



Lent Devos

Ash Wednesday- February 14

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

The beginning! Lent is upon us! "Sound the alarm," for we are now entering our time of reflection & remembrance.

We are reminded through the reflections of Lent that everyone has a battle to fight, a trial they are struggling to work through, an obstacle they need assistance with. The Israelites had just endured the effects of the locusts and, through guidance of the priests, were guided to seek God through an assembly. Doesn't this seem a little backwards? He just unleashed this plague and they are now being told to seek their Judge out? This scripture is meant to show us that in our questioning of "why did this happen to me?", we have often become blind. God sends plagues/trials/obstacles as a reminder to us that we cannot walk blindly in His image. We hear in 1 Peter 5:8, "your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." We must not submit ourselves to our temptations and risk forgetting our goals towards Eternal Life. We should aim to maintain our purposeful intentions in light of Him. This is the time for us to come clean, admit our sins, and to work towards better choices. We enter new chapters of life all the time and it is how we write those chapters through our actions that guides us for the next one.

So, I implore you to be kind to yourself as we enter this time of reflection, YOU are working your hardest & He is proud. I implore you to be kind to your peers during this time as you don't know what they might be working through. Most importantly, I implore you to continue your reflection and remembrances towards God for whatever you may need—strength, patience, courage, calmness. He is our Father, and He will guide us in the direction we are meant to be in.

Oh Lord, as we enter this time of reflection, I ask that you express patience in our willingness to better ourselves. I ask that you guide those who are in doubt towards clearer paths. We have not forgotten what it means to be a sinner, and we are working towards your image always. May your guidance aid us through our trials and tribulations, and your steadfast love be an anchor in our storm. Amen.

Ash Wood '23

notes:

February 15

Confession

notes:

This year, we're trying something a little different for our Thursday devotionals during the Lenten season. Many of you are familiar with the idea of either giving something up or taking something on for the season, and, as the 'something you take on,' we invite you to try out a variety of spiritual practices. Each Thursday will include some info about a spiritual practice and some guidance for how you might practice it. And if you want to try it out in community, Wesley will use the prayer chapel at 5:30pm each Thursday to engage with these practices.

The spiritual practice for today is confession, particularly appropriate on the heels of Ash Wednesday. For some, confession can feel deeply uncomfortable or shameful. And that's fair - on the surface, it feels like just offering up a laundry list of our sins. But, at its heart, confession is about freedom. We hear in Proverbs 28:13, "no one who conceals transgressions will prosper, but one who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy." The process of admitting and confessing our wrongdoing is necessary for our own well-being. In different parts of scripture, we hear the importance of confessing our sins to God and to one another. In 1 John 1:9, we read, "if we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And James 5:16 instructs us to "confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed." Confession can lead to forgiveness, healing, and sanctification, as we are cleansed from our unrighteousness.

So, what does it look like to try it out, especially if you don't want it to turn into a laundry list of sins and wrongdoing? Today, I offer one prayer of confession for you to try out, which is one of the many found in the United Methodist Book of Worship. Notice the communal language - even if individually we have not fallen short in all of these ways, as the whole body of Christ, we have. And yet our hope and expectation is that the Holy Spirit will transform us, individually and communally, so that one day we no longer fall short.

Holy and awesome God, we stand in your presence filled with regret for our many sins and failings. Though there is greatness in us, and a deep longing for goodness, we have often denied our better selves and refused to hear your voice calling us to rise to the full height of our humanity. For there is weakness within us, as well as strength. At times we choose to walk in darkness, our vision obscured. We do not care to look within, and we are unwilling to look beyond at those who need our help. O God, we are too weak to walk unaided. Be with us as a strong and wise friend, and teach us to walk by the light of your truth.

Offer your own prayer of confession, naming two or three specific sins or transgressions, and ask for forgiveness and a changed heart.

The Lord God is merciful and gracious, endlessly patient, loving, and true, showing mercy to thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin, and granting pardon. Amen.

Rev. Paige Holaday

February 16

Isaiah 58:1-12

notes:

This section of Isaiah really calls into question our perspective on a common practice of the Christian faith: fasting.

Fasting is not about God desiring for us to suffer without reason, or to go about our day as we regularly would minus Wesley rolls. Fasting is meant to foster time for reflection on how we conduct ourselves and how we treat those around us.

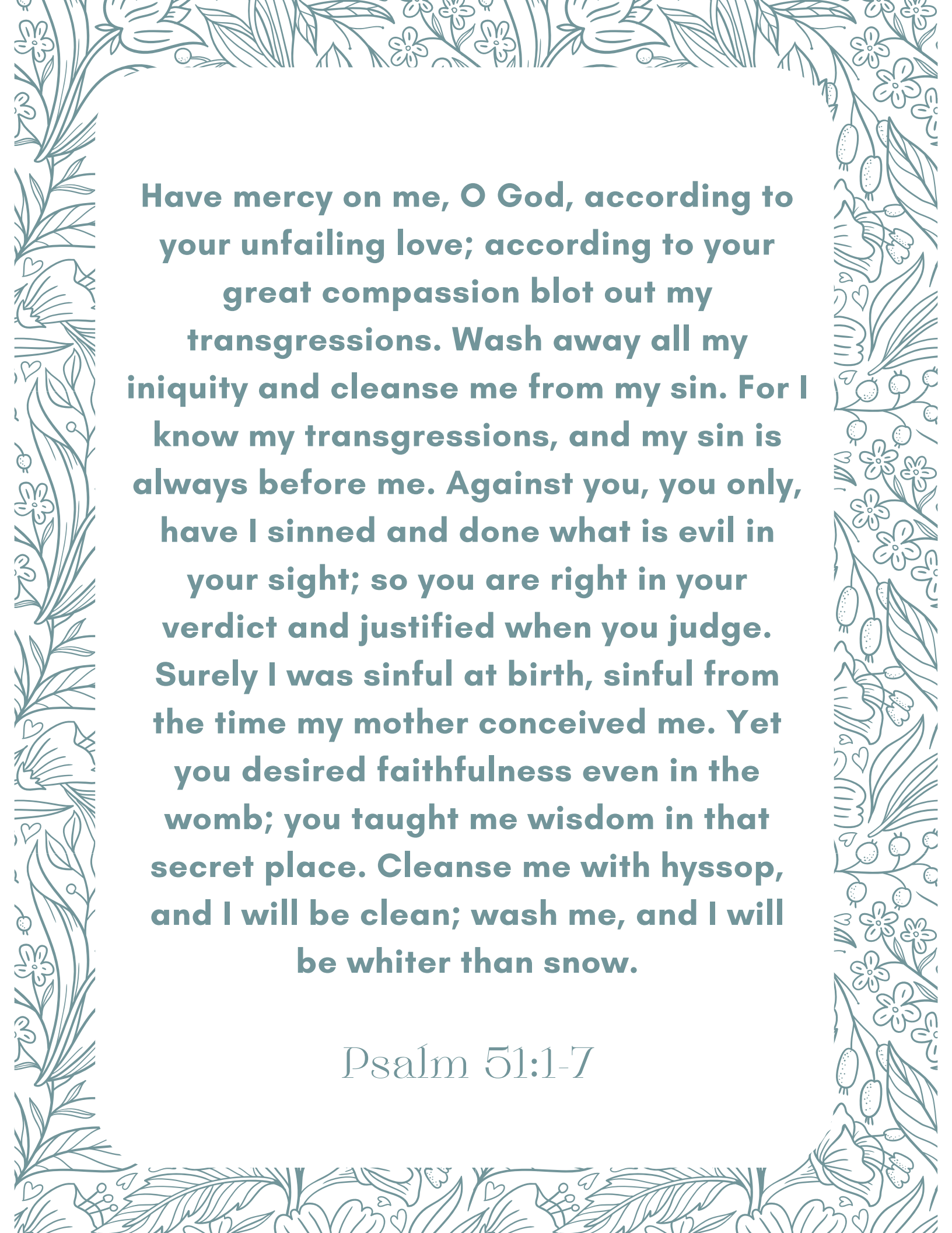
God tells the people the purpose of fasting is to "set the oppressed free" and "to share your food" and to "clothe the naked".

This passage really spoke to me because I found during my time at Auburn, I could get so focused in on the stress of school and tests and managing a pretty awesome friend group at Wesley. My calendar became so chock full, it was easy for me to forget about my duties as a Christian. Though I always gave something up for Lent and took that very seriously, it was not until later in my college career I really began reaching out into the community. Working with the East Alabama food bank in my hunger class allowed me to realize the many blessings I have and become close with a group of people whose only focus was the well being of hungry families. These verses challenge us to view the coming days as an opportunity to follow in Jesus's footsteps and put others first. I encourage anyone at Auburn to reach out and get to know any of the outreach groups in town! However, even something as simple as connecting with a friend over coffee you know is struggling or helping the Fellowship leader run the next big event puts you on the right path to giving time and love to your community.

