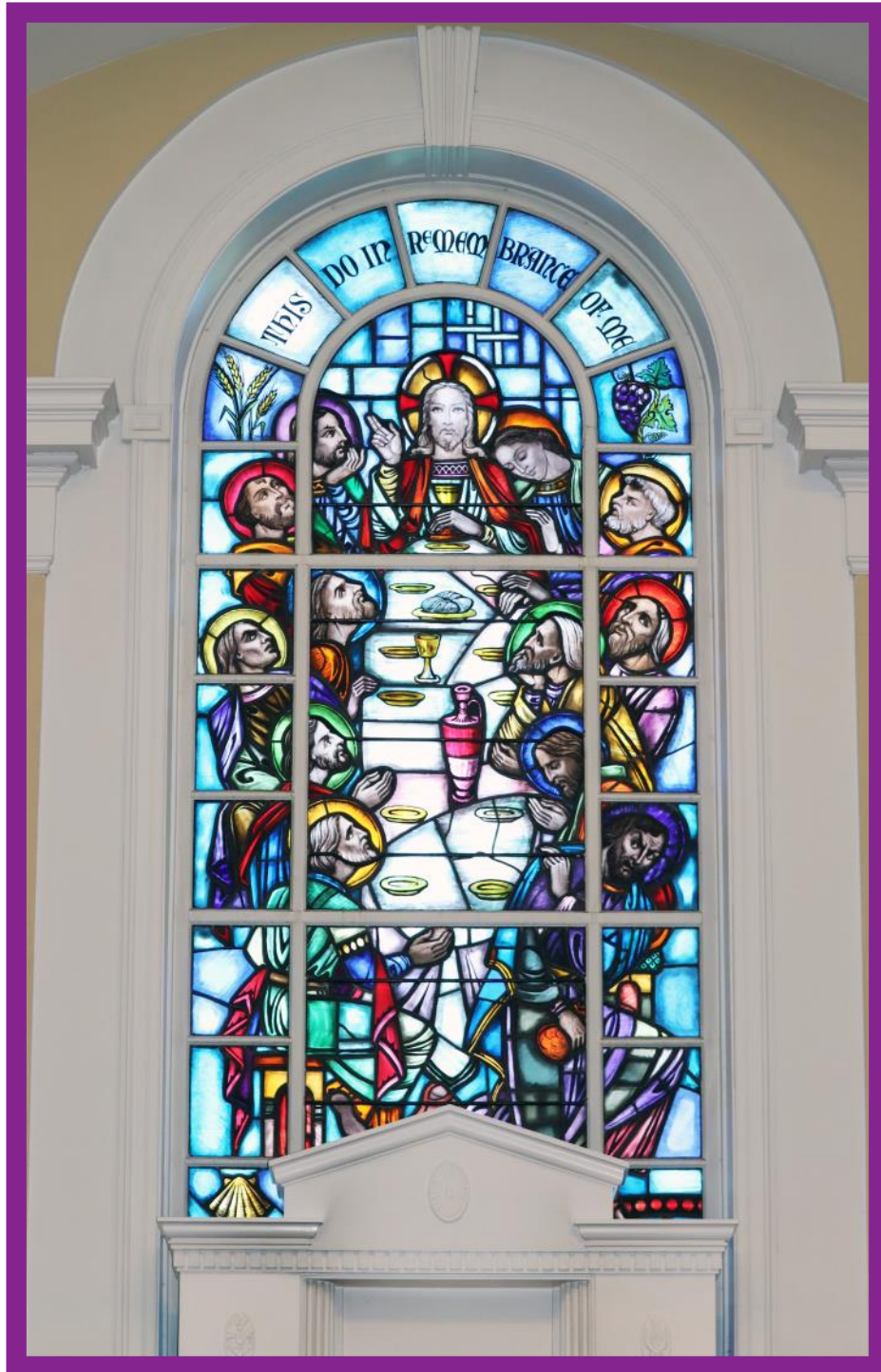


Morrisville Presbyterian Church

2024 Lenten Devotional



INTRODUCTION

Dear MPC Family,

It's easy to see Lent as a time to give up chocolate or a second chance at a New Year's resolution that went poorly. But that's not what Lent is. Lent is a time to draw closer to God. It is a time of prayer, fasting and self-examination, all in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of the Lord at Easter. It is a period of 40 days — like the flood of Genesis, Moses' sojourn at Mount Sinai, Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb, Jonah's call to Ninevah to repent, and Jesus' time of testing in the wilderness. It is a time to open our hearts more fully to God—to tell the truth about all the things that separate us from God, and to draw ever nearer to God in the process.

This Lent, here at MPC, we're trying something new! In your hands, you have a Lenten Devotional that has been created for the church, by the church. In other words, our very own church members have written this devotional! Each day during our 40-day Lenten journey, this devotional includes a scripture reading, a personal reflection from a church member, and oftentimes a prayer. Where there is no written prayer, we encourage you to offer your own! It is our hope that this devotional will provide a daily opportunity for you to read and reflect on scripture with the help of a fellow church member, all the while trusting that God is molding us more fully into the people God longs for us to be! We pray that Lent will be a meaningful season for each of you, and that God will continue to melt and mold MPC into the church God longs for us to be!

Blessings upon your Lenten journey,
MPC Worship Committee



ASH WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 14

by Elizabeth Lester-Abdalla

Psalm 51:1-7

¹Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me.

⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. ⁵Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. ⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

There is nothing quite like kicking off our Lenten journey with the psalmist speaking of transgressions and evil. I, like many fellow Presbyterians, do not like to dwell on sin and judgment and much prefer the passages on grace and forgiveness where we acknowledge we have done wrong and can move past it to the next step. But this passage calls us to sit in our wrongs. It is heavy. Indeed, in Lent we have to sit with the heaviness—in Scripture, in our world, and in ourselves.

But this passage also speaks of bringing us closer to God, as we seek truth in our inward being and wisdom in our secret heart. It reminds us that we need God to do just that. Indeed, we were even “born guilty.” This is not something we can do on our own.

This passage closes with a desire by the psalmist to be purged with hyssop, to be washed and made clean. I learned today that hyssop is a Mediterranean evergreen plant that is part of the mint family and looks like a lavender plant. It was used in Jewish rituals to cleanse a person before entering the Temple. It also plays a vital role in the Passover story. I like the way this passage uses this simple, common plant to help us start anew.

Prayer: Dear God, help us not to rush past the heaviness of this Lenten season. May we recognize that no matter what we have done or left undone, we are in need of You. Provide us with Your abundant mercy, O Lord, as we seek to be closer to You. Purge us with hyssop, so that we may start anew. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

by John Damiani

1 John 1:5-10

⁵This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; ⁷but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. ⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

As biblically confirmed (1John 1:5), God is light (i.e. in simple terms: what is good, true and holy). Knowing that we are made in His image (Genesis 1:26 "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...'"), it is a tall order (i.e. walking in the light, thus having fellowship with Him and others) assumed by myself et al with regard to likeness, especially. Despite my numerous inherent shortcomings, with His guidance, I continue to make an attempt to live a commensurate lifestyle, “walking in the light”. Examples of such efforts where risk (financial, etc.), sacrifice, and conflict were involved include: 1) taking a "leave of absence" from work given two simultaneously

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bedridden/sick parents; 2) heavily endowing financially a brother encumbered with many stressful circumstances;

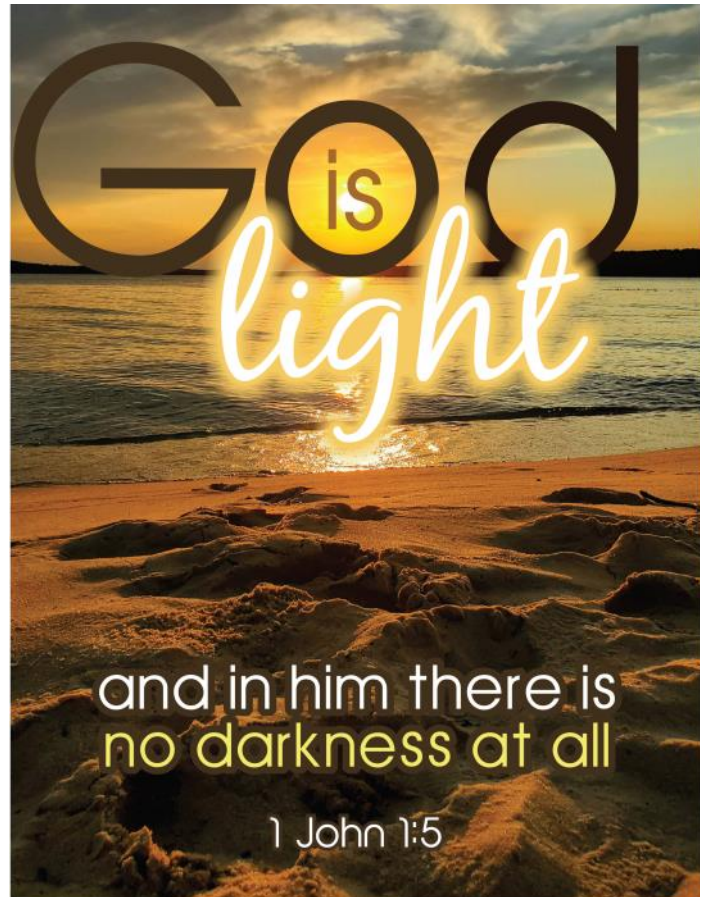
3) providing regular assistance in support of those in need; 4) endeavoring to serve and forgive others (as desired by self) despite their misgivings; 5) composing, times at a risk, letters petitioning (examples: governmental officials, organizations, etc.) for the benefit of self and others; 6) looking, with faith, to Jesus for rescue (i.e. averting an earthly death) from past bouts involving cancer and a heart attack, and also for eternal life.

All said, I will fall short, but persevere nevertheless. Other biblical texts that encourage my persistence include, 1 John 3:18: "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." James 2:14: "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him"? Matthew 5:7: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy".

With regard to "walking in darkness", I believe it is inevitable, at times, given "The Doctrine of Original Sin". So, I find myself asking for Jesus' forgiveness endlessly!

Finally, in consideration of the Lenten season, I (personally) feel that it is incumbent of me to heighten efforts (as above) to honour God's Word, benefit others and family.

Prayer: During the Lenten season, may we ALL heighten our personal efforts to "walk in the light" with the hope of benefitting each other as well as honoring God and His Word to an ever greater degree!



FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

by Tim Carpenter

2 Timothy 4:1-4

I urge you, Timothy, as we live in the sight of God and of Christ Jesus ... to preach the Word of God. Never lose your sense of urgency, in season or out of season. Prove, correct, and encourage, using the utmost patience in your teaching. For the time is coming when men will not tolerate wholesome teaching. They will want something to tickle their own fancies, and they will collect teachers who will pander to their own desires. They will no longer listen to the truth, but will wander off after man-made fictions. --J.B. Phillips translation

It is human nature to want other people to tell us what we want to hear; and it is now more possible than ever to filter out what we don't want to hear by choosing a source that aligns with our view of how things should be.

The problem with the notion of "how things should be" is that it requires asking the question "according to what or whom"? If we search the Bible we can surely find a passage that can be used to justify our views. Although we may be able to justify that our views are Biblical, can we demonstrate that they are also Christ-like?

Prayer: Gracious God and author of all that is, help us align our thoughts and actions with the mind and life of Christ Jesus as we strive to bring about your Kingdom.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 17

by Pastor Alex Lester-Abdalla

Matthew 9:9-13

⁹As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax-collection station, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he got up and followed him. ¹⁰And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax collectors and sinners came and were sitting with Jesus and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" ¹²But when he heard this, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ¹³Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous but sinners.

What are you called? How are you seen? We are given hints in this text that Matthew was called many things. He has a name: "Matthew." He is given a gender: "a man." The text assumes we know his job by where he is sitting: "at the tax-collection station." The Pharisees see the same person Jesus sees, but they call him a sinner and deem him unfit to sit with Jesus. Jesus on the other hand sees someone who he wants to follow him. I like to think that amidst the outward appearances and social stigmas, Jesus saw deeper into who Matthew truly was. Jesus called Matthew by his true name.

This Lent I wonder what you are called and how you are seen. I wonder what Christ would call you and how he would see you. For there we might find the source of mercy we are seeking.

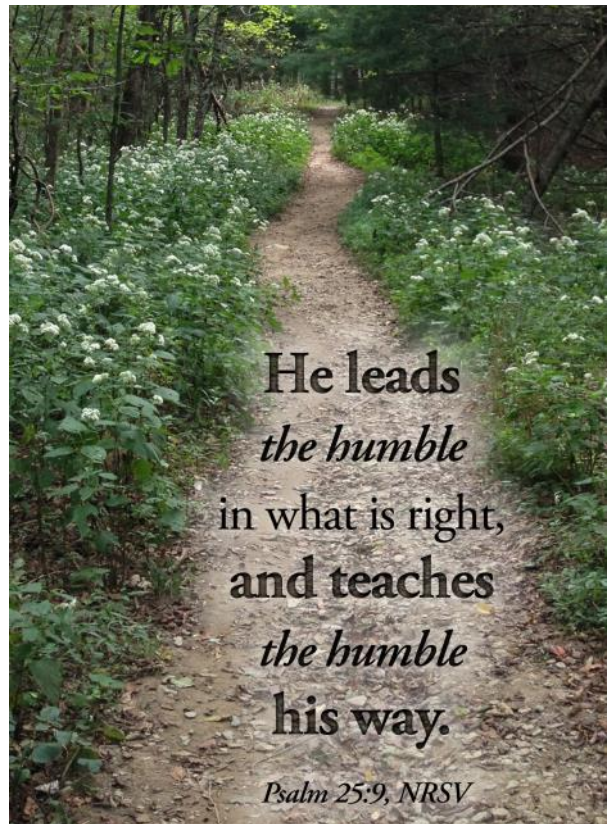
Prayer: You who have called us by name, may our outward appearances wash away from us for just a moment, so we may glimpse an image of your true mercy somewhere in our inner being. Amen.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18

by Reverend Jack McAnlis, retired

Psalm 25:1-10

*¹To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.
²O my God, in you I trust;
do not let me be put to shame;
do not let my enemies exult over me.
³Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.
⁴Make me to know your ways, O Lord;
teach me your paths.
⁵Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation;
for you I wait all day long.
⁶Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.
⁷Do 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!
⁸Good and upright is the Lord;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.
⁹He leads the humble in what is right
and teaches the humble his way.
¹⁰All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.*



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Do you have any regrets? It appears that the psalmist had some, not recently but from a while ago. And because of these unspecified indiscretions, the psalmist has enemies. Now, the prayer is for wiping out the foes and clearing thoughts that haunt the mind. “Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions...” (25:7). It is a prayer for divine mercy and forgiveness to end the shame and abuse that has come about. This prayer, too, is for moral guidance, for a way to the truth. Young lives often have more to do with building identities and gaining friends and “likes” and less to do with discerning the truth that sets us on the way of fulfillment and peace with God. Seek forgiveness and shed the fear of the past.

Prayer: O God, forgive my follies, lead me in your truth, and teach me the ways of love, through Jesus Christ. Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

by Patrick Gilbride

Ephesians 2:1-10

¹You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in 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. ³All 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, ⁴but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we may walk in them.

In Chapters 1 and 2 of Paul’s letter to the young church in Ephesus, he is providing an account of the many blessings that the gospel reveals. In our selected verses, we hear of a journey that we are called to take. This journey, this mission, if we choose to accept, begins with acknowledgement that we have been (at more times, perhaps, than we would like to admit) wandering from God. Through our human transgressions and sins, deceived by the temptations of this world, we are spiritually dead. But, good news friends, because of God’s love, we can be made alive again. We can wake to God, by His grace. As amazing, unbelievable, and miraculous as reanimating dead tissue, we are raised from the dead. From the graveyard to glory, from Death Valley to Graceland, if you will. As awake people, we can then be watching for God, as He shows us the full riches of this grace, and the unfathomable depths of His love, through Jesus Christ. We are reborn and saved, not by our works, but for our works. As grateful dead, now reborn people, we are called to work for God. We are awakened in order to do good works, in His name.

Let us journey together, with music and joy in our hearts. I can’t help but think of a great song. In these words from another Paul (Paul Simon), we have an image of the company we keep on this journey.

*I'm going to Graceland, Memphis, Tennessee
I'm going to Graceland
Poor boys and pilgrims with families
And we are going to Graceland
And my traveling companions are ghosts and empty sockets
I'm looking at ghosts and empties
But I've reason to believe we all will be received in Graceland*

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With broken hearts or broken souls, we travel with fellow sinners who have wandered from God: poor boys, pilgrims with families. We are awakened and reborn, children of dead marriages, ghosts and empty sockets. By the grace of God, and our faith, we have reason to believe!

Another song plays in my head. From yet another Paul (Paul David Hewson, aka Bono), we can see with reborn, watchful eyes, how much God loves us.

*You broke the bonds
And you loosed the chains
Carried the cross
Of my shame
Of my shame
You know I believe it!*

“I Still Haven’t Found What I’m Looking For” acknowledges our wandering and sin, and also comments on the length of this journey. “I believe in the Kingdom Come... but, yes I’m still running.” We are God’s masterpiece, but a painting in progress, being reborn through the love of Christ Jesus, for the purpose to do good works. Let us rejoice in this good news! Let us be awakened. Let us show our gratitude with good works. There is a lot to be done. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 20

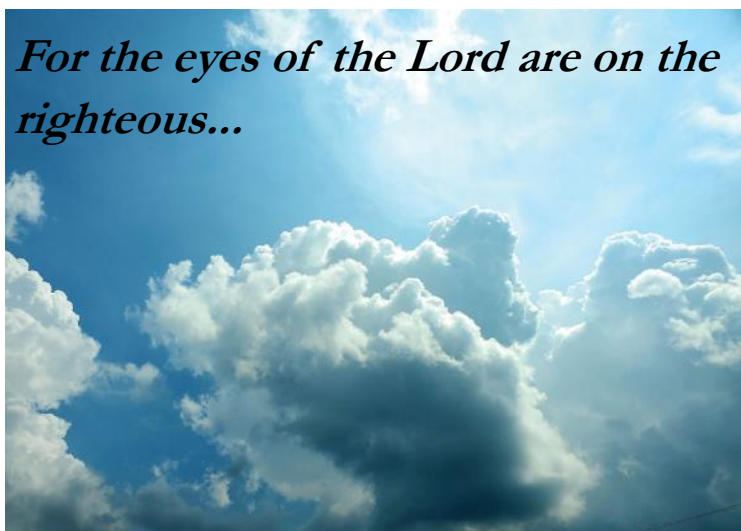
by Carol Carpenter

1 Peter 3:8-12

⁸Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse, but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For “Those who desire to love life and to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; ¹¹let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it. ¹²For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

The scripture from 1 Peter urges us to live in unity of spirit. How hard that is in our divided world, our divided country. How easy it is to perpetuate the disharmony by vilifying those we perceive as our enemies. Instead, Jesus has told us to love our enemies.

Prayer: Loving God, help us to keep our tongues from speaking evil. Let us truly seek peace and pursue it. We pray in the name of the Christ who demonstrated that loving our enemies is possible. Amen



WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21

by Tom Evans

Matthew 4:1-11

¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. ²He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴But he answered, "It is written,

'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "

⁵Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶saying 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.'* "

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

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

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

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

The Spirit led Jesus into the desert. Jesus presumably was fully willing in spite of the hardship to come. After 40 days, He was famished. Then the devil tempted Jesus, knowing He could turn stones into food. Though hungry, Jesus was strong and true.

Jesus could have taken the easy route to power, but He trusted God and was true to scripture: "The Lord your God you shall fear; him you shall serve, and by his name alone you shall swear." (Deuteronomy 6:13)

Prayer: Lord, Jesus survived severe hardships and was still true to you. He denied temptations, worshiping and serving only you. Help us stay true to you through our struggles, worshiping and serving only the Lord. Amen.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

by Jim Lytle

Genesis 15: 1-6

¹After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward" ²But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." ⁴Then the word of the Lord came to him, "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." ⁵He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.



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Our faith will benefit when we believe in God as our shield. Sometimes our troubles and worries overwhelm us and we lose sight of God's presence. In this vision, Abraham feared he would have no heirs and God instructed him to go outside and look up at the stars. As he did so, he was calmed by the vastness and multitude of stars, knowing that it meant many generations to come. It restored Abraham's faith in God. So when we feel lost and afraid, remember and read this passage in Genesis, and know that God is with us as our shield.

