but by looking at the blue sky and the willowy clouds, as well as the green fields and the puffed-up dandelions, I know that God is taking care of me. Acknowledging the presence of a greater being can be one of the hardest things that anyone can do. We want to believe that we can control everything, but the truth is, few things are truly in our control. He will help guide us onto the right path; the journey that you were destined to take with Him.



God, come to save me from my enemies and guide me on my journey through life. Know that I need You each and every hour. The world cannot satisfy my needs or bring me to salvation. Only You can heal my heart and help my soul. Amen.

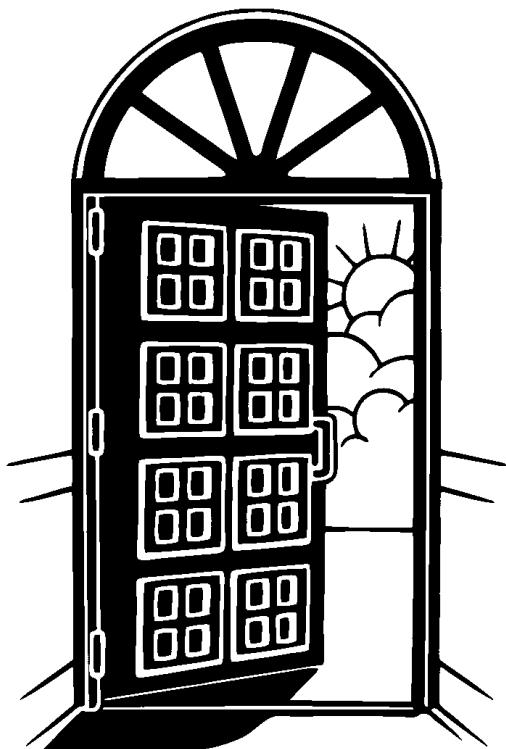
Wednesday, April 1

Submitted by: Sara Johns

Verse: John 12:27

"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour." (New International Version)

Reflection:



People love shortcuts. We read articles on how to make meals faster. We watch videos of "life hacks" meant to help us clean less. We try to find a route that no one else is using so we can drive to our destination more quickly. Sometimes, it's a win and dinner is on the table in half the time. But, sometimes we wish that we just would have followed the original directions as we sit in traffic in a neighborhood we didn't mean to go to.

Jesus knew there was no shortcut. He needed to fulfill God's plan by making the ultimate sacrifice on that first Good Friday. Despite the path not being clear and easy, He knew He had to move forward.

There is also no shortcut to Heaven for us. Our minds and souls will not always be at ease in this life. But, just because there is no shortcut, it doesn't mean that God is leaving us on our own to struggle. When we are looking for light in the dark times, we can turn back to Him in prayer, asking for understanding, comfort and more. We can look to his Word for guidance. Our church, our Pastors, and fellow Christians can help us as we walk through the tough times. As Jesus said later in chapter 12 of John, "I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness." We may not always be able to see the path forward easily, but we all can live secure in the knowledge that our destination in Heaven is ready and waiting for us - no shortcuts needed.

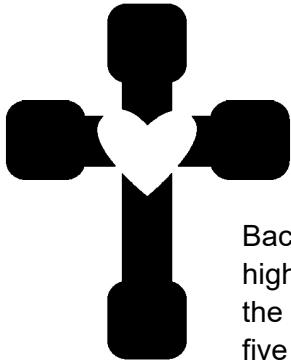
Maundy Thursday, April 2

Submitted by: Liz Huss

Verse: John 13:34

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another." (Revised Standard Version)

Reflection:



Back in English class in junior high school (when it was still called junior high school), we got an assignment requiring us to clip an article out of the local newspaper (yep!) and evaluate it. We had to determine the five W's as well as the H of the article. Who, what, when, where, why, and how. Looking at the Bible verse above, it's pretty simple to come up with the five W's. It's the H that's not so easy. Maybe you have a disrespectful boss or a neighbor who makes too much noise while you're trying to sleep. How can you love people who make it seemingly impossible?

I thought of this question for a bit, then remembered the Bible is chock-full of people whom Jesus loved without question even while others rejected them. He healed the woman who bled for twelve years and called her daughter, broke bread with rich tax collector Zaccheus, healed ten lepers, and talked with kindness to the Samaritan woman at the well, just to name a few. Jesus got past the "how" question... I wonder sometimes whether the "how" question even occurred to Him. Probably not. He simply loved without hesitation. Something more to think about in this season of Lent.



Dear Lord, Help us to do Your will by loving one another without hesitation. Amen.

Good Friday, April 3

Submitted by: Barb Fields

Verse: John 19:30

When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. (English Standard Version)

Reflection:



I have read this verse and other verses of the Good Friday story every year for years. I have read it in all four Gospel narratives and in many different Bible versions... all in an effort to read something new or understand something I hadn't thought about before. Yet, I still struggle. This story is one of the most well-known in the world and thousands of sermons, papers and devotions have been written on this very passage.