My favorite verse from this section is verse 11. It speaks of the fulfillment from God when one truly uses time of fasting to help others; God says "you will be a well watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail". God will fulfill me when I make the time to uplift others as he would and follow his teachings. He speaks of one person's actions uplifting entire communities and creating an incredible reputation for those who follow the Lord. In the end, I think that's our main goal as Christians, to reflect the teachings of love and service this section focuses on in the Bible through our everyday actions and those we surround ourselves with.

Heavenly Father, help us understand that fasting is about serving others and reflecting on our actions. Guide us to reach out to those in need and to be like well-watered gardens, overflowing with Your love and grace.
In Jesus' name, Amen.

Reagan Vinson '22



Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against 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. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Psalm 51:1-7

February 17

Psalm 51:1-17

One of the hardest things that you can do as a Christian - but also the most important part - is to repent. Jesus said in Matthew 3:2, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand." What does it mean to repent? It means to review your actions and feel regret for the things you may have done wrong and then commit to actual actions that show a change for the better. Jesus's ministry was centered around repentance and the Kingdom of God. Why? Because without a change within us and getting rid of our sin, we create death in our relationship with either God or our relationships with others. Sin isn't bad simply because it's bad; sin is bad because it has consequences that keep you from being able to flourish spiritually.

A big lesson that I learned when I began growing in my faith was that I went from avoiding sin because it's wrong to avoiding sin because I could feel the Holy Spirit's heart breaking when I took a step away from Him. But this is where Jesus helps us in our weakness. 1 Corinthians 12:9 says, "But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.'" And that's so true. Having the heart posture of remorse when you sin and fall short is all that the Holy Spirit needs to draw close to you and help you.

Now, King David (yikes, he was going through it) wrote one of the best parts of the Bible with Psalm 51. Bro was a man after God's own heart. For context, this is the psalm he wrote after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and pretty much killed her husband. Nathan the prophet came to convict him and, man, did David feel convicted. David didn't feel bad that he did something bad, he felt horrible because he broke God's heart. He wrote "Against you, only you, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." He brought his heart before God and repented out of grief for what he had done. He asked for God's forgiveness and even admitted that he was in clear wrong for everything.

But here's the coolest part that connects to the Lenten season. David asks for God's mercy and love. He asks for Him to wash away all his sin and states that he knows he's deeply broken God's heart. Then he asks God to "Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow". Hyssop in the Bible is symbolism for a blood sacrifice. In Exodus 12:22, God tells the Israelites to "take a bunch of hyssop, dip it into the blood in the basin and put some of the blood on the top and on both sides of the doorframe. None of you shall go out of the door of your house until morning." Then in John 19:28-30, "a jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. When He had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit."

notes:

notes:

The symbolism of hyssop in this psalm and all throughout scripture points to our desperate need for a savior to atone for our sin. We need the blood of Jesus to wash us whiter than snow. Only God Himself – even in David’s time – can be our savior. David’s grief in Psalm 51 is a revelation of what our hearts have been longing to have. We long to be known by the one who knows us best. Yet, we can’t have an intimate connection with Him if we don’t ask our Father to wash us with the blood of Jesus. Repentance, a state of grief from the heart and wanting to cut off sin, is the first step we have to take. Ask Him to point out worldliness and patterns of sin in your life. Then, ask Him to create a heart within you that longs for His presence. He will take it from there. :)

A few reflection questions

- Do you miss God?
- Where in your life do you need Him the most?
- Are you willing to give up things that keep you from Him?

Father, I ask that You reveal Yourself to me by the Holy Spirit. I may not get it right all the time but I’m thankful that no matter where I am, You are closer to me than my own breath. Create in me a pure heart, Jesus, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Restore to me the presence of Your Holy Spirit and how You’ve saved me. Please take away things from my life that prevent me from knowing Your heart. Convict me when I want other things more than You. Help me when I don’t know where to go in my relationship with You. Most of all, thank You, Jesus, for everything You did on the cross to cleanse me and wash me whiter than snow. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Virginia Kate Brandt

February 18- first Sunday in Lent

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

In this world, many questions of faith are brought up to us as Christians. How am I supposed to act around my non-believing friends? How am I supposed to conduct myself in day-to-day life? How can I be a model of faith to my Christian friends so that we might grow in Christ together?

notes:

Paul writes, "We are Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us" (v.20), which brings up the question of "I know I'm God's ambassador as a Christian, but what does that look like?" Well, Paul then outlines this in Chapter 6, verses 3-10, as he states that we are not to cause anyone to stumble in their path; we are called to show great endurance through any trial, to show God's grace in any emotion we may encounter, to command our tongues to speak purely, to be genuine throughout any appearance we may give whether good or bad, be known yet also unknown, and to rejoice as if we had nothing yet possess everything.

That sounds like a long list of emotions that sometimes seem impossible to control. For example, I struggle with controlling my mouth so that all my words glorify God. Every day, I fall short in some shape or fashion, whether cursing, gossiping, or lying. It's a shortcoming that I struggle with. But does that make me any less of a believer than anybody reading this? No, of course not!

In Chapter 5, verse 21, Paul also writes, "God made him who had no sin to be sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." If there is any single verse you should take away from this devotional, it should be this one that directly tells us Jesus has already carried the weight of our sin so that we may become what he was on Earth. Just because we fall short sometimes does not make us less of a Christian. Just because we can't control that one emotion, how we feel about that one professor, or how we acted that one time does not make us less than or unworthy of God's love. We, as believers, have had our sins paid for in full, and now it is our time to be the light in the world as Jesus was.

Dear God, in these trying times, we ask for your forgiveness for our shortcomings; we repent of our sins and accept your grace paid for by the blood of Christ. We ask in your name that we may progress to a more holy place in our relationship with you to where controlling ourselves with grace and dignity no longer seems like a goal but is how we act daily. We pray that you use us to sanctify those around us who may or may not know you and bring them further into your grace, whether we actively recruit them or show your love unspokenly. We pray this in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Ellis Ikerman

February 19

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

notes:

In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus provides profound guidance on the true essence of worship – reminding us that it goes beyond mere external actions and rituals. Jesus redirects our focus from seeking the approval of others to offering sincere expressions of our hearts in worship. Our acts of worship are not for public applause but a genuine connection with God. Through giving, praying, and fasting, we are called to invest in heavenly treasures – acts of righteousness, love, and faithfulness – aligning our hearts with the desires of God rather than the world.

Giving

Our act of giving should stem from a genuine desire to make a meaningful impact and give back to the Lord's Kingdom. It's about the authenticity of our hearts. The generosity we show should reflect the love and grace we have received, serving as a testament to our gratitude.

Prayer

When engaging in prayer, we should partake in heartfelt conversations as we unveil our hearts to the Lord. Our conversation should be filled with humility, sincerity, and honesty. This allows us to create a sacred space where God can meet us intimately.

Fasting

Our fasting should not be a display of self-righteousness but a humble surrendering of our desires, drawing us closer to God. It is a discipline that refines our intentions, emphasizing dependence on God rather than on ourselves.

Lent is not a performance for public approval; instead, it is a sacred opportunity to express gratitude and faith. Our acts of giving, prayer, and fasting should reflect a heart captivated by the Lord rather than worldly approval. These actions should be genuine expressions of faith, resulting in treasures stored in the eternal presence of our Heavenly Father. By prioritizing eternal values over the temporary, our hearts will align with God's desires. This season of Lent challenges us to reconsider the treasures we store, ensuring they align with the eternal presence of God.

Heavenly Father, as I embark on this journey of devotion to you during this season of Lent, I come before you with a humble heart. May my acts of giving, prayers, and fasting draw me closer to your heart, where eternal treasures are found. Please remove any desire for public approval and self-seeking motives within me. May the sincerity of my actions and intentions of my heart align with your will for my life. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen.

Sidney Risch

February 20

Genesis 9:8-17

After the Lord floods the earth and returns Noah, his family, and all the animals from the ark to dry land, He establishes a covenant with Noah. In this covenant, the Lord promises to never again destroy life through flood waters.

notes:

The story of Noah and the ark shows that despite His hatred of sin, God is still committed to life—all life, forever. God offers Noah a way to escape wrath, just as He does with us through Jesus. And he leaves us a sign of this covenant, this promise to never flood the earth like he did, so that when we feel at our worst we can be reminded of his everlasting covenant with us.

I think it's beautiful that God uses a rainbow as a sign of His covenant with us and a reminder of His love for His creation. That rainbows follow rain not only resembles the story of the flood and how God sent the rain before making a promise of life, but it also parallels God's promises and goodness in life. When we have gone through the storms of life we can still find Him, and sometimes we need to go through some hardships to be reminded of God's presence in our lives.