Prayer: Dear Lord, I pray that you give me a faith like that of Abraham. That I may have the strength to overcome my fears and believe that God is there for me, as my shield. Remind us that we are not alone, that you are always present to guide us and strengthen our souls so we may follow in your ways. Hear our prayer, Lord. Amen

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

by Drew and Gail Hunger

Psalm 22: 23-31

*23 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.*

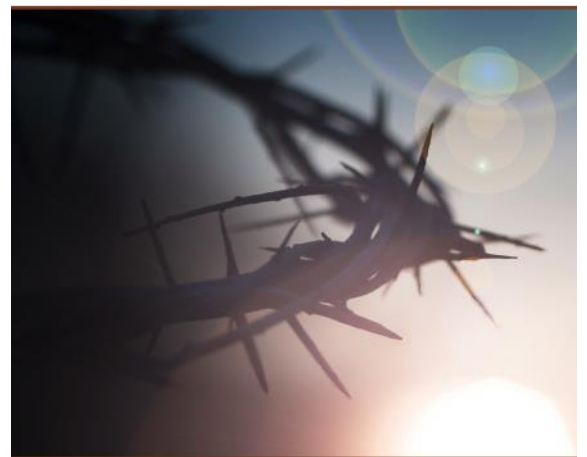
*29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep
in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go
down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.*

*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.*

Future generations
will be told about the Lord, and
proclaim his deliverance
to a people yet unborn ...

These verses reveal that David, the psalm-writing shepherd who rose to King, is in awe of God, and beseeches us to praise and thank God for what has been provided to us. These verses were written about 1000 years BCE. Verses 30 and 31 foretell God's plan: "future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn." About 1000 years after these verses were written, God spoke through Jesus to provide us with lessons on salvation so we can be delivered from sin.

Prayer: Praise be to God for life, the world, and the Word as provided through the psalmists, the prophets, Jesus, and the Gospels. Amen.



Psalm 22:30-31, NRSV

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 24

by Tom Drake

Mark 8:27-30

²⁷Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" ²⁸They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." ²⁹"But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah." ³⁰Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

When Jesus visited the villages around Caesarea Philippi, he did not want the people to know that he was the Messiah. I'm not entirely sure why. Perhaps Jesus just wanted to be known for the miracles he had performed. Perhaps he feared that if they knew he was the son of GOD then great expectations would be placed upon him. Perhaps Jesus knew his actions would have to prove to the people that he was their Messiah instead of telling people that he was. Either way, Peter knew.

Prayer: Lord, may we always be able to answer the question "Who do you say I am?" with conviction like Peter. May we recognize you by your mighty acts and by your quiet deeds; and always by your love. Amen.

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25

by Nancy McHenry

Psalms 77: 1-14

¹I cried out to God for help;

I cried out to God to hear me.

²When I was in distress, I sought the Lord;

at night I stretched out untiring hands,
and I would not be comforted.

³I remembered you, God, and I groaned;

I meditated, and my spirit grew faint.

⁴You kept my eyes from closing;

I was too troubled to speak.

⁵I thought about the former days,

the years of long ago;

⁶I remembered my songs in the night.

My heart meditated and my spirit asked:

⁷"Will the Lord reject forever?

Will he never show his favor again?

⁸Has his unfailing love vanished forever?

Has his promise failed for all time?

⁹Has God forgotten to be merciful?

Has he in anger withheld his compassion?"

¹⁰Then I thought, "To this I will appeal:

the years when the Most High
stretched out his right hand.

¹¹I will remember the deeds of the Lord;

yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.

¹²I will consider all your works

and meditate on all your mighty deeds."

¹³Your ways, God, are holy.

What god is as great as our God?

¹⁴You are the God who performs miracles;

you display your power among the peoples.

It is easy to get caught up in a sense of hopelessness when we look at how broken our world is. Why is God letting so many good people suffer? Why is He letting us spoil the earth when we are called to be good stewards? Why does He let hatred and greed prevail while He teaches us love and generosity? We pray for God to fix all that is broken but the suffering goes on. When we feel hopeless it is good to stop and remember all the miraculous deeds God has done. Take a moment to think of all the times your prayers have been answered and the peace you felt. And most importantly, remember what He calls us to do as His people.

Prayer: Dear Lord, sometimes I feel overwhelmed and it feels hard to breathe. There is so much sadness in the world around me. I dread reading news about wars that kill innocent people every day, children without food in their bellies, deadly storms and fires that ravage communities, terrifying diseases that take loved ones before their

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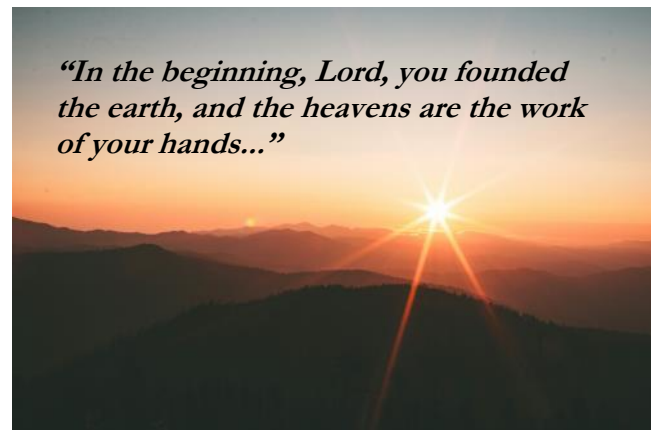
time, global warming that threatens the earth we strive to pass on to our loved ones, unchecked gun violence that knows no bounds, daily stories of hatred and unacceptance of differences that seem much too close to home. I pray to you for comfort. I pray that you will take away the sorrow and make the world right again. Yet my prayers seem to go unanswered no matter how many times I beg. I dig deep for faith in a world that seems so hopeless and yet you remain quiet. Are you not seeing what I see? We need your help to fix this broken world. Maybe I need to rethink my prayers. Maybe I should pray for strength and fortitude to do one good deed every day to teach kindness, acceptance, healing and love in my very small world. What a beautiful world it could be if all your people sowed a seed of love every day. Maybe you are asking us all to do your healing work one small moment at a time. You are a mighty God and you have done such miraculous things yet maybe you need me to be your boots on the ground. Lord, give me focus and a loving heart to do a deed worthy of your praise today. Then I will feel a sense of purpose and begin to breathe again. Amen.

MONDAY, FEBRUARY 26

by Fran Akelewicz

Hebrews 1:8-12

⁸*But of the Son he says,
Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
and the scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom.
⁹You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”
¹⁰And, “In the beginning, Lord, you founded the earth,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;
¹¹they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like clothing;
¹²like a cloak you will roll them up,
and like clothing they will be changed.
But you are the same,
and your years will never end.”*



The book of Hebrews is focused on the Jewish Christians of that time. These individuals were considered social pariahs of the day as they were not Jews nor were they Gentiles. It is ironic and extremely sad that even today society discerns through bias, culture and yes, the practice of religious faith, who is perceived with respect and honor. Who can be trusted and looked to as examples of good faith.

The messages in the book of Hebrews reflect (1) faith, (2) perfection, (3) promise, (4) endurance, (5) superiority, (6) witness, and (7) inheritance. For my reading, the focus is faith. In the Jewish faith, angels are seen as interceding with God on our behalf. In chapter 1:8-12, the reader is reminded of the superiority of Jesus Christ in heaven. Christ is supreme and is above the angels. Christ is the exact representation of God. God generously sent his Son as a human being to us to show us the power of God and to remind us that God is the Father. God created the “foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

In my life, much has changed over the years. My father and mother have passed. At times, all in my precious family have struggled, as have I. Dreams were fulfilled on God’s timeline not mine and at times not seen by me as dreams fulfilled. I have been reminded over and over that my time here is temporary and yet I fuss and fret when in the end there is only God whose “years will never end”. Why that night when I fell asleep at the wheel of the car on the

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interstate did you wake me before I drove off the highway? Why did you not take my life when I offered it in exchange for my dying mother? Why did you let me experience the heavenly phenomena of St. Elmo's fire when on a plane returning from DC? Why did you guide me through various encounters to meet the man that I would love throughout my life? Why did you cure my health issues through your intercession? Because you are God! Our time is temporary like our garments, but you are forever!

Prayer: My God you art infinite and timeless,
Hear the joys of your people;
Hear the pleas of your people;
Make us "flames of fire" for justice and righteousness. Amen.

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 27

by Heidi Dous

Psalm 105:1-5

¹Give praise to the Lord, proclaim his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.
²Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.
³Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
⁴Look to the Lord and his strength;
seek his face always.
⁵Remember the wonders he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,

I chose this passage because it comforted me. During difficult times, I seek the Lord and his strength, and this passage assures me that he is there. I have always felt comforted, healed, and strengthened by singing; I find comfort when listening to music as well as singing. The end of the passage reminds us to remember all that God has done for us and given to us. He is truly a miracle to us in our lives.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for the strength that you have given to us. Thank you for the voices that you have given to us to be able to speak and sing your praises as well as the ears you have given us to hear your beautiful music. Help us to remember all that you have given to us and be grateful to you. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

by David Hough

John 12:36-43

³⁶While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them. ³⁷Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him.
³⁸This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah:
"Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?"
³⁹And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said,
⁴⁰"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them."
⁴¹Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. ⁴²Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue, ⁴³for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

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In this passage, Jesus urged people to believe in Him as the light of the world while they had the light and to become children of light by following his example. Earlier in the Gospel according to John (John 8:12), Jesus said, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” His use of the word “light” may have several possible meanings such as good news, hope, or wisdom.

After saying this, Jesus withdrew from the public eye, knowing that his hour of suffering and death was near. Despite his many signs and miracles, most of the Jewish people did not believe in him, fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah. However, some of the leaders did believe in him secretly, but were afraid to confess their faith openly, because they valued the approval of people and their public image more than the approval of God. They feared being expelled from the synagogue, which was a severe social and religious penalty.

Prayer: Lord, help me to see in your Word the light of good news, hope and wisdom. Help me to follow this light wherever it leads me without considering what others may think of me or my actions.

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29

by Nancy Kernan

1 Peter 2:4–8

⁴Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and ⁵like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶For it stands in scripture:

*‘See, I am laying in Zion a stone,
a cornerstone chosen and precious;
and whoever believes in him
will not be put to shame.’*

*⁷To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe,
The stone that the builders rejected
has become the very head of the corner’,*

*⁸and ‘A stone that makes them stumble,
and a rock that makes them fall.’*

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.

Peter was beside Jesus throughout his ministry and was personally transformed by the risen Jesus Christ to HOPE in all situations. Peter believed that the Christian life is to be centered in hope, love for each other and strangers, and he talks about being encouraged in life by being a living stone. If we see a need, fill it. If we find a hurt, heal it. Christ became the strongest cornerstone for everything faithful, right, and true. When a “living stone” is referenced in this scripture, Peter is talking about us—a living stone being built into a spiritual house with Christ as the cornerstone. 1 Peter 2:4 says, “Come to Him, a living stone rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight.” Only our disobedience to His word leads to suffering, but through Him we are called out of darkness and into God’s light.