This latest reading is above, and I am caught by the final scene that seems so quiet and subdued in the words above. Not long before, Jesus was praised and worshiped with palm branches as He entered Jerusalem's city gates. Not long after that, He holds the Last Supper with his friends, His disciples. He then prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane where he asks God if this is His will. Now totally understanding His fate, Jesus was arrested, brought before Pilate and today on Good Friday, He suffered an incredibly painful form of death.

As I read this again, I notice that Jesus is not shouting or screaming to be released. He is not indignant or begging for sympathy. Jesus even takes time to provide for His mother's care after he is gone.

Once everything is accomplished, Jesus receives a drink of the sour wine and simply says, "It is finished" and gives up His spirit. Jesus is dead.

No final demands or prophetic words. Jesus died knowing He had fulfilled His Father's plan. He was not concerned about Himself. He was God's instrument and knew why He was here. He had led the world to this moment and bore God's plan with no anger, tears or fear. I have been told Jesus is 100% human and 100% God. I cannot fully understand this and that's OK. That carries me through in all times. I believe the Gospel and I believe in you Jesus.



Dearest Jesus, thank you for loving me so much that you would die for my sins. I can't begin to understand the depth of that kind of love. But, I do feel your love and I do try to show others that love by the way I live my life. Yes, I fall short too often. Please forgive my weaknesses. Amen.

Holy Saturday, April 4 Submitted by: Jennifer Kegley

Verse: Ezekiel 36:27-28

"And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your ancestors, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God." (New International Version)

Reflection:

Resting in God's Spirit Amidst Life's Busyness

The Business of Modern Life

In our world today, busyness is often worn like a badge of honor. Calendars overflow with commitments, screens demand constant attention, and the pressure to perform—to excel at work, parenting, community involvement, and even spirituality—feels relentless. Our days blur into a cascade of tasks and noise, leaving little room for quiet or reflection. This “busy-ness” can feel productive, but often it is a distraction from what truly nourishes us. It fills time, but empties the soul.

What Does God Actually Ask of Us?

God's call, as echoed through Ezekiel's promise, is surprisingly simple yet profound: To walk in His statutes, to obey His rules, to dwell in His presence as His people. In essence, God asks us to live in relationship—with Him and with others—in ways marked by love, obedience, and belonging. It's about a heart aligned with His Spirit, not merely a checklist of duties. Part of this calling is learning to discern what is truly good and beautiful in life. Our culture often pushes us to strive for excellence in everything, but God invites us to understand that striving itself is good only when rooted in the right context—when it serves His purposes, nurtures our well-being, and reflects His love. Striving for excellence becomes burdensome when it's disconnected from rest, grace, and the Spirit's guidance. The challenge is to pursue excellence without losing sight of what really matters—our relationship with God, our peace, and our care for others. But, here's the challenge: This is not about frantic doing. It's about being—being led by the Spirit, resting in His guidance, allowing Him to shape us from the inside out.

Why Is This So Difficult?

Because living this way runs counter to the rhythm of our culture. We are trained to hustle, not rest. We seek control, but God asks surrender. We crave productivity, but God offers presence. We measure worth by achievement, but God measures by faithfulness and love. The internal work of yielding to God's Spirit demands vulnerability, patience, and a countercultural slowing down. It is easier to keep moving than to stop and listen.

Modeling This to Ourselves and Others

To ourselves:

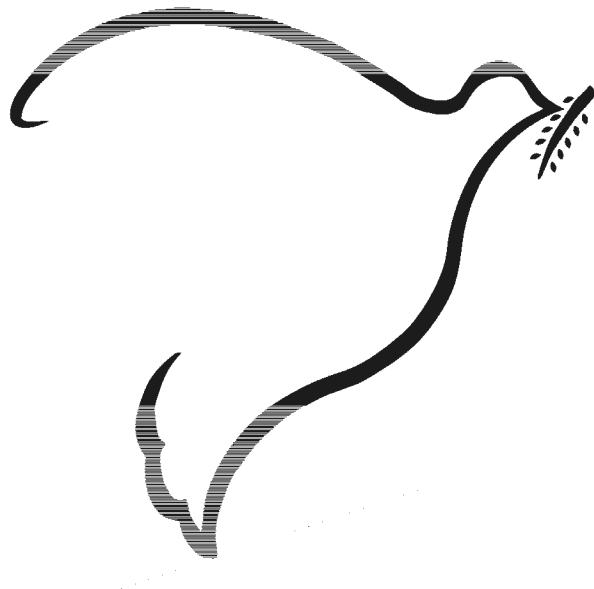
Carve intentional spaces of silence and rest—daily or weekly—that invite God’s Spirit to renew us. Practice gentleness with your own limits and failures; rest is a discipline, not a reward. Reflect regularly on what truly matters beyond to-do lists and accomplishments.