As we go through Lent we are reminded of God's promises of salvation through Jesus. God's promises are forever and without a requirement of anything from us other than accepting His promise and believing in His Word. Just as the Lord made this promise so that all life on earth would be spared from His future wrath in this manner, the Father sent His Son so that all people might find salvation.

Thank You, Lord, for Your eternal and unconditional love for us. Thank You that Your promises are forever. Help us to remember the good You have done in our lives, and help us to be able to live for You and trust You through the hardships of life. In Your precious and Holy name we pray, Amen.

Emma Burns

February 21

Psalm 25:1-10

notes:

This psalm of David is chock full of worshiping the Lord and praising God for his mercy. These verses sound a lot like what we would find in a worship song on Sunday morning or night. But, what really spoke to me is how we are worshiping our merciful Heavenly Father every single day in and day out, not just on Sunday.

How am I trusting in the Lord throughout my day? That can be a very personal question, and maybe it will bring a lot of reflection on how you spend your time. Verse 5 says, "guide me in your truth...I put my hope in you all day long." I don't know about you, but that is something that I struggle with during the busyness of school and sports and hanging out with friends. I want to work on really prioritizing time with God that is not just at the very end of my day right before I fall asleep and rinse and repeat. These verses can be understood both for praising God everyday and challenging us on how we can use our time for Him.

Then, that leads us to the loving nature of our merciful God! We all come into this world as sinners, and I mean we sin everyday, but our loving God has shown His grace on us! Hallelujah! It says in verse 8 "The Lord is honest and good. He teaches sinners to walk in his ways." The Lord loves us as His chosen sons and daughters. Relish in that today! The Creator of the universe wants to teach and love us through a personal relationship with Him! The Bible is quite a primary source when it comes to learning how to live in a manner that will please the Lord. These verses are an excellent reminder of the Lord's love for us each and every single day. He will give us wisdom, all we have to do is ask...

Dear Lord, we thank you for another day in your creation. Set our hearts on you throughout today, focusing our mind on you during the pauses and the busy moments. Thank you for being a loving and merciful Father. May we go to you and Scripture for the wisdom we so dearly seek. We love you! Amen.

Hunter Atkins

February 22

remembering your baptism

At the beginning of Lent, we remember the “means of grace” for our lives. One way we recall that God’s grace working is to look back on our baptism. We were loved by God ahead of time and drawn into grace by an act marked by water, covenant, and community. Water: a great way to daily understand cleansing power and newness of life. Covenant: a promise fulfilled by God and drawn up with a commitment of deep love. Community: a surrounding bunch of believers who take promises seriously. Below are familiar words from the Congregational Reaffirmation of Baptism (United Methodist Book of Worship) and some scriptures I chose that might apply when you read these lines.

notes:

Through the reaffirmation of our faith we renew the covenant declared at our baptism,

...Just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. He destined us for adoption as his children through Christ Jesus, according to the good pleasure of his will. Ephesians 1:4-5

acknowledge what God is doing for us,

We are being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy. Colossians 1:11

and affirm our commitment to Christ’s holy church.

For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body... 1 Corinthians 12:13

Take time to meditate on what your baptism might have looked like (or if you remember, what details you can recall). Then imagine the baptism of Jesus. Put yourself alongside Jesus and share the blessing “...in whom I am well pleased”.

Dear Lord, I am thankful for my baptism. It’s a reminder to me of being born through water and the Spirit. May I live as a faithful disciple of Christ always. Amen.

Christy Benitez

February 23

1 Peter 3:18-22

notes:

So, there seems to be a couple of things Peter wants to hit on in these few verses.

The first thing he makes clear is that Jesus came to Earth, suffered, and died to bring you closer to God. Then he talks about being alive in the spirit, and about Noah and the ark, and about baptism.

There are several water references in the second half, talking about how "lives were saved through water" during the time of Noah building the ark and baptism.

This makes me think of when I went through confirmation while in my youth group. After going through several weeks of fellowship with other 6th graders, of Bible studies, of asking lots and lots of questions, I and many others decided to follow Jesus, not because of our parents, but because we believed. So, in front of the church we all spoke the words and some of us were baptized. When I knelt at the altar and felt the water on my head I knew that I was choosing to be a follower of Jesus, because, as this verse states, Christ suffered and died to bring me to God, to bring you to God, and he uses water through baptism to "appeal to God for a good conscience".

Holy Lord, we know it is truth that You came to Earth, You suffered, and You died, for me and for all others. We thank you for Your Spirit and for the use of water for us to be baptized. May we remember who You are and what You have done for us. May we remember Your Spirit and walk with You always. In Jesus name, Amen.

Abigail Wyatt

February 24

Mark 1:9-15

Listen: "Honey in the Rock" by Brooke Ligertwood, Brandon Lake

notes:

In Mark 1:9-15, we encounter the powerful and transformative moment of Jesus' baptism and his subsequent time in the wilderness. What strikes me most about this passage is the contrast between divine and human. Jesus, the beloved Son of God, is publicly acknowledged by the Father, and yet immediately afterward, He is led by the Spirit into the harsh and desolate wilderness. It's like getting a big "You're amazing!" from God and then immediately followed by "Now put your big kid pants on for the tough stuff." This contrast creates a good picture of the human struggle. It reminds us that even amid clarity and purpose in our faith life, there will also be periods of doubt and confusion. No one is exempt from facing challenges, temptations, and periods of wilderness.

Wilderness is a place where our comfort zones are stripped away. Wilderness takes everything we once leaned on and relied on that isn't God and challenges us to figure out who we are and our purpose. Oftentimes, we don't pick the wilderness, so if and when you find yourself there, it's essential to know that Jesus is familiar with this desert. He knows it because he, too, has suffered through it.

BUT, wilderness is also a space where we can encounter and really meet God! All we have to do is be willing to hang on. We will come out on the other side with a clearer picture of what it means for us to follow Jesus. We see this in this passage from Mark. He comes out of the wilderness and is fully ready to live into who God is calling him to be.

Here are some questions to ponder as you finish out this devotional:

- What does it mean for you to enter into the wilderness this Lent?
- Where do you want to encounter God in this wilderness?
- Reflect on what it means that wilderness picks you, not you pick the wilderness
- What does it mean to you that Jesus also faced wilderness?

Heavenly Father, during life's wilderness journeys, we turn to You. Thank You for the assurance of Your presence, even in the deserts. Give us strength to withstand temptation and courage to trust in Your unfailing love. As we journey through this Lenten season, may we draw closer to You, seeking comfort in Your Word and Your Spirit, and embrace the challenges of the wilderness. Amen.

Caroline Deck

February 25- second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

notes:

In this passage of scripture, God appears to Abram at the age of 99, establishes a covenant with him to be the father of many nations, and changes his name to Abraham (father of many).

I think something that's interesting to point out is Abraham's reaction when the Lord first appears to him. Verse 3 says "Abram fell facedown". In response to God appearing before him, he immediately bows down. I think we should all aspire to be more like Abraham in this way- bowing down because of his power and submitting to the will of God (whatever it may be). Having your name changed by God at the age of 99 is probably a sign that the Lord is going to move in a mighty way in your life. God declares that Abraham will be "a father of many nations".

If I were in his shoes, I think I would doubt the likelihood of this actually happening, but here Abraham trusts that the Lord will do something in the life of he and his wife Sarah (her name was changed from Sarai). Father Abraham did indeed have many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham.

Ultimately, the lineage of Abraham would lead to the birth of Jesus. And it's incredible to see how God used the faith of a 99-year old man and his wife to eventually bring to life the One who would come to save.

God is faithful in keeping his promises. And the same God who promised these things to Abraham is with us today. As we walk to class. As we take a Biology exam on a Tuesday afternoon. As we eat lunch. May you today be a little more aware of God's presence in your life- and how He is good on His promises.

Heavenly Father, Thank You for the example of Abraham's faith. Help us to trust in Your promises and be aware of Your presence in our lives each day. Strengthen us to walk in faith and submit to Your will In Jesus' name, Amen.