Prayer: Dear Lord, as we walk through the Lenten season, transform our hearts to serve as your living stone, that by doing good we may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men (1 Peter 2:15). May grace and peace be yours in abundance (1 Peter 1:2). Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 1

by Ruth Workman

Acts 7:30-35

³⁰“Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush. ³¹When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight, and as he approached to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ³²I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look. ³³Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴I have surely seen the mistreatment of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning, and I have come down to rescue them. Come now, I will send you to Egypt.’ ³⁵“It was this Moses whom they rejected when they said, ‘Who made you a ruler and a judge?’ and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator through the angel who appeared to him in the bush.

I remember the first time I was aware of standing on holy ground. I was about 5 years old lying on my back in the grass on a beautiful summer day. I stared up at a cloudless blue sky through the white petals of our cherry tree. I did not have words to describe the experience, but I was filled with awe and wonder. Looking back, I think of this as a “holy ground moment”, a moment when I was deeply aware of the presence of God. I have had many “holy ground moments” since then. I invite you now to quiet yourself, take a few deep breaths and recall “holy ground moments” you have experienced. Savor these memories and thank God for these awarenesses of God’s loving presence.

Prayer: Loving God, help me to live with my eyes and heart wide open so that I don’t miss the opportunity to stand on holy ground. Thank you that you reveal your loving presence through moments of awe and wonder. Amen

SATURDAY, MARCH 2

by David Hough

Mark 9:2-8

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling bright, such as no one on earth could brighten them. ⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us set up three tents: one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified. ⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!” ⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

The context of this passage is that it occurs a few days after Jesus promised that some of the disciples would see God’s Kingdom. Jesus is also well aware that his time on earth is short and his suffering and death are fast approaching. He wants to prepare them for their ministry after He is gone. Jesus takes Peter, James and John to a mountain where he is transfigured. His clothing becomes dazzling white, and he talks with Moses and Elijah. Witnessing this frightens the disciples and they offer to build three shelters as memorials. God then appears briefly through a cloud and affirms his love for his Son. This experience helps convince the disciples that Jesus is much more than a man or a rabbi but is in fact the Son of God. It also implies that God’s kingdom is both a place our souls go after death as well as within us.

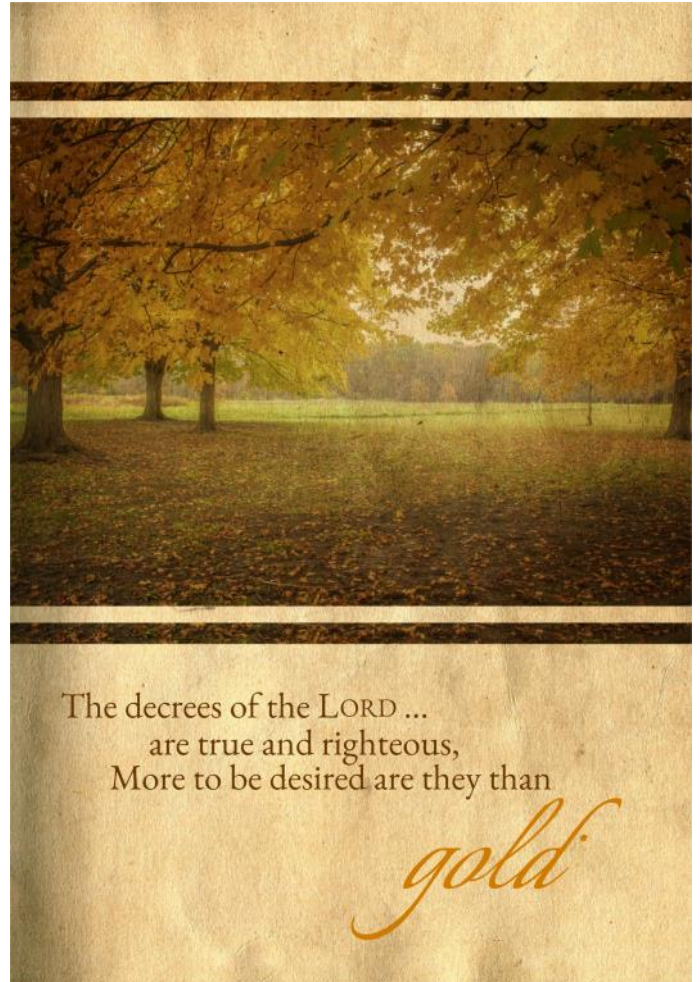
Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that I can connect with You through Jesus Christ at any time and in any place. I need only speak to You in prayer and ask for your wisdom, comfort, and protection. No matter what is happening in this world, or in my life at this moment, You are always there with me.

SUNDAY, MARCH 3

by Donna Damiani

Psalm 19

*¹The heavens are telling the glory of God,
and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.
²Day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge.
³There is no speech, nor are there words;
their voice is not heard;
⁴yet 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,
⁵which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,
and like a strong man runs its course with joy.
⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens
and its circuit to the end of them,
and nothing is hid from its heat.
⁷The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure, making wise the simple;
⁸the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear, enlightening the eyes;
⁹The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.
¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb.
¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.
¹²But who can detect one's own errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.
¹³Keep 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.
¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer.*



As I read Psalm 19, I am reminded of the hymn "How Great Thou Art" and of Psalm 8:3-4, "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him?" Psalm 19 reveals God's existence, character, will, and plan for all humanity. The psalmist, David, first reflects on God's self-revelation in the sky and stars. The skies declare the "glory of God" (v.1), and we are instructed to place all hope and trust in God's grace. As we concentrate on the message, we understand God desires to communicate Himself to us through both the created world (v. 1-6) and the word (v. 10-14). What we learn about God from His word takes priority over what we learn about God from His creation. The hymn, Psalm 19, reminds all who would enter God's presence that they must come as those who have seen with their eyes His glory on display in the creation and who have in their hearts a deep devotion to His law, as "the law of the Lord" (v.7) blesses the lives of those who heed it (v. 7-13).

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The sun, as the supreme metaphor of the glory of God, makes its daily triumphant sweep across the whole extent of the heavens and pours out its warmth on every creature, God's laws (Torah) are "trustworthy" (v.7) and faithfully represent His righteous will; they endure generation after generation. These laws truly fulfill their purpose in the lives of all who honor them.

David presents the psalm from his heart as a praise offering, and he concludes that God's Word is to be more desired "than gold" and is "sweeter also than honey" (v.10). As is written in Psalm 119:105, "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path." The closing verse of Psalm 19 encapsulates the Psalm's orientation toward God: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer." We are encouraged to praise God for who He is and what He has created. May our praise manifest actions that are worthy of His acceptance, thus avoiding the warning rendered and faithfully recognize the Lord as our Rock and our Redeemer.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your unfailing love and promise to watch over us. Help us to seek your guidance as we journey through life—to trust and hold on to your promises even in the face of adversity. May we look around our world and see the glory of your creation and have a deep devotion to your laws. Strengthen our resolve to keep our eyes on you as we journey in faith. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 4

by Robb Dugan

1 Corinthians 3:18-20

Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness', ²⁰and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'

From Michael Card's lilting, lovely, and challenging song, "God's Own Fool:"

*When we in our foolishness thought we were wise,
He played the fool and He opened our eyes
When we in our weakness believed we were strong,
He became helpless to show we were wrong.*

And later:

*For the power of paradox opens your eyes,
And blinds those who say they can see.*

And at the last:

*Believe the unbelievable,
And come be a fool as well.*

Like, what do I know?

A more powerful laptop, the Iggles' Brotherly Shove, the passing lane on I-95. All of these things seem like pretty good ideas to me — a little bit of might'll make it all turn out right and let's get on with our day; another issue to address, another problem to wrestle to the ground; one down, x - 1 to go. But hmmm

By admission, I mess up all of the time — with an alarming amount of frequency at home (winky face to Elizabeth), hopefully a tad bit less during the workday — from sloppy proofing of a text to an unkind word to someone I love, I am chock full of missteps. So lean in tho' I might, I know for truth and for certain that I don't have anywhere close to all of the answers within me. And that sometimes maybe the sit still in God's presence is better than the cram it in and push right on through.

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I'm not suggesting that we simply let life happen to us. God granted us intellect and free will, and I think God is glad when we actively and creatively take part in our lives and engage with the world around us. But for me, I often need to slow down, even stop, and with humility let my heart listen for the Good Lord's calling and guidance, tenderness and grace.

A man (and good heavens, God Incarnate), on a lonely hill and hanging on a cross — that does not exactly seem like the fast track to salvation to me.

But what do I know?

Prayer: Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.

Lord, grant me the grace to sense and to see Your will.

So that not my will but Your will, not my way but Your Way,
be done.

TUESDAY, MARCH 5

by Seth McHenry

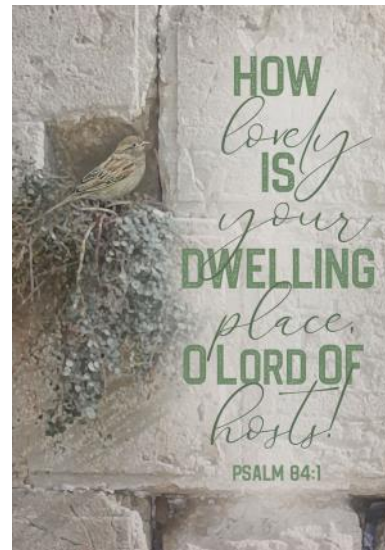
Psalm 84: 1-4

¹*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O Lord of hosts!*

²*My soul longs, indeed it faints,
for the courts of the Lord;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.*

³*Even the sparrow finds a home
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O Lord of hosts,
my King and my God.*

⁴*Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.*



The opening verses of Psalm 84 reminds us to stay focused on that which, although we forget it from time to time, we intrinsically know and need to imbed deep into our institutional memory; God has, and always will have, a place for us with Him.

The sparrow and the swallow know that they can always make a home with God (and not only in the Mission at San Juan Capistrano!) and thus remind and encourage us to remember that we can do the same. While we may worry about the material things of this world - and may even call them necessities - God reminds us, both here and in the Gospel of Matthew (6:26-29), that He will provide that which we need and, in fact, splendor and abundance beyond our imaginings; our needs will be met in such a way that “even Solomon, in all his glory, was not arrayed like any of these.” We must always remember as the poet D.H. Lawrence notes, that “a small bird will drop frozen dead from a bough without ever having felt sorry for itself.” We, too, need to remember in times of trial that the birds of the air are provided for, the sparrow finds a home, the swallow a nest for herself, and we will always have a home in the courts of the Lord and a dwelling in His house.