To others:

Lead by example—show that rest and surrender are strengths, not weaknesses. Encourage honest conversations about the struggles with busyness and the desire for deeper connection. Create community rhythms that value presence over performance.

A Closing Thought

Holy Saturday reminds us that waiting and resting are not signs of weakness but sacred acts of trust. God’s Spirit is at work in the quiet spaces, preparing us for resurrection—new life that flows not from our efforts but from His faithful presence within us.



God, in the noise and rush of life, please teach me to stop, listen, and follow Your gentle lead. Help me embrace rest as a holy practice and surrender control to You. May my life reflect Your peace and presence, drawing others into Your grace. Amen.

Easter Sunday, April Submitted by: Pastor Blair Fields

Verse: Matthew 28:5-7

The angel spoke to the women: “There is nothing to fear here. I know you’re looking for Jesus, the One they nailed to the cross. He is not here. He was raised, just as he said. Come and look at the place where he was placed. “Now, get on your way quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He is risen from the dead. He is going on ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there.’ That’s the message.”

(The Message)

Reflection:

During the snowstorm Fern in January, a friend sent me a meme which said: “The weather man says a storm is coming. Everybody panics & gets prepared. The preacher says Jesus is coming & nobody moves. Let that sink in for a minute.”

Now that you let it sink in a bit, we have to ask this: What difference does the Resurrection News make in our living? Do we believe what we proclaim: that Jesus is risen from the grave? Do we believe that, yes, he will come again? Does that make a difference in how we live?

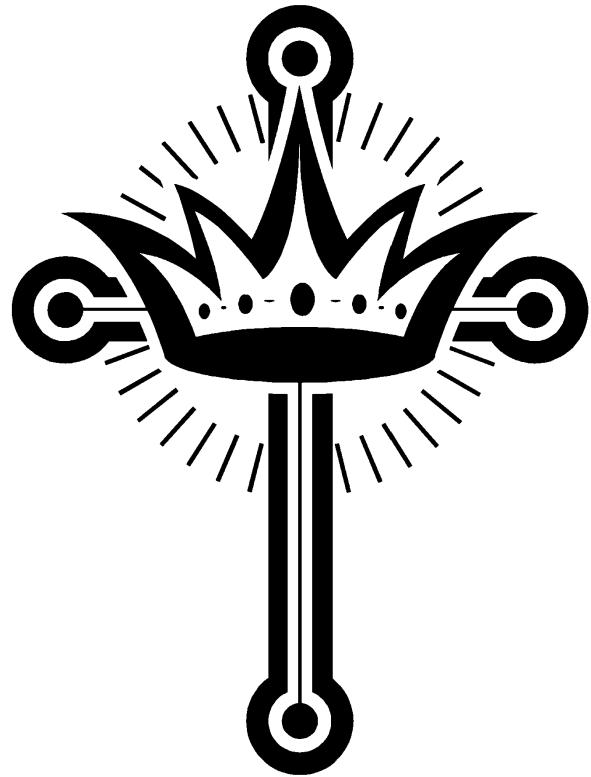
In the Gospels, many are told, “do not fear.” When the women went to the tomb and found it empty, they were told that ‘there is nothing to fear here.’ Did they forget that Jesus had told them all that he would be killed and from the grave that he would rise again? Did they fear because they knew how much this would change the world, because he actually did what he said he was going to do?

When I was a kid, we got snowed in from a huge snowstorm that hit Fancy Gap in Virginia. We were at my Aunt’s house when the storm hit. We were stuck in that house for over a week. We actually were running out of food, and for my cousin Michael and me, growing 11-year-old boys, otherwise known as eating machines and a handful of trouble, my mom and aunt had to have been panicking. On that two lane ridge road in the mountains, there were 5-and 6 foot snow drifts – no way to get to the store! It was so bad that my mom had to finally leave the confines of that house and walk to a store. She told me that it was probably not very smart to do that, but we were out of food and something had to be done. I’ve never asked her how she was able to overcome the fear of that which she had to do, but I’m sure she was motivated by her faith and her desire to not have us starve. But I think at some point she had to have heard the words of Jesus and the angels, “Do not fear.” Because of what she did, we survived!

(continued)

Because of Jesus we too shall live! That faith that he gave his people through his saving action has changed the world. And throughout history there are millions of stories of the difference that has made for those who have believed and proclaimed the news that He is Risen! I know this because I have walked with thousands of people whose lives and hearts have been changed, who live to love God with all their heart, and to love their neighbors as they love themselves. They have made a difference in the world in which they live. They are disciples of the Risen one.

Behind all of the celebrations we participate in on this day, let us not forget why we celebrate. The news is earth shattering for the world – and it is earth shattering for us. Jesus lived, died and rose from the grave for you – the crown of his creation, that you would have life and be made a new creation in his mercy. Are you MOVING yet??? He is Risen! He is Risen indeed! May God bless you with his love today and all days! Amen.



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