Hays Jones

February 26

Psalm 22:23-31

This passage in Psalms is a great call to worship for us as Christians. It follows a call to worship, without necessarily needing to be stated, with some of the reasons why we need to worship God. He does not shy away from us in our times of need, instead He presents Himself to us so that we can draw near and feel safe and at peace. This can be a hard subject to blindly adhere to, as we can't physically draw near to God in a literal sense. However, if you are able to look back on hardships and tough situations, God can be seen readily in those experiences. Verse 25 in this passage is a bit of foreshadowing to what Jesus will speak on in the Beatitudes. There Jesus states "blessed are the meek, blessed are the poor in Spirit." This relates to how we should view ourselves in our tough moments, blessed by God because of the position we are placed in. We are placed in a prime position to praise God passionately and genuinely at our lowest points. The psalmist understands this and mixes this language properly into a psalm of praise. The end of this Psalm also furthers the message Jesus spoke on, that those who are rich will have their reward here on earth. However, those who are destitute and "cannot keep themselves alive" will be blessed in the next life. This can help us keep perspective in our difficult times or times of hard decisions.

notes:

Thank you Lord for the good times in our lives Lord, but also thank you for the times that challenge us and cause us to be humbled. We praise You in both instances, Lord, and give all the glory of our works to You. Amen.

John Thornhill

February 27

Romans 4:13-25

notes:

13 It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, 15 because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. 16 Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 17 As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." [a] He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. 18 Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." [b] 19 Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." 23 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

In this passage Paul talks about the promise Abraham received from God. Paul notes that Abraham did not receive this promise not through the law but through his faith. At first this passage seems easy to understand but after reading it a few times I realize that there is more to it than the initial message. It is the story of how Abraham had been faithful even though it would be easier to give up and abandon his faith. Verse 22 says "it was credited to him as righteousness" and verse 23 points out that this was not meant for Abraham alone. We were also included in this when we believe in Jesus Christ.

Dear God, thank you for this time of Lent where we seek to grow closer to you. Help us to grow in our faith and to continue to trust and have faith in you even when it seems hard. Amen.

Katie Dalton

February 28

Mark 8:31-38

This short span of scripture is one that is well known, but not talked about too often. It is easier to look at these verses if you split it into two halves. The first half is where Jesus foretold of his death. This resulted in Peter becoming upset with him and Jesus scolding Peter. Jesus states to Peter, "... You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns" (Mark 8:33). This line is something that we should take to heart. We have to recognize that we do not and cannot know exactly what God is planning. It is especially important for us to recognize that God has us in his hands since we are in a part of our lives when we are constantly facing huge decisions. We are not able to comprehend the plans that he has laid out for us, so it is important for us to trust Him. notes:

The second part of this scripture is referred to as The Way of the Cross. This section of scripture contains the well known lines from Jesus where he states, "...Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it" (Mark 8:34,35). This piece of the second half of the passage is easier to follow if it is split up. The first sentence is pretty straight forward. Jesus calls us to make him the center of our lives.

We cannot truly be his followers if we choose to indulge our desires. Jesus commands us to do his will and follow his commandments even in a world where sin is all around us. This is further reenforced when he states, "If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

The second sentence mentioned earlier feels a bit paradoxical. Jesus shares that we will lose our lives if we seek to save it, but we will save our lives if we lay it down for him. This notion is one that is quite scary. This line builds on the previous sentence. Jesus asks us to make him the center of all we do no matter what the cost is. I would like to pose the same question that Jesus did. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? (Mark 8:36,37). We must go forth and follow God as he has told us. Through this we can save our soul which is truly priceless.

God, we ask that you guide us in your ways so that our actions may be pleasing in you. We come humbly looking for the strength to stay true to what we are supposed to do as taught by the Son Jesus. May you watch over us and bestow trust on us so that we may follow you with our whole hearts. May we be able to stand against the modern sins around us. In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit we pray. Amen.

Timothy Brandon

February 29

Prayer

notes:

God makes it clear over and over that God desires to be God with us, God for us. From the very start, in the garden, when we choose alienation, it's God who comes walking through the garden calling to us. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph - is, at its core, about the lengths this God will go to to have a people. When these people end up enslaved in Egypt, they cry out and this God HEARS their cries and sets about to lead them out to a place where they can draw near to and worship God.

This kind of relationship is called COVENANT. It's about fidelity, open-heartedness and steadfast love. It's about deep communion and connection that is born of a mutual trust. And God always goes first. But it is God's deep desire that God's COVENANT LOVE would open up and create in us that same kind of fidelity, open-heartedness and steadfast love. Listen to God speak:

31 The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. (Jeremiah 31:31-33)

The clearest and most definitive move of God's COVENANT LOVE and of God's desire to create a people on whose hearts are written a fidelity and steadfast love for God... It's Jesus - his life, death and resurrection. Here is God's most personal and risky move of being with us and for us.

PRACTICE - COVENANT PRAYER -

Today, reflect on God's COVENANT LOVE for you in Jesus. Let it into this very moment. And in light of that, take this time to RENEW YOUR COVENANT WITH GOD. Speak to God about what it looks like for you to trust God in your life RIGHT NOW. What keeps you from this kind of trust? What does fidelity to God look like given all the things you so easily give your heart and love to instead? What do you need to let go of? What do you need to hold on to? In as honest and detailed way as possible - write out what it looks like for you to be committed to God in COVENANT LOVE - to let the gift of Jesus' life, death and resurrection be written on your heart. Then as a way of offering that to God, consider slowly praying this prayer...

Covenant Prayer -

God - I am no longer my own, I belong to You. Call me to whatever You want. Rank me with whomever you want. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me work for you, let me be set aside for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and with joy give my whole life to You. And now God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, You are mine and I am yours! With Your help, let this covenant be faithfully kept all year long. Amen.

Tony Jeck

March 1

Mark 9:2-9

notes:

This is the story about the transfiguration of Jesus. Right before this chapter, Peter declares to Jesus that he is the Messiah and Jesus warns him to tell nobody about this. After this, Jesus predicts his death and subsequent resurrection as well as telling the disciples to "deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (8:34).

Such a statement like this might have caused the disciples to have some doubt in Jesus, which could be why he decided to transfigure himself in front of them. Six days later, "Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and led them up on a high mountain" (9:2). What are some other stories from the Bible that happen on a mountaintop?

This is the second time in Mark that Jesus had brought out these three disciples apart from the others. The first time was when Jesus healed Jairus's daughter in chapter 5 of Mark. Why exactly Jesus continues to single out these three still puzzles me. This verse also reminds me of when Moses received the ten commandments from God on top of Mount Sinai and when he returned, "he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord." (Exodus 34:29). And just like Moses, Jesus transfigured and his clothes became dazzling white. When I think of these transfigurations, I think that talking to God and being with him brings out the best in us and that we are made into his perfect image.

Elijah and Moses appeared before the disciples and they were talking to Jesus. What could they have been talking about? Both Moses and Elijah existed during the Old Testament and yet here they are existing right in front of the disciples. The Law of God (The Commandments) were represented through Moses and the Prophets through Elijah. An interesting note from verse 5 is that Peter knew who Moses and Elijah were even though he was never told who they were, which might mean that we'll all know each other when we get to heaven.

Peter, James, and John probably didn't know what to think at this point, and Peter proposes that they should build three tabernacles, one each for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah because he just doesn't know what to say. Peter puts Jesus on an equal level here with Moses and Elijah, and I feel like his statement gets "left on read" and nobody responds to it. This feels like a reminder that we shouldn't say something if we don't truly know what to say. At some point, we've all said something that we didn't think out beforehand, and the result of it isn't a positive one. I've struggled with this while praying sometimes, and I'll pray about something in the heat of the moment and when I reflect on it later, I'll realize that I was being selfish or too demanding of God.

notes:

Then, "a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!'"(v.7). God responded to the disciples' doubts and assured them that Jesus's plan was also his. And just like that, everything was gone except for Jesus who told the disciples not to tell anyone what had happened until he rose from the dead. Like the disciples, we should also get rid of all of our doubts, as hard as that might be sometimes, and put all of our trust in Jesus because he died to save all of us.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for revealing Your glory through Jesus' transfiguration. Help us to trust in Him and listen to His teachings.

Guide our words and actions, that they may reflect Your wisdom and grace.

May we always heed Your voice and follow Jesus with unwavering faith.

In His name we pray, Amen.

Preston Stephens

**The world is charged with the grandeur of
God.**

**It will flame out, like shining from shook
foil;**

**It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of
oil**

**Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his
rod?**

**Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared,
smeared with toil;**

**And wears man's smudge and shares
man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.**

**And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep
down things;
And though the last lights off the black West
went**

**Oh, morning, at the brown brink
eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with
ah! bright wings.**

God's Grandeur
GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS

March 2

Psalm 40:5-10

notes:

In this section of Psalm 40, King David writes praise as God appears to meet David's needs. "Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear." Verse 6 emphasizes the personal connection each of us has with God.

In my life, I rarely call out to God when I face the struggles of life. I like to maintain an illusion of control over my life, and I do this by refusing to ask for help. This is, of course, not a good mentality. David reminds us that we cannot make it on our own. We need to ask God for help. I find it encouraging to know that God wants to hear from us.