Prayer: Dear God: help us to remember and to know, with the simplicity of the smallest and neediest of your creatures, that we will always have a home and dwelling place in the magnificence of Your house and Your courts. By remaining focused and yearning for you, we will know your peace and feel your support and comfort now, in our darkest hours and forevermore. Amen

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

by Adrienne Poissant

Mark 11:15-19

¹⁵Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves, ¹⁶and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,

"My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations?"

But you have made it a den of robbers."

¹⁸And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him, for they were afraid of him because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. ¹⁹And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

When Jesus arrives at the Temple, he isn't afraid to make a bunch of people upset. The people in the Temple have been doing things this way for a long time. For some of them, maybe trade in the Temple is part of their livelihood. But that doesn't make what they're doing right. Just because something has been done a certain way for a long time, doesn't mean it's correct. Jesus knows this and isn't afraid to rectify the situation, despite the negative attention he receives as a result.

Prayer: Lord God, help us to remember how to flip tables. Don't let us become so accustomed to injustice that we defend it as part of tradition and remind us that the tables we so often wish to sit at are often the tables that Jesus himself would have flipped. Amen.

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

by Kathryn Jervis

Ephesians 1:3-14

³Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. ⁷In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace ⁸that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and insight ⁹he has made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ, ¹⁰as a plan for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. ¹¹In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance, having been destined according to the purpose of him who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will, ¹²so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ, might live for the praise of his glory. ¹³In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and had believed in him, were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit; ¹⁴this is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.

Do you always remember to express gratitude for the blessings that God has freely given to us? We sometimes forget these gifts from God as we get caught up in the mundane daily trials of life or the more serious challenges that can come our way. It is so easy to complain, particularly now, as we are in the middle of the Lenten period of penitence and fasting, while the weather is dreary. In this reading, Paul provides a needed reminder of the grace that God bestows on us. In fact, God planned our salvation with redemption through Christ's sacrifice for us to grant forgiveness of our sins. Our greatest blessing is God's grace that we did not earn nor even deserve.

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Prayer: Dear Lord, today, forgive our selfishness as we reflect upon our failings to trust in You to deliver all our spiritual needs. In the midst of this Lenten season, thanks for the reminder that it is Your plan to offer salvation to us, your chosen people, and to recognize and welcome the eternal blessing of your grace.

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

by Wendy McCleskey

Daniel 12: 5-13

⁵Then I, Daniel, looked, and two others appeared, one standing on this bank of the stream and one on the other. ⁶One of them said to the man clothed in linen, who was upstream, "How long shall it be until the end of these wonders?" ⁷The man clothed in linen, who was upstream, raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven. And I heard him swear by the one who lives forever that it would be for a time, two times, and half a time and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be accomplished. ⁸I heard but could not understand, so I said, "My lord, what shall be the outcome of these things?" ⁹He said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are to remain secret and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰Many shall be purified, cleansed, and refined, but the wicked shall continue to act wickedly. None of the wicked shall understand, but those who are wise shall understand. ¹¹From the time that the regular burnt offering is taken away and the desolating sacrilege is set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred ninety days. ¹²Happy are those who persevere and attain the thousand three hundred thirty-five days. ¹³But you, go your way, and rest; you shall rise for your reward at the end of the days."

As we look to the promise of this Lenten season, we often get stuck in the struggles of life. Daniel was no different. When the angels appeared to him in this vision, he asked about the end of times. When he didn't understand the answer, he was simply told to "go on [his] way". God promised to purify the faithful and reward those who persist in the midst of sacrifice.

We are reminded that God has a plan. It may not be quick, and we will not know what it is, but those who are wise and faithful shall be purified in the spirit of Jesus. Our job is to 'go our way' and rest in the promise that we shall find peace in the kingdom of God.

Prayer: Dear Lord, give us the patience to know that you are by our side through all our trials. Help us to remember, as you foretold to Daniel, that we are purified in the Holy Spirit and saved through the blood of your Son. As we carry on, we look to you in faith and know that our gift is this life and the next. In your name we pray. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

by Sue Ward

John 3:1-13

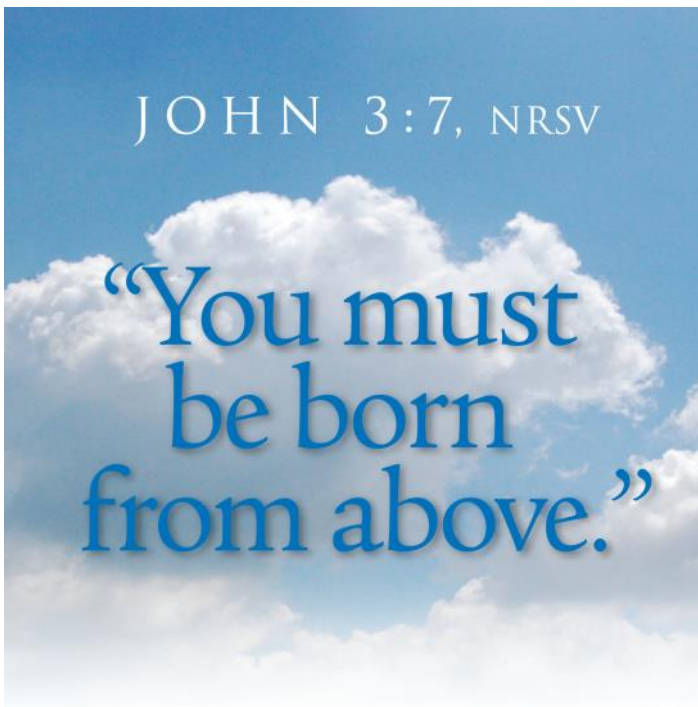
¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The wind] blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

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¹¹“Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

Nicodemus is in a dilemma. He is a learned man, a teacher, and a well-respected member of the Pharisees. He has heard of another teacher, Jesus, who is wandering the countryside preaching, gaining the attention of large crowds of people AND people are listening. Jesus is a simple man without the education and stature that Nicodemus possesses but even Nicodemus is attracted to Jesus’ message and wants to hear more and learn more from this simple man. However, Nicodemus’ place in Jewish society and his fear of loss of reputation and respect in his community make him hesitate to approach Jesus.

Nicodemus’ dilemma reminds me of a book I once found at a used book sale called, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway* by Susan Jeffers. The title intrigued me so I bought it and read it because I know that I am not a person who usually feels fear and does something anyway. I thought that maybe this little book might have a message for me. The premise of the book is that no decision in life is wrong. We can learn from every experience we have in life, even the ones that don’t work out as we expected. By allowing fear to limit our experience, we may miss great learning opportunities. Nicodemus did not want to miss out on an opportunity to learn from Jesus so under the cover of darkness he felt the fear and went to speak to Jesus.



Nicodemus’ encounter and conversation with Jesus about being born of the Spirit was confounding. Nicodemus’ reaction to Jesus’ words were “How can this be?” Nicodemus could not understand why more was needed of him beyond following the law as he had been taught and had spent many years studying. Jesus illustrates the difference between human birth and being born of the Spirit with a beautiful image of wind. The Spirit is like the wind. You can hear it but cannot see it or harness it. You don’t know where it begins or where it is going but it exists. It defies logic. In this passage, we can feel Nicodemus’ confusion and struggle to understand Jesus words. Jesus is a simple man and puts his instruction in simple terms for Nicodemus. He must accept what he has heard Jesus say because Jesus has seen and knows it to be true. This was a tall order for Nicodemus and the Pharisees especially coming from an unknown and uneducated man but...Nicodemus listened, heard the words of Jesus, and perhaps he heard the wind of the Spirit.

The story does not tell us how Nicodemus felt when he left that midnight meeting with Jesus or what he did next. Nicodemus thought he was living according to the law of God and was in God’s favor. It was a surprise to find that more was expected of him. Was he disappointed or downhearted by what he heard? Did he leave just as confused and questioning as when he arrived or did Jesus open his mind to being born in a new way? Did he leave with new conviction and courage to feel the fear but follow Jesus anyway?

Prayer: Dear Lord, at times we are faced with difficult choices. Choosing a path is not always easy and fear often holds us back from moving in the direction our hearts are telling us to go. Help us to seek out your counsel and be guided by your word just as Nicodemus was. Help us to remember that you are always there to listen and hear our prayers. Help us to surmount our fears and have the courage to follow your will even in the face of criticism or disapproval. Give us the acuity to hear the wind of the Spirit and may it guide our footsteps. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

by Kathleen Foster

Psalm 107: 1-16

¹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so,
those he redeemed from trouble

³and gathered in from the lands,
from the east and from the west,
from the north and from the south.

⁴Some wandered in desert wastes,
finding no way to an inhabited town;

⁵hungry and thirsty,
their soul fainted within them.

⁶Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he delivered them from their distress;

⁷he led them by a straight way,
until they reached an inhabited town.

⁸Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.

⁹For he satisfies the thirsty,
and the hungry he fills with good things.

¹⁰Some sat in darkness and in gloom,
prisoners in misery and in irons,

¹¹for they had rebelled against the words of God
and spurned the counsel of the Most High.

¹²Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor;
they fell down, with no one to help.

¹³Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,
and he saved them from their distress;

¹⁴he brought them out of darkness and gloom,
and broke their bonds apart.

¹⁵Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wonderful works to humankind.

¹⁶For he shatters the doors of bronze
and cuts in two the bars of iron.

This is a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God for His abundant goodness, unwavering love and patience for us. This Psalm teaches us to ponder God's love and kindness; reminding us to thank God for that mercy by giving Him our complete dedication.

The Lord waits patiently, forgiving those who come to Him and for that He deserves the praise of thanksgiving. Thanking God does not have to be complicated. Just like saying "thank you" to a person for a kindness is simple but effective, giving thanks to God can be a short prayer of gratitude or singing his praises is another wonderful way to give thanks.

I like to think that as we praise God for His goodness and His works—God opens doors for us.

Prayer: Today is the perfect day to be grateful; keep the spirit of gratitude alive within me. Teach me to offer you a heart of thanksgiving and praise every day for loving me unconditionally; your love sustains me. You have been my refuge and strength, my help and my hope. I thank you for your presence and your peace in my life.



MONDAY, MARCH 11

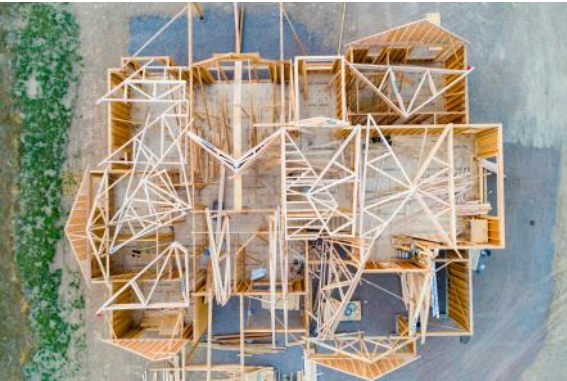
by Joy Rees

Hebrews 3 1-6

¹Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partners in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, ²who was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses also “was faithful in all God’s house.” ³Yet Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, just as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. ⁴(For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) ⁵Now Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later. ⁶Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the boldness and the pride inspired by hope.

Lent is an opportunity, a time for reflection and evaluation of ourselves and our Christian life. This passage from Hebrews helps keep things clear and simple for us: there is no one above Jesus. He is the Cornerstone for our salvation, but also for our life’s inspirations. I think the ‘big picture’ of the passage is that although Moses is a great example for people to follow, Jesus is superior since it is He who is the very fulfillment of Moses’s predictions. Moses was a faithful servant of God; Jesus is the Son of God. The author, in no uncertain terms, states that Jesus is the ultimate Leader, superior to all. In addition, the author continues, it is not enough to just believe that concept, but to “hold fast” or keep true to this belief in our daily lives and actions. We are all aware of the struggles life gives. These experiences can make beliefs “muddy” as we navigate these challenges. This passage reminds us to hold true and follow the greatest example or guide, Jesus, our North Star.

As I continued to reflect on this passage, one of my favorite hymns, “All Hail the Power of Jesus Name”, popped into my head. My suggestion is as you go through your day, take a moment (or two or three), and sing this song with gusto! I think this hymn puts the exclamation point to the Hebrews 3:1-6 reading: ”and crown Him Lord of all!” Jesus is our Redeemer, our Mediator, our supreme guide. Let’s hold him close, and follow him together!!



Prayer: Dear Lord, as we continue on our life’s journey, we thank you for the gift of Jesus, our Guide, our Redeemer, our North Star. Help us remember, He is the one true Light. As we hold fast to that certainty, help us to remain faithful. Let our lives be a true reflection that above all else, our foundation, our cornerstone is Jesus Christ. Amen

*For every house is built by someone,
but the builder of all things is God.*

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

by Elizabeth Dugan

1 Corinthians 10:6-13

⁶Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. ⁷Do not become idolaters as some of them did, as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.” ⁸We must not engage in sexual immorality, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. ⁹We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. ¹⁰And do not complain, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. ¹¹These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. ¹²So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. ¹³No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

(Continued on next page)

Warning! Temptations ahead! Wouldn't that be a nice sign post from God in our daily lives. In this scripture, that's exactly what Paul is doing for the Christians living in Corinth. He's reminding them (and us!) that we are going to be tempted. In fact, he throws in a history lesson and itemizes some of the Israelites past sins in super uncomfortable detail. Surely God, not us, we wouldn't do those things. But we do, or we do other things. We create barriers between ourselves and God; things that don't draw us closer or point others to our Lord. God wants all of us and wants to be all for us. God asks us to place him in the center of our lives. Some days, that doesn't seem so hard. Other days, whew, that's a really tough ask.

Matthias Grünewald paints Christ on a cross with a man (believed to depict John the Baptist) pointing his long bony finger and holding a scroll entitled "he must increase, but I must decrease". Karl Barth wrote that all theology is in that bony finger. It's a powerful image - one I find to be a great reality check and an excellent motivator. Every move we make, or don't make; every word we speak or when we choose to keep silence, should always and only point to our Lord. Each and every day - with all the temptation it may hold - can be met reminded of God's deep love for us and the promise that we are not ever alone. Christ should always be the center of our life. We should always practice the theology of that bony finger.

Prayer: Lord, take my life and let it be always, only, all for thee. Shepherd me through the temptations of life. And may all that I do be for your glory. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

by DeeAnn Martin

John 8:12-20

¹²Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." ¹³Then the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵You judge by human standards; I judge no one. ¹⁶Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid, for it is not I alone who judge but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf." ¹⁹Then they said to him, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." ²⁰He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

I have always been drawn to the Gospel of John as his faith never faltered and his writings focused on illuminating his unwavering belief that Jesus is the Son of God: the Messiah.

John opens with the beautiful reference to the life that was the light of all people; and in this passage Jesus proclaims that he is the light of the world and that those who believe will have the "light of life". In the verse that follows this passage (John 8:21) Jesus foretells his death, and this is the shadow that darkens our Lenten path. However, I find comfort that Jesus has also promised that if we believe, we will not walk alone in the darkness. When our son, Timothy, died, I experienced so many moments of deep, excruciating darkness; but always His light broke through and led me back to life. I was so blessed that my faith had been nurtured and strengthened along my faith journey that when this darkness threatened to swallow me, I was able to grasp and believe those other beautiful words of John: "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it."

Prayer: Gracious God, as we travel through this Lenten season may we not ignore the pain of the Cross, the pain or our neighbor or even our own pain; but may we also embrace the promise of the Resurrection and the light that Christ promises to all who believe and follow him.

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

by Gary Ward

Psalm 51: 1-12

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

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

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

⁴Against 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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.

Although this Psalm is attributed to King David as his repentance for his sins with Bathsheba, this scripture is relevant to each and every one of us. If David, one of God's most revered and cherished children, was guilty of adultery with Bathsheba and later the murder of Uriah (Bathsheba's husband), we surely all are sinners. Whether we think of ourselves as good or bad individuals, no one is perfect and we all, in our heart of hearts, realize we have many things in life we have thought, said and/or done or failed to say/do that have been sinful.

However, through repentance and prayer, David asked for God's forgiveness and for a "pure heart" so he would be far less prone to sin in the future. Although their illegitimate child died shortly after birth, in God's infinite mercy, He forgave David and Bathsheba, and later blessed them with another child, Solomon, who God chose from among the many of David's sons to succeed David as King of Israel. Solomon, renowned for his wisdom and knowledge, was also selected by God to be the builder of God's home in Jerusalem (the Temple). Furthermore, and perhaps foremost, Solomon is in the direct lineage of Christ.

This story truly demonstrates how merciful God is should we simply repent and ask for his forgiveness and continued blessings.

Prayer: Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love, according to your infinite mercy, blot out my transgressions and instill in me a clean heart. Help me to forever see and always follow your ways, in Christ's name I pray. Amen.



FRIDAY, MARCH 15

by Sarah Zazzu

Hebrews 4:14 – 5:4

¹⁴Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

¹Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ²He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness, ³and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴And one does not presume to take this honor but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

So much of life is spent trying to be “enough”. Smart enough, healthy enough, social enough, stylish enough, “woke” enough, even holy enough. No matter how hard we strive, we never feel good enough. After all of this striving, we feel defeated, and far from worthy enough of God’s love.

We hide in our insecurity of this feeling of unworthiness, pulling away from God and his love.

But God sent Jesus – fully human and fully God – to understand the human condition while showing us an example of God’s perfect love. Jesus experienced the temptations we face everyday; temptations to fit in and be accepted, temptations that draw us further from God. Instead of giving in to these temptations, Jesus rejected them, opting to die for our sins.

So let us draw near to God, knowing that He knows us fully, loves us anyway and has endless compassion for us.

So too, let us show this compassion to our neighbors, knowing that we are all imperfect people that are worthy of love. Let us use Jesus’ love as an example to strengthen each other in faith and draw near to God together.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to draw closer to you in this season of Lent as we are, so that we can receive your grace and love to share with others. Amen.

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

by Elizabeth Dugan

Habbakuk 3:2

*I have heard all about you, Lord.
I am filled with awe by your amazing works.
In this time of our deep need,
help us again as you did in years gone by.
And in your anger, remember your mercy.*

--New Living Translation

Habbakuk was a prophet of God who lived around 600 BC. He watched as armies annihilated cities and people. He watched as bad people came out ahead. He cried out to God to try to understand how this could be; to understand why it was happening. Sound familiar? Most days a quick glance at the news or our social media feeds confirms that thousands of years later, we too are in a time of deep need. Hate is easier than love and acceptance. Greed and violence prevail. Truth and grace are distorted for personal gain. We struggle to reconcile an awesome and loving God with the painful experiences we witness and live each day. We can’t help but ask “Why, Oh LORD?”

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Yet, at the root of Habbakuk's cry is a deep and abiding faith. Amidst all the evil of his day, uncertain of God's plan or timing, he offers a prayer - the beginning of which is reflected above - and steps out into the world trusting that God's will WILL be done. So go ahead MPC, cry out to God, God can take it. But don't forget to lean into your faith too. Just like Habbakuk, pray. Step out in hope and faith, trusting that the God of yesterday and today and all our tomorrows will have God's way!

Prayer: Awesome God, be with us in this time of deep need. You alone know what they are before we can even speak them. Like Habbakuk, help us to trust in you, to live into hope and faith every day. And by Your grace may we know your love and mercy just like the faithful saints across the ages. Alleluia. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

by Luisa Fernanda Herrera Gonzalez

Hebrews 5:5-10

⁵So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed b] the one who said to him,

*"You are my Son;
today I have begotten you";*

⁶as he says also in another place,

*"You are a priest forever,
according to the order of Melchizedek."*

⁷In the days of his flesh, [Jesus] offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered, ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

The passage of Hebrews 5:5-10 tells us about the obedience and reverence that Jesus displayed when accepting the priesthood given by God, without glorifying himself. With this passage in my notes, I began to think about why my relationship with Jesus was on the decline.

Five months ago in my spiritual relationship, I started wandering. It was a point of growth, and the next step required me to commit to being obedient in various areas of my life. Seek him intimately, give more of myself to God, authentically live the gospel in my daily life. Hebrews shows us that Jesus, the son of God, did the same thing! He offered prayers, supplications, and great cries to his father to save him from death.

But I didn't want to. I tried to fill my head with other things but they would only keep me asleep. I tried assuring myself that we all do things to put our mind at ease. I was confused about my faith and nothing was giving me the peace I desired. Not my occupations, rest, acting like a good person, or the next trip to my country. Not the company of family and friends or the smells and flavors of home would make me feel better and give me that peace that I desired.