Verse 8 reminds us that we should also desire to hear from God. Not only should we desire to hear from God, but we should be excited to perform His will. All the while, we should be praising him to all those around us. Publicly praising God is something I know I don't do enough. I had an eye-opening experience a couple of years ago while I was working on campus. I had casually mentioned that I was going to a Wesley event to a coworker and the coworker was surprised that I was a Christian because I had never mentioned it to him publicly. I work in an environment where I am often around atheist and agnostic people and my fear of confrontation often prevents me from speaking about my faith. This passage is definitely a call to action for me.

Almighty God, help us to remember to bring You our troubles. Help us to recognize our inability to handle our problems alone. Let Your hand guide us as we face the struggles. Embolden us to publicly lift up Your name and proclaim the great work You have done in our lives. Allow us to be confident in our faith and provide us the strength to share it with others. Amen.

Chase Taylor

March 3- third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 20:1-17

Then God spoke all these words, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before Me. "You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above or that is on the earth beneath or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work—you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and consecrated it. "Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you. "You shall not murder. "You shall not commit adultery. "You shall not steal. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. "You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female slave, ox, donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

notes:

You know her. You love her. It's the ten commandments. Chances are this is one of the first things you were exposed to if you grew up in church. So let's quickly break them down once again.

1. Have no other god before God. - God is God. Not only is He God, but He is THE God. Nothing else came before and nothing else is more omnipotent or more godly than God. Full stop.
2. Make no idols and do not idolize anything of this world. - We probably all know the phrase "latest hyperfixation". The important distinction is when your fixation starts to dictate how you live your life. Don't let your job, relationship or current hobby become such a priority that you forget who you live your life for. Everything is secondary to God.
3. Do not take the Lord's name in vain. - A fairly self-explanatory one, but think of it this way: God created you, the world around you and everything you know to be real. What reason could you have to use His name to cause offense to Him, the world or yourself? His name is the most powerful one there is and using it to further sinful or bad behavior can only reap sinful and bad behavior for yourself.
4. Keep the sabbath. - An easy one, but, essentially, God rested on the seventh day for a reason. It's important to take a moment to step back and see that what you're doing is good and to recognize where your strength comes from.

notes:

5. Respect your parents. – A not so easy one, but one of the most important. God may be THE father, but it was your mother and father that brought you into this world and have sacrificed so much for you. No matter what stage of life you're at, your parents will always be your parents. It's never too late to start mending or growing that relationship. And the best place to start is from a place of respect.

6. Do not murder 7. Do not commit adultery, 8. Do not steal. – I group these together because it's easy to glaze over and say, "yeah yeah that's obvious." Here's the thing, do not murder also means do not cause harm or intend to inflict pain on others. Do not commit adultery also means appreciate what you have and do not stray from the path you're on. Do not steal also means do not take what you don't deserve. Suddenly these seem much more relevant don't they?

9. Do not lie and do not make plans to deceive others. – The cost of lies is too great. It is human nature to protect your ego and your way of life by hiding the truth and not owning up to your mistakes or accepting things you don't agree with. To be honest is to recognize that your words have immense power to inflict pain or healing depending on what you decide to do. Words are the greatest weapon we have for good and evil.

10. Do not crave something that another has. – I think it is important to note that this commandment is the last one. There are a few other commandments that, if not followed, are results of coveting. Taking the Lord's name in vain, dishonoring your parents, murder, adultery, stealing, lying. All of these can come from a place of desiring something someone else has. The best defense we have against all of these is gratitude. Gratitude for what you have and who it all comes from. Be thankful above all else.

A while ago, I walked out of a church service and thought about how the Bible can be seen as a handbook to being a good person. The stories of sacrifice and love, forgiveness and redemption can all be used to show us what it means to be good and faithful. Turn to the Bible and the commandments for your personal how-to guide on living a life of morality and virtue. I give it 5 out of 5 stars.

Father God, thank you for the gift of your word and its continued relevance in our lives. Thank you for giving us eyes to see and minds to think as we explore what your plan is for us in a world that works to turn us away from you. Help us to use these commandments to live a life worthy of your plan. Help us to know we were made for something greater and our strength comes from you. In your son's name we pray, Amen.

Katy Kindley '23

March 4

Psalm 19

This psalm, Psalm 19, is about how God's creation is so magnificent and wonderful that just even looking upon the skies and the earth shows that God is present because it's too good to be true. All of these things in the world may not have the ability to say, "Hey there, God made me, aren't I beautiful?," but they demonstrate that. Then this psalm talks about how the Law, Scripture, or what God says are the guidelines to life. It talks of how perfect the Lord is, and how the Law of the Lord is refreshing to the soul. This is such a beautiful concept, too, because we are leading a life where we can look to one who quite literally can do no wrong. After all, why would we praise and worship something that is just as imperfect as we are? David also writes that he wants God to keep him from falling into sin and that he wants his praises would be pleasing in God's eyes. We do the works we do not for the earthly reward, but rather for God's reward. We do not know what the future holds, but He does, and that alone should drive faith.

A lot of times we never slow down to take in the wonder God created. I know not everyone is an "outside" person, but no matter what you do on a day-to-day basis, God is present in every aspect. He is the one that put you here to use your talents and gifts, allowing you to see where you fit in to what He created even before you. In college we are swept away in the school work and checklists we have to accomplish. Another test, another homework, and another application always comes up at the end of the one right before it. But really ask yourself, why am I doing this? You might honestly answer "I don't know," but I encourage you to sit back and realize how you could help people or the world with the area of expertise you are studying. Once you finish that work, internship, or project, you will have impacted others and been helpful for the progression of your area of interest. You don't always see the direct impacts, but they are always there. Sometimes we can even see cyclic patterns to what was and is now. I can attest to the fact that from the beginning of my life I couldn't always see how things would lay out, but now I definitely do. God shows Himself in so many ways, so take a minute and sit and think about how He is showing you that you fit into the puzzle perfectly.

God, thank you for making this world for us to be a part of through Your image. We are worked into Your plan and want to show anyone and everyone that the light we have is made by You. Everything I see and hear, You work through and fit together perfectly. Move me to continue spreading Your Word and creation. Amen.

Emma Burns

notes:

March 5

Romans 8:1-17

notes:

Y'all, this passage is kinda long, but every bit of it is important. Please read verses 1-17 in Romans 8!! I'm just including a portion that's most critical to me so I don't write an essay, haha.

Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of His Spirit who lives in you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

Okay, so I gotta start off and say Romans 8 is arguably one of the best chapters in the entire Bible. As a summary, Paul is super clear that as beings made in the image of a triune God - we have a spirit, soul, body - we have a requirement to not live by our flesh but by the spirit. What is the flesh you ask? Our flesh is just our bodily desire for physical things. In Galatians 5:19-21, Paul outlines some of the works of the flesh as sexual immorality, impurity, idolatry and witchcraft, hatred, and jealousy. Not great stuff. Now, our physical bodies aren't bad, but the fallen nature of this world has corrupted our physical desires. So Paul states that the way we overcome our fallen nature is by walking in the Spirit.

When I was younger, I often asked myself, why can't I see God? It's because God is spirit (John 4:24). But we also have a part of our being that's also spirit. Now, you can't see your spirit but it's there. As believers, we have to learn how to walk according to the Holy Spirit and by the nature of our own spirit. Paul writes, "Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God. You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but the realm of the Spirit." So we have to get our heads out of physical living and think about our spiritual living, quite literally.

Okay, so hang on for a second. We gotta shift gears for a second. When we shift our minds from physical living to spiritual living, how do we do that? Well, I don't know if you've heard about fasting, but that's where we're going with this. A common practice Christians did to increase their spiritual lives was to refrain from physical things, most notably food for a certain amount of time. However, it could also include social media, cutting off patterns of sin, or taking up spiritual disciplines like prayer and reading the word.

But in the context of a traditional fast, refraining from food allows you to take note of your spiritual health, grow closer to the Holy Spirit and hear God more clearly. Oftentimes, fasting may be a sign of spiritual petition in prayer before the Lord. Turning down a plate or cutting something off helps you see how you're doing with your walk in the Spirit. But let me make something clear, food is NOT bad. Eat three meals a day, please. However, every once and a while it's okay to fast! Jesus even said in Matthew 6:16, "when you fast" instead of "if you fast."

This Thursday, if you would like to participate in a fast with your fellow Wesleyans, I would highly encourage it if you're able. It will also look different for everyone. Pray and ask the Lord if it's something that He wants you to take part of. If you have any questions please feel free to contact Rev. Paige or me!

Holy Spirit, You are my guide in learning how to walk in the spirit and not in the flesh. Help me see where I'm being carnally minded versus spiritually minded. Teach me what it means to walk in the fruit of the spirit instead of the works of the flesh. Through the sacrifice of Jesus, embolden me to take a new step in my faith and encourage me. Guide me in Your word to refresh my mind and lead me in the spiritual walk Jesus walked first before us. I thank You, Holy Spirit that You're leading me in the way everlasting. In Jesus' name.

Virginia Kate Brandt

March 6

John 2:13-22

notes:

When you read this story, it's probably one several of us have heard many times if you grew up around church or Christianity. What I find very interesting here is this is one of the very few moments in the Gospels where we see Jesus get physically and verbally angry. Usually, Jesus takes a very wise and steady approach, but here he seems to have a very adverse reaction to what the Jewish people were doing. The issue at hand doesn't arise from the trading and selling the people were doing, but the fact of the matter is they are defiling God's holy temple by having zealous individuals who think they are doing things in the name of God using God as an excuse, when the reality is, it's all self centered and done out of zeal.

Later on in this passage Jesus tells the Jewish traders, "destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up." They completely misunderstand the point because Jesus was referring to his resurrection, not the revival of the temple. What I finally gathered from this is that yes, it's okay to be angry, it's okay to have a negative emotional reaction to something, if we can subdue it and take a step back from it. Well placed anger can eventually turn into a benefit for either party.

There have been times in my life where I know anger got the best of me but it was misplaced, and maybe if I had thought about and had faith that God would handle it, that anger could have been better placed and could've been more beneficial or avoided completely.

Heavenly Father, may our emotions and feelings not consume us when we are quick to anger but guide us by the Holy Spirit to subdue it and act as you have in the temple. Let us reassess where anger is placed and better express how we should feel. Let us give it to you and lay it down at your feet, so that you may work in us to improve our mind. Amen

Peyton Pylant

March 7

fasting

notes:

Our spiritual practice for this week is fasting. When we think about spiritual practices during Lent, this is probably the one we most readily think of, and several of our Lent devos have already spoken about it. As Reagan Vinson's Isaiah 58 devo indicated, the purpose of fasting is not simply to deny ourselves for the sake of denying ourselves, but we hope that the act of fasting, the act of self-sacrifice, will create an attentiveness to the ways we can better love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Food fasting is probably the first kind of fasting that comes to mind, and for good reason. It is the type of fasting most regularly practiced in the Bible, from Jesus to Moses to Elijah. In historic and modern Christianity, we see folks continuing this practice by completely abstaining from food for a prescribed period of time, choosing to only eat before sun-up and after sun-down for a prescribed period of time, or doing things like abstaining from meat on Fridays, as many Catholics continue to do during the Lenten season.

A quick note about fasting from food - fasting is NOT a diet. We live in a culture where we are surrounded by restrictive eating practices, and some of you reading this may be actively struggling with disordered patterns of eating or eating disorders, or you may be in recovery from an eating disorder. If that is part of your story, please do not engage in a food fast. Fasting is about loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves, and if you have a troubled or complicated relationship with food, a food fast is not going to help you tend to either of those things well. And even for those who may not be dealing with a history of eating disorders, if our minds go to calories and potential weight loss implications when thinking about fasting, any food fast we engage in will likely not be pleasing to the Lord and we should probably refrain from it.

If food fasting isn't for you, there are still tons of other ways to practice fasting. Fasting from social media has become incredibly popular in recent years. Some people have begun to engage in fasting from all screens and technology for a certain period of time. Others choose to give up alcohol or coffee/caffeine or any other substance that they find themselves becoming dependent on.

notes:

Fasting requires preparation, so I encourage you to take time after reading this devo to discern what God may be inviting you to fast from for a 24 hour period, and then do what you need to do today in order to make that possible for tomorrow. Maybe it's making sure your bills are paid and emails answered so that you can fast from screens tomorrow. Maybe it's making sure you have a good book on hand so you reach for that when you feel tempted to open up TikTok. Maybe it's making a delicious dinner tonight and/or making plans to eat out with a friend to break your fast tomorrow evening to give yourself the best chance of being more attentive to God than to your rumbling stomach as you try out a food fast.

Whatever fast God may lead us to try, let's take time to prepare well and direct our hearts to how this experience can help us to love both God and our neighbors more fully.

Holy God, draw to each of our minds the fast You are inviting us to engage in, whether it be social media, food, technology, caffeine, or something else. Enable us to prepare well. When we face temptation, draw our hearts to You. May we experience self-sacrifice not merely for the sake of self-sacrifice, but allow us to be attentive to the ways the experience of fasting helps us to love You better and to love our neighbors more fully. In Your Son's holy and precious name, we make our prayer. Amen.

Paige Holaday

March 8

Isaiah 42:1-9

Today we're going through Isaiah 42!

This passage and Matthew 3 are echoes of each other, so for a little extra fun you can read through that passage and connect the two if you feel led to. In 42:1, the divine speaker announces the presence of a servant who is chosen by God and a source of delight for God. God will place His spirit upon this servant so that the servant is able to bring forth justice to the nations, to be a light, to open blind eyes, and bring out prisoners

During the time of when this was written, Judah was in exile with the temple in ruins and kingship at an end, and some of the Judahites were forcibly exiled to the foreign land of Babylonia. Without a temple and a leader, the future of God's people was greatly in danger. They need assurance, assistance, and a new vision. With what we know now, that leader God promised was Jesus.

Sometimes it's difficult to trust what God is planning. You pray for immediate solutions to problems and sometimes it doesn't seem like He's going to answer them. However, sometimes all it takes is looking back on your life and reflecting on your prayers to realize that He has answered them, one way or another. It's all in God's timing! The promise of Jesus and all that He would bring was prophesied some 700 years prior to his birth.

What are some times you've seen God answer your prayers? How about prayers He hasn't answered yet, but might be in the process of answering? Reflect on these as you go throughout your day today!

Heavenly Father, I thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus. I pray that You lessen the burdens that are weighing on our hearts. I ask You to make Your plans known to us so that we may serve You better. God, I thank You for the opportunity to grow closer to You this Lenten season. Thank You for another beautiful day in Your creation, we love You. Amen.

Cece Conway

notes:

March 9

Psalm 36:5-11

notes:

**Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens,
Your faithfulness to the skies.
Your righteousness is like the highest mountains,
Your justice like the great deep.
You, Lord, preserve both people and animals.
How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house;
You give them drink from your river of delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
In your light we see light.
Continue your love to those who know you,
Your righteousness to the upright in heart.
May the foot of the proud not come against me,
Nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.**

This psalm is one that many have probably heard before. One of my favorite things about this psalm is the way that it flows from praise to plea. Verses 5-9 praise God for His unfailing love, while verses 10-12 are a plea to God to continue in His ways of unconditional love and to protect from those who might try and pull someone away from Him.

My favorite verse in this psalm is verse 9: "For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light". This whole psalm is a reminder that God's love is both limitless and fierce. For God to be the fountain of life means that everything comes from Him. He gives life and breath to everything, then turns around and loves it unconditionally. His unconditional love is the thing that binds us together and keeps us going as we walk through trials and dark times. With God's kindness, unwavering love, and guidance we are able to follow in the light of God. We are able to spread His word to others. We are able to see God working in scenarios where we might feel like He is far. When you come across times when you feel beaten down by the world, remember God's unconditional and everlasting love for you.

Holy God, allow us to draw closer to You and fully embrace the love You have for us. Let our hearts continue to seek Your love in every aspect of our lives. As we move throughout the day, let us seek to see Your light shining through every situation so we can love others as You have loved us. Amen.

Ella Haywood

March 10- fourth Sunday of Lent

Numbers 21:4-9

notes:

We as humans are needy and impatient. We oftentimes expect God to work in the way of instant rewards. However, that is not often the case, which is evident with the Israelites who were enslaved by the Egyptians. Moses was leading them to the promised land when they became impatient. Honestly, when I was a kid, I believed that only having a limited amount of food would be easy and I would handle it well. Now as an adult, I have learned that I am impatient and after an extended period of time with little food, I would complain and I would question why God would put me through that. I have never been tested like the Israelites. I have gone through times where I felt like He was telling me that I was meant to do something, however, it was a painful struggle, and I did waver. But God is caring and forgiving. He cares not by giving us everything we want, but he gives us everything we need. He gives us every opportunity to follow him, even if it's not easy. With God being a forgiving God, he allows us to be forgiven and gives us opportunities to be redeemed. He let the people who looked at the snake on the pole be cured because He loves the Israelites and us.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for Your patience and forgiveness, even when we doubt and complain. Help us to trust in Your provision and timing, even when we face struggles and challenges. Grant us the strength to follow You faithfully, knowing that You give us everything we need.

May we always remember Your love and grace, and may we seek Your forgiveness and redemption in every moment.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Paige McDaniel

March 11

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22

notes:

Generally, when I think of a psalm, I imagine someone using lots of words in poem/song form to express great emotion of some kind, whether that be joy, anger, grief, or even confusion. This particular psalm is about giving thanks no matter the situation.

During the first three verses, we are told to “give thanks to the Lord,” which is as straightforward as you could ask for, because “he is good” and “his steadfast love endures forever”. That is a line I have heard in many songs, but, personally, I think it can never be said enough.

The verses then go on to tell us that troubled times will come, often because of our own choices, but that God will answer us – “he saved them from their distress” and “delivered them from destruction”.

We are told to give our thanks by telling our story, by offering thanksgiving sacrifices, and singing songs of joy. This psalm lays out – in fairly simple terms to me – that we have a God who loves unconditionally, and that is why we should give our thanks always.

So, to tell part of my personal story, I have been a worship leader since I was 14 and have learned how to worship through many different difficult times in my life. When this psalm refers to giving thanks with songs of joy, I am reminded of these times, and I am reminded of how it felt when I praised him anyway and the joy I had when singing of his glory.

Lord, thank you for all you have done, for saving us from our distress and our destruction, and for your unending love. Help us remember to give you thanks through all things, as you are good and have done wonderful works. May we remember to tell others of you, and offer up songs of praise. In Jesus name, Amen.

Abigail Wyatt

March 12

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. 3 All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. 4 But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, 5 made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. 6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

notes:

Think about a time you felt unworthy of God’s grace. Maybe you felt like you made a bad decision, or perhaps you were in a low place and didn’t always have the motivation to sing His praises. We’ve all been there. This is college, life is hard, and we don’t always know the right things to do. As Hannah Montana once sang, “everybody makes mistakes; everybody has those days.” But God is always there for us. While we were yet sinners, Christ died on the cross for us, and his love is unconditional. Being Methodist, many of us were likely baptized as infants, before we were capable of making a conscious decision to devote ourselves to God. Through confirmation or a renewal of our baptisms later in life, we choose God, but he has always chosen us, even before we were “made alive” in Him. We don’t need to constantly prove our worth to Him. Of course, this is not to say that actively sinning and disgracing ourselves to God is a great idea, but God doesn’t want humanity to become some sort of challenge where we are always trying to one-up each other in His eyes. As Christians, we should feel a natural call to praise God, do good works, and avoid sin. By His grace, and His grace alone, we have been saved. We may make mistakes, but God doesn’t. Each and every one of us was created with a purpose, even if you haven’t discovered your own yet.

During this Lenten season, reflect on the effect that God’s grace has had on your life, and rest assured that He is there for you, in your darkest days, in struggles with your faith, just as He is there for you when you are full of His presence and can clearly see Him moving through your life. Be grateful that God has made you “alive” in Him, and pray for others that they may be made alive in Christ, too. We have been saved! Praise be to God. :)

Heavenly Father, Thank You for Your unconditional love and grace. Help us to remember that we are saved by Your grace alone and guide us to live out our purpose in You. As we reflect on Your grace during this Lenten season, may we be grateful for the new life we have in Christ. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

March 13

John 3:14-21

notes:

This is personally one of my favorite passages. It is often quoted in services at the camp I went to and has been a fundamental piece in my relationship with Christ. Verse 14 calls back to Numbers 21 in which the Israelites are attacked by snakes as a result of their disobedience towards God. Moses prays to God when the Israelites realize their sins, and God tells Moses to place the image of a bronze snake on a pole and all who gaze upon it will be cured of their bites. This serves as a direct reference to the crucifixion of Christ because just as the snake was crucified in order to cure the people of their bites so must Christ be crucified in order to cure us of our sins.

The passage then continues with the classic verse "for God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." Everything that can be said about this verse has been said before but that does not diminish the importance of it. John 3:16 serves as a great summary of essentially the entire New Testament. God sacrificed his only son for the benefit of us because he loved us, and in comparison to that tremendous sacrifice, we just have to have faith in him and we will be rewarded with eternal life and the forgiveness of our tremendous sins.

The rest of the passage states how Jesus was brought into this world not to destroy us but rather to save us. Verse 19 and 20 are particularly interesting to me. Here it seems John is saying the very thing Jesus came to save us from is the thing people run towards and what ended up leading to his crucifixion.

We end with verse 21, which acts as a call to action to come to the light, proclaim God, and live a life of faith so that we may be saved and cleansed of our sins.

God, thank you for cleansing me of my sins. For you sent your only son to die on the cross so that I may be forgiven and granted eternal life. Help to guide me towards the light and away from sin. It's in your name we pray. Amen.

Jack Estes

March 14

healing and anointing

notes:

Today's topic is healing. Healing can be emotional, spiritual, or physical, or a combination of these.

When Jesus stood in the synagogue in Luke 4:16-21, he read from Isaiah's prophecy that one would come and heal (and more) and said that he was the fulfillment of that prophecy. Then Jesus healed and proclaimed the kingdom of God as he traveled and taught. Then, in Luke 9:1-2, Jesus sent the 12 disciples to proclaim God's kingdom and heal the sick. We see in verse 6: "They departed and went through the villages proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere."

So we know that Jesus loved and had compassion and healed. We know that the apostles healed. What does that mean for us as Jesus's disciples today? God still heals.

In Follow the Healer, Stephen Seamands says there are 5 ways Jesus heals.

1. Jesus heals directly and supernaturally- the miracle of the supernatural touch
2. Jesus heals through doctors and medicine - the miracle of modern medicine
3. Jesus heals through the body's healing power - the miracle of nature
4. Jesus heals through bestowing grace in suffering - the miracle of sufficient grace
5. Jesus heals through victorious dying - the miracle of the victorious crossing

He says that John Wesley embraced these also.

I have personally experienced supernatural healing of Jesus through the laying of hands and prayer over my body. I've also experienced a friend's healing after praying over her in a discipleship group as a student at Wesley and know that she is still healed. I've experienced praying for healing for my mother, who suffers greatly from a brain disease, and the answer, so far, has been God's sufficient grace in suffering. I don't know why. I would have chosen her healing over mine, hands down. But I do know that God is good. God loves. God wants me to love and have compassion like Jesus did.

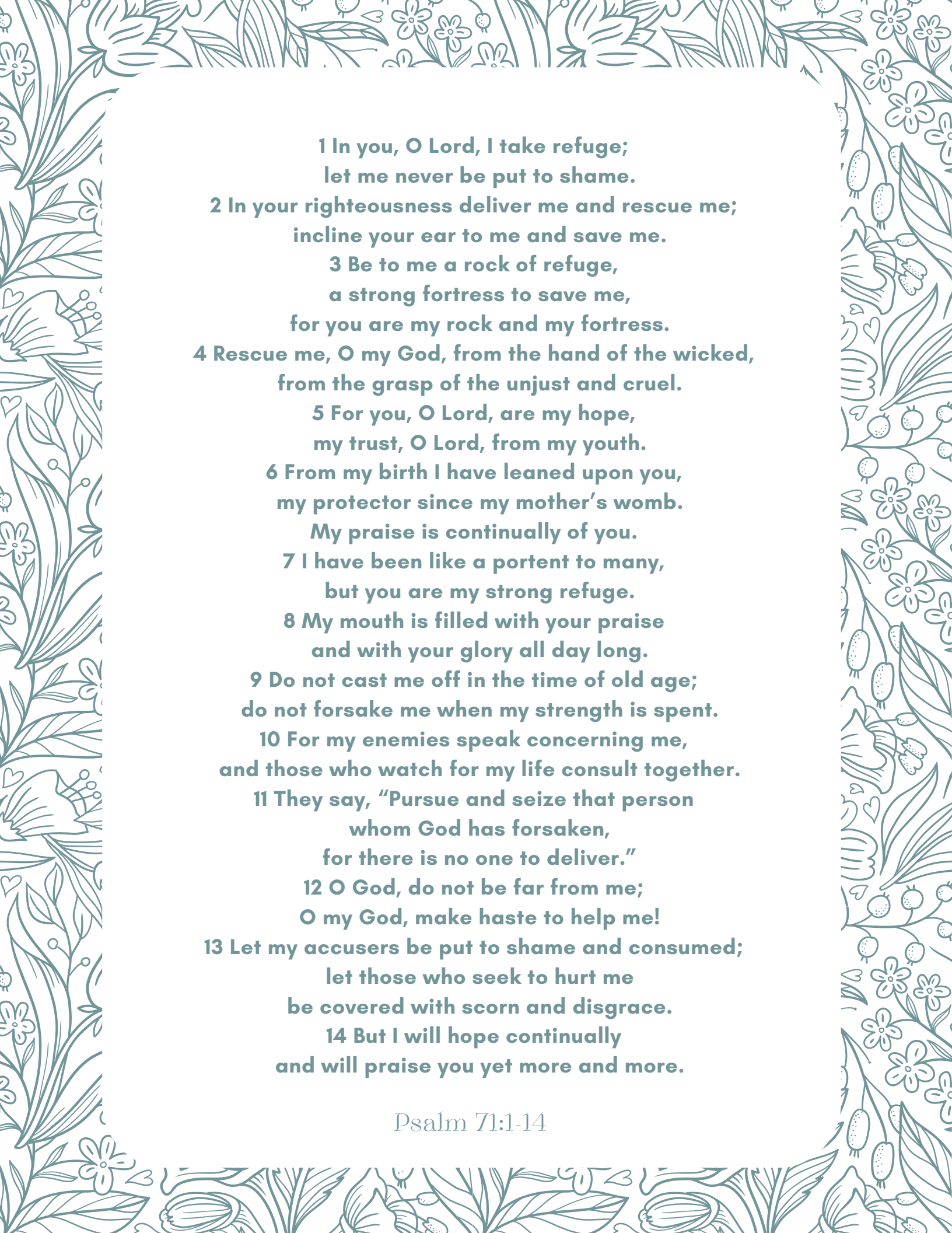
notes:

When I heard Dr. Seamands speak last year, one more thing that resonated with me and changed the way I pray about healing and serving was this: when I pray or work in Jesus name, it's not my asking Jesus to help me as I work to heal others, but my joining with Jesus in his ongoing healing ministry as he heals others through me.

Another scripture that is helpful for today is James 5:13-18. Pray together. Sing together. Allow leaders to anoint and pray over you. Repent. Accept forgiveness. Don't let your humanness keep you from praying with confidence. Accept God's healing. Be open to God using you as God heals others.

God, I thank you for creating me in your image. Jesus, thank you for your love and compassion as seen in Scripture - the way you were "moved" and the many times you healed. Holy Spirit, speak to my heart. Show me where you are working, and let me join in your ongoing ministry of healing others. Let my life and my words proclaim the kingdom of God and draw others to you. Amen.

Patricia Stevenson



1 In you, O Lord, I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame.

2 In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline your ear to me and save me.

3 Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress.

4 Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.

5 For you, O Lord, are my hope,
my trust, O Lord, from my youth.

6 From my birth I have leaned upon you,
my protector since my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of you.

7 I have been like a portent to many,
but you are my strong refuge.

8 My mouth is filled with your praise
and with your glory all day long.

9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age;
do not forsake me when my strength is spent.

10 For my enemies speak concerning me,
and those who watch for my life consult together.

11 They say, "Pursue and seize that person
whom God has forsaken,
for there is no one to deliver."

12 O God, do not be far from me;
O my God, make haste to help me!

13 Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed;
let those who seek to hurt me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.

14 But I will hope continually
and will praise you yet more and more.

Psalm 71:1-14

March 15

Psalm 71:1-14

notes:

In the Lord of the Rings series, a common cliché (and common complaint) is that the eagles will always save them. They rescue Gandalf from Isengard, the knights of Gondor as they escape Osgiliath and Frodo and Sam from the top of Mount Doom. When all hope fails, the eagles come. Life doesn't work that way. There is no last ditch rescue tool that you can fall back on when you need protection. Except...there kind of is. We have a direct line to the most powerful "eagle" there is. We have a relationship with the greatest protector in the world. God is limitless in his ability to keep us from harm. He is unfailing in his attention to our needs and hopes. All we have to do is open our hearts and minds and call out to him.

However, here's an important thing to note. Was God not also working in Aragorn when he protected the hobbits on Weathertop? Or in the Rohirrim when they came to the aid of Minas Tirith? These were also great moments where protectors came to help others, but why don't we have the same reaction to these scenes that we have to the eagles? It's because when we ask for help from God, we expect our protection to come as a huge and awe-inspiring moment that looks unlike what we've ever seen. We won't accept help if it isn't the kind of help we want. Sometimes help looks like small deposits of kindness over time. Maybe it's your mom calling again and again just to check in on you. Maybe it's being told "no" because we're meant for something else. These aren't grand romantic gestures like eagles, but they are still offerings of help.

In this passage, the speaker isn't just talking to God, he is crying out with all his might. He is appealing to God, praising Him, bargaining with Him and practically begging Him for protection. Prayer isn't always pretty. It isn't always the 4 line poem you read before you eat dinner. Sometimes it's ugly and long and painful. But it is also beautiful. It is opening a door that would have otherwise been closed. It is accepting help when you have always prided yourself on being independent. It is lighting the beacons of Gondor even if you have deep grief and anger for the loss of your son, Boromir. Never let the fear of judgment or pride stand in your way of talking to God or asking for help. Prayer is the greatest tool we have in times of need or in any time at all. It's your endless fount of protection that no one can take from you. Not even Sauron.

Father God, thank you for the gift of prayer and the continuous connection we have with you. Thank you for listening and protecting us as we navigate life in the face of constant adversity. The road you have paved for us can seem unclear, but we know that help is always available even if not in the way we'd expect. Help us to stay curious and humble and to always know that you are for us, not against us. In your son's name we pray. Amen.

Katy Kindlety '23

March 16

1 Peter 4:1-8

notes:

Since, therefore, Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live for the rest of your time in the flesh no longer by human desires but by the will of God. You have already spent enough time in doing what the gentiles like to do, living in debauchery, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme. But they will have to give an accounting to him who stands ready to judge the living and the dead. For this is the reason the gospel was proclaimed even to the dead, so that, though they had been judged in the flesh as everyone is judged, they might live in the spirit as God does. The end of all things is near; therefore, be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.

There's something really interesting about the reason behind following Jesus that goes beyond simply a desire to be saved. Of course, that is an extremely important part of this whole thing, but I think sometimes we forget that the fundamental reasoning behind why we choose to want to be more like Christ is ultimately justified by the fact that He first chose to make Himself like us. I want you to seriously ask yourself, "Why do I follow Christ?" Maybe it's a question that you haven't thought about too much, or maybe you think that the answer is so obvious that you don't need to think about it any longer. Or maybe you're on the fence about how devoted you really want to be to this carpenter from a small town just outside of Jerusalem as questions of, "is it really worth it?" may come to mind. Regardless of where you are, one of Jesus' best friends, Peter, might be able to give us a good reason to abandon our old self and embrace the born-again life that the Messiah calls us to. In his letter, Peter is addressing a group of persecuted Christians in Asia Minor who are living amid a culture that makes it very hard to follow Christ not only in name, but in morality as well. In an effort to encourage (and maybe even call out) his pen pals, Peter makes a comment about their behavior among so many nonbelievers, saying, "you have already spent enough time in doing what the gentiles like to do, living in debauchery, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing, and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you no longer join them in the same excesses of dissipation, and so they blaspheme." Does this sound familiar to you? Do you have friends, family members, or even complete strangers who cannot fathom the lifestyle you live in Christ? Have you been so utterly changed from a lifestyle in which you once lived into someone so entirely new that the world around you can't understand why you stopped living that way? It may be the case that you have experienced these things and find yourself to be suffering in isolation, or, if you're really honest with yourself, you may find that you are not living too dissimilarly from the rest of the world at all. I have been in both situations, and believe me, they both feel pretty terrible, but I think our boy Peter has a solution.

notes:

If you're in the former group, verse 4 is for you, and if you're in the latter group, verse 3 is for you, but what reason do we have to get out of either of these situations? If you look back at verse 1 and 2, you'll find your answer. It's BECAUSE Christ suffered in His own flesh that we have a God who shares in our suffering so that we are never isolated. And it's BECAUSE Christ suffered in His own flesh that we have an obligation and freedom to no longer live by the selfish desires of our own flesh. In both scenarios, we are called to adopt the mind of Christ. A mind familiar with suffering, but never forsaken. A mind tempted by worldly sin, but never heeding its voice. Peter also gives us a much more cosmic reason to follow Christ. He paints this crazy picture of all having to give an account to Him who judges the living and the dead at the end of all things, and this is meant to encourage us to take seriously the things of the spirit while we are all currently judged in our flesh on earth. And he makes it clear that not only did God choose to descend to be a Man just like us but, upon His crucifixion, He descended even into the depths of the earth (to a place that may be called Sheol or Hades) to preach the gospel to those who had died before His arrival. This is to ensure that no one past, present, or future is without knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as we see that the God of the universe knew what it was like to die to not only reach the living, but to literally pay a visit to the dead to give them the good news.

It is by observing the descension of the Son of God from the right hand of the Father in Heaven to earth, and even to under the earth, that we realize just what He sacrificed for us. But that's obviously not the end of the story. We know that on the third day, He arose from the dead and ascended back into Heaven where He now sits beside the Father in