Every day I was asking more questions and not finding answers because I didn't want to hear them if they brought me closer to God. Yes, I was a little worried that I would stop believing in God, because then who was I going to pray to when I felt the need?

Today I decide again to come to my priest Jesus to ask him to show me that I must surrender to him. I ask him to mold my heart. I ask him to give me the strength to learn to obey and have faith because I couldn't do it alone. I want God to continue working on me.

I know that we are allowed to take time and distance ourselves from many things, but it did not work for me to distance myself from God. Jesus always looked for him. Jesus calls me to do the same.

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Prayer: Beloved God, thank you for giving us your son Jesus, an obedient priest who teaches us how to follow him on this path to salvation. Forgive me for choosing continually things that fill me momentarily or distract me, over you. Today I ask you for an obedient heart; a heart that listens to your voice and follows it. I don't want to postpone meeting you any longer. I want to come to you and learn to surrender at your feet. To come to you Jesus, with faith, always remembering everything God has done in my life. Let me remember that God is the one who gives me growth, who gives me what I need with his great goodness. Amen

MONDAY, MARCH 18

by Pastor Rachel Rhodes

Psalm 119:9-16

⁹How can young people keep their way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you;

do not let me stray from your commandments.

¹¹I treasure your word in my heart,

so that I may not sin against you.

¹²Blessed are you, O Lord;

teach me your statutes.

¹³With my lips I declare

all the ordinances of your mouth.

¹⁴I delight in the way of your decrees

as much as in all riches.

¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts,

and fix my eyes on your ways.

¹⁶I will delight in your statutes;

I will not forget your word.

One of the most important declarations of Jewish faith is the Shema: “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength.” These words are likely familiar to Christians as well, but we often overlook the instruction that comes right after them. In Deuteronomy 6, where these words first appear, they are followed by: “Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise. Bind them as a sign on your hand, fix them as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” Basically, God wants you to write this commandment and speak this commandment and live this commandment every single minute of every single day.

These instructions were, no doubt, central to the faith of the Psalmist as well. I know that Psalms can be intimidating when they are full of words like, “statutes, ordinances, decrees, and precepts.” It sounds like a lot of rules that make us nervous. But here in Psalm 119, the psalmist is pointing back to this central declaration of faith: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” This is what you need to seek with your whole heart (v. 10)! This is the word you need to treasure in your heart (v. 11)! This is the law God begs of you to know, and love, and keep in your heart. For if this is where your faith begins, the rest of your faith will be shaped by it!

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, we thank you for your love for us, and for calling us toward a faithful life of discipleship. Remind us that this life of discipleship begins with you. That it is your word to which we must cling. Help us to keep your word in our hearts at all times, so that our lives might be a reflection of your will and your way and your love. Melt us and mold us on this Lenten journey, so that we might become the people you long for us to be. Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 19

by Curt Rimler

Isaiah 44:1-8

¹*But now hear, O Jacob my servant,
Israel whom I have chosen!*

²*Thus says the Lord who made you,
who formed you in the womb and will help
you:*

*Do not fear, O Jacob my servant,
Jesurun whom I have chosen.*

³*For I will pour water on the thirsty land
and streams on the dry ground;
I will pour my spirit upon your descendants
and my blessing on your offspring.*

⁴*They shall spring up like a green tamarisk,
like willows by flowing streams.*

⁵*This one will say, "I am the Lord's,"
another will be called by the name of Jacob;
yet another will write on the hand, "The
Lord's,"
and adopt the name of Israel.*

⁶*Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
I am the first, and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.*

⁷*Who is like me? Let them proclaim it;
let them declare and set it forth before me.
Who has announced from of old the things to
come?*

Let them tell us what is yet to be.

⁸*Do not fear or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and declared
it?*

You are my witnesses!

Is there any god besides me?

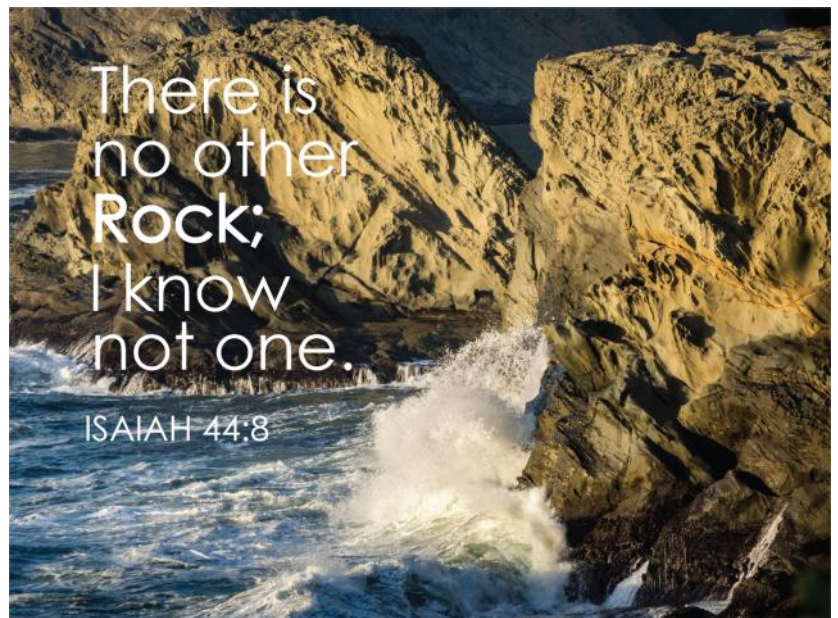
There is no other rock; I know not one.

In this passage from the Book of Isaiah, God is encouraging His people not to fear. God promises to support and show His Spirit to help guide His people through times of trouble. He gives hope to those who are faithful and ensures justice without any injury. God reminds us that it is He, alone, who has power over everything and everyone. God created us and gave us life; he also ensures us that He will be there to uphold us and give the oppressed their freedom through his grace. God also reminds us that He alone is the supreme being, the omniscient and He will not have any idols or gods before Him.

Too often, I forgot or took for granted how God's grace and love affected my life. After recovering from surgery and radiation treatments, I now realize how God protected me in my darkness, and my faithfulness to his promise helped me through that difficult period.

At the time, I was primarily concerned with getting to doctor's appointments, blood test results, and managing day-to-day activities, so I forgot that God was gently guiding and caring for me in my health journey. Once again, I pledge my reaffirmation of faith in God's love and hold Him alone as the one true and omniscient God. I am eternally grateful for the grace He has given me.

Prayer: Lord God, help us to feel and to know your loving presence each and every day. Amen.



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

by Lisa Zazzu

John 12:44-50

⁴⁴Then Jesus cried aloud: "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. ⁴⁷I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge. ⁴⁹for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me."

"Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that." Martin Luther King Jr.

Believing in Jesus calls us to live in the light. Spread kindness in all that you do - from a simple hello to helping someone carry groceries to their car. Serve with compassion – whether you are volunteering at the Food Center or serving on a Committee, treat everyone as a brother or sister in Christ. Love everyone and spread the light of Christ each day.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending your Son to show us the way from the darkness. Continue to guide us so that we may live in the light. Amen

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

by Nancy Powers

Philippians 2: 1-6

¹If, then, there is any comfort in Christ, any consolation from love, any partnership in the Spirit, any tender affection and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or empty conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped,

In this passage, Paul is instructing the Philippians in the importance of living the Christian life in humility. He states in verse 3: "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves." I have wrestled with this statement. Does this mean that when I have disagreements with others I am required to "suck it up" and assume that I am less capable than others of healthy discernment and decisions?

I have come to believe the point is that I should not selfishly or pompously assume that I am automatically right. Instead, I must always turn to God in my considerations and pray for his loving guidance, enabling me to humbly regard others in ways that will result in loving and caring interactions. I will be able to see people in a new light, and to think and act with love rather than self-centeredness. God has shown us the way through Jesus' death on the cross, the ultimate act of humility.

Prayer: Dear God, grant me the wisdom to turn to you in all that I think and do. Let the humility of Jesus be the model I will try to follow in my daily life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

by Beth Becker

Psalm 118:19-29

*¹⁹Open to me the gates of the Temple;
I will go in and give thanks to the Lord!
²⁰This is the gate of the Lord;
only the righteous can come in.
²¹I praise you, Lord, because you heard me,
because you have given me victory.
²²The stone which the builders rejected as
worthless
turned out to be the most important of all.
²³This was done by the Lord;
what a wonderful sight it is!
²⁴This is the day of the Lord's victory;
let us be happy, let us celebrate!*

*²⁵Save us, Lord, save us!
Give us success, O Lord!
²⁶May God bless the one who comes
in the name of the Lord!
From the Temple of the Lord we bless you.
²⁷The Lord is God; he has been good to us.
With branches in your hands,
start the festival and march around the altar.
²⁸You are my God, and I give you thanks;
I will proclaim your greatness.
²⁹Give thanks to the Lord, because he is good,
and his love is eternal.*

It's hard to read this passage and NOT think of Jesus. I think of a stone and see something imperfect and raw. I see the stone used to cover the tomb from which Jesus was raised. In this passage, we learn things are not always as they appear. The builders rejected this stone, called it worthless, and yet it was the most important of all; just like Jesus, who was also passed over and yet ultimately our Savior. Christ is the cornerstone, the foundation of so many things – our lives, our faith, the church and our community. We are all imperfect and raw, not always what we seem to be, but Jesus finds a way to mold us to become what He wants us to be. Give thanks to the Lord for this great good news!

Prayer: Dear God, may we always know you and feel your presence. May we put you first above all else, for it is you who drive our lives and our future, to be who you are calling us to be. In your name we pray, Amen.



SATURDAY, MARCH 23

by Tom Smith

Mark 10:32-34

³²They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³saying, 'Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the gentiles; ³⁴they will mock him and spit upon him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise again.

Jesus and his disciples are on the road to Jerusalem. Jesus is leading the way. It is a call to love him and others more than ourselves. It is also a call to follow Jesus in the most difficult circumstance. He has gone before us and is our example.

Jesus knows he will be betrayed, condemned to death, mocked, and beaten, but he will not waiver. He knows why he is going and remains faithful. His death will provide salvation and forgiveness for all who believe. We may suffer in our life; however, we can look forward to eternal life.

Think of the faithfulness Jesus had in going to Jerusalem, knowing that he would face the ultimate sacrifice of his life for our sins, so that we could be forgiven. Let us be moved by a sense of wonder at the love of God for us through his Son Jesus, and to worship him. Amen.

SUNDAY, MARCH 24

by Adrienne Poissant

John 12:12-16

¹²The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

"Hosanna!

*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—
the King of Israel!"*

¹⁴Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵"Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

*Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt!"*

¹⁶His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

I imagine the atmosphere in Jerusalem on this day would have been one of a great party. The sun would be shining and people would have run back and forth, gathering palm branches and meeting up with friends so they can all go welcome Jesus into the city. But the people in this crowd may be the very same people that will call for Jesus' crucifixion and watch his death in silence. How often do we rush to welcome and celebrate another person and then sit in silence when they are in need? The term 'fair-weather friend' is appropriate here. Once Jesus is named as an enemy, no one steps up to defend him, even though they once flocked to the city limits to catch a glimpse of him.

Prayer: Almighty God, help us avoid becoming fair-weather friends. Too often we call someone a friend but avoid them when they go through challenging times. Remind us of the crowd in Jerusalem and give us the courage to take action when a friend is in need. Amen.

MONDAY, MARCH 25

by Shellie Stoddard

John 12:1-8

¹Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ²There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵"Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶(He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

This is one of my favorite stories! I can picture this scene in modern times so easily: men gathered in the living room with the game on the TV; women gathered in the kitchen finishing preparation of the gravy and mashed potatoes. How would you react if your sister went to the bachelor friend and began to lather his feet with the retinal cream costing \$65 per oz? Another cousin would certainly comment on the extravagance, shaming her for not considering the "poor"!

It is the amazing grace of our Lord Jesus, allowing Mary to anoint his feet and wipe them with her hair, and then defending Mary, that is the hardest for me to imagine. He is alluding to his impending death, of course. Does He also want us to spend time and money caring for, and reflecting our boundless love for a dear one at the end of life? Of course! For all those with an elderly parent, a sick child, a friend struggling with mental health and/or addiction, we know in our hearts they need us today! The poor will always be with us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank You for loving guidance and grace. You came to earth and taught us so much. You died for us so that we might live! Your love is so great still and You know us so well! Help us to keep our priorities straight, especially when caring for each other at vulnerable times and end of life. Bless us and keep us strong to look after others for Your glory, Amen.

TUESDAY, MARCH 26

by Pastor Brian Ballard

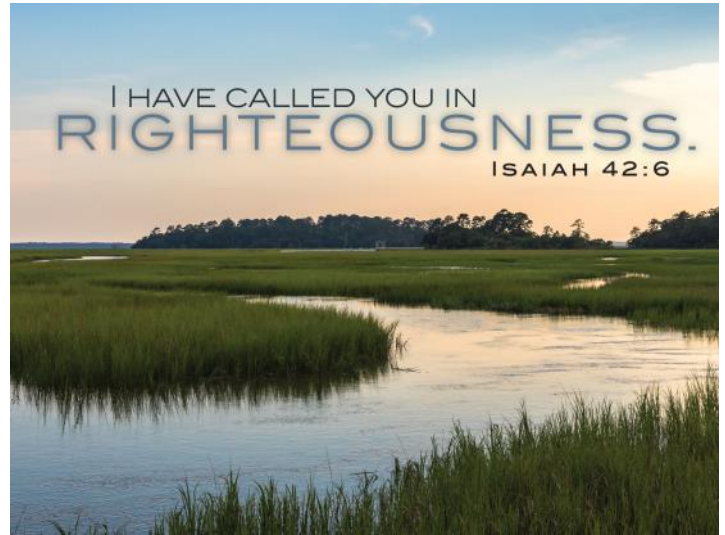
Isaiah 42:1-9

*¹Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
my chosen, in whom my soul delights;
I have put my spirit upon him;
he will bring forth justice to the nations.
²He will not cry out or lift up his voice
or make it heard in the street;
³a bruised reed he will not break,
and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;
he will faithfully bring forth justice.
⁴He will not grow faint or be crushed
until he has established justice in the earth,
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.*



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⁵Thus says God, the Lord,
who created the heavens and stretched them out,
who spread out the earth and what comes from it,
who gives breath to the people upon it
and spirit to those who walk in it:
⁶I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness;
I have taken you by the hand and kept you;
I have given you as a covenant to the people,^[a]
a light to the nations,
⁷to open the eyes that are blind,
to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,
from the prison those who sit in darkness.
⁸I am the Lord; that is my name;
my glory I give to no other,
nor my praise to idols.
⁹See, the former things have come to pass,
and new things I now declare;
before they spring forth,
I tell you of them.



I've heard it said that the most important people need the shortest introductions. Their reputation, work, and character, precede them.

Isaiah seems to understand this. Who is God, the Lord? Merely the one who created the heavens, who spread out the earth, who gives breath to people. God is the one who has taken us by the hand and kept us. The one who gave a covenant, a light to all the people. God, in other words, is everywhere! God is in everything!

God can be trusted because God holds together all that is. So when this passage concludes with God promising through Isaiah that new things will spring forth, we can believe that promise. As surely as the earth lies before us, so too does God's promise hold.

As you make your way through this Holy Week, may you cling to and believe God's promises. May you trust that the God that has been will continue to be the God who will not grow faint or be crushed, but will bring forth justice. God is the Lord. To know this God more, look around, God's work is everywhere.

Prayer: Gracious God, Your work surrounds us. Thank you for your promises, for taking us by the hand and keeping us. Journey with us this Holy Week so that we may know more your goodness and trust it in our lives. Amen.

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

by Pastor Rachel Rhodes

John 13:21-25

²¹After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, 'Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.' ²²The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; ²⁴Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, 'Lord, who is it?'

Most of us know that in the days leading up to Jesus' death he was betrayed by his disciple, Judas. It is a story we have heard told many times as part of the Holy Week journey of Jesus toward the cross. However, this particular

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text ends before we hear Judas' name. Instead, we are simply left with the question, "Lord, who is it?" We can imagine the racing thoughts of the disciples wondering whom Jesus could possibly be accusing of such betrayal. No doubt, the disciples looked at one another with skepticism and doubt, perhaps calling to mind that one time Andrew asked a few too many questions, or that other time Phillip looked very suspicious. However, despite their inclination to call to mind all the suspicious and unrighteous behavior of one another, chances are they were less inclined to hold up a mirror to their own hearts and minds. Because let's be honest, no one wants to believe that they would be the one to betray Jesus. Yet, part of this Lenten journey includes our willingness to take a serious look at our own hearts and minds, asking ourselves, "How are we living in ways that betray Jesus every day? In our action, our inaction, in words spoken and unspoken, how are we failing to live as Christ's faithful disciples?" May we be bold enough in this Holy Week journey to not simply ask, "Lord, who is it?" but rather pray, "Lord, show me how it's me."

Prayer: Merciful God, we are hesitant to admit the ways that we betray you. We want to point fingers at others, hoping you will not notice the sin that clings to our own hearts and minds. And yet, you know us inside and out; there is nothing we can hide from you. Encourage us, then, to trust you with our whole hearts. Remind us that within your loving embrace, grace abounds. Open our hearts to be melted and molded by you alone, so that we might live more faithfully as your people.

MAUNDY THURSDAY, MARCH 28

by Eric Becker

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

"Do this in remembrance of me" ...that sticks with me. When I take communion, it is sacred, powerful and I do the 3 R's; rewind, reflect and reset.

This passage speaks to me about being grateful, about being blessed, about being humbled by the love of Jesus who bears all things. It speaks to never forgetting that I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. His spirit equips me to do God's work every day.

Prayer: Lord God, teach me to give with grace, love and dignity to help others. May your light that shines within me, be brighter than the light that shines on me. Amen.

GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 29

by Beth Curtiss

Psalms 22:1-2

*¹My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?
²O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find no rest.*

These verses are not part of the Bible's stories or history.

These verses are the raw, honest emotion of a despairing soul.

These verses attest to living life and facing the pain that can come in many forms.

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These verses speak to the hurt and loneliness that we each can relate to at some point in our lives.

These verses can also be the cry of a community against the inhumanity that man inflicts on others through ignorance, hatred, or indoctrination. Unjust laws, acts of race supremacy, violence, abuse and wars continue throughout the world as well as in our neighborhoods. How can we watch the news of terrorism and war crimes and not cry out to God at what seems his absence?

Ignoring our hurt doesn't make it go away. Ignoring evil doesn't make it go away. Ignoring God doesn't make him go away. He is not insulted by our anger. Crying out, sharing our despair, rallying against what seems unbearable is the first step to moving away from it. It is the first step to remember that God is there, next to us. It is the first step toward hope.

Prayer: Dear God, I cry out to you in despair. Though answers seem lost or far away, help me remember that you are always with me and to look for you. Help me recognize others who are hurting, and be your vessel to bring them hope. Amen

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

by Clark Martin

John 19:38-42

³⁸After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission, so he came and removed his body. ³⁹Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴²And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Jesus entered Jerusalem as a celebrity and, in less than a week, was declared a criminal by the chief priests of the Jews and portrayed by them as a threat to the Roman government. Jesus was sentenced to an agonizing execution and suddenly anyone associated with him became suspected of threatening the rule of law and order. In spite of the sea of hatred and suspicion in the city after the crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea chose to do the right thing: give Jesus a respectable burial. He gained Pilate's permission to take the body and, accompanied by Nicodemus, treated the body with spices and wrapped it with linen strips in accordance with Jewish burial customs.

They placed the body in a nearby tomb (thought to be carved out of a stone hillside) and rolled a stone in front of the entrance. Joseph and Nicodemus, both wealthy men of high standing, took a risk by treating the body reverently, and in broad daylight, which had to be done before the Sabbath began at sundown.

Christians owe a prayer of thanks to Joseph and Nicodemus for doing the right thing in spite of the potential risks. Though once a doubter, Nicodemus showed the impact of his earlier meeting with Christ: that one was done under the secrecy of dark; but he became a believer and acted upon his new found faith.

Prayer: Dear God, may we also have the strength of our beliefs to follow Christ and do the right thing regardless of the earthly cost. As we reflect upon the pain Christ suffered during Holy Week may we strengthen our resolve to live the words of our faith, Amen.

This Wednesday, Feb. 14

Ash Wednesday

Worship Service
7:00 p.m.

Livestream also available



www.mpcusa.org

Lenten Soup Suppers return!

Join us on Wednesdays
February 21 & March 6
as we share with each other a
simple meal and short program.



Fellowship Hall 6:00 p.m.

MAUNDY THURSDAY



Thursday, March 28

**Supper &
Worship Service
6:00 p.m.
Fellowship Hall**

Sunday, March 31

Join Us

THIS EASTER



**10:30 a.m.
Sanctuary &
Livestream**

CONTACT US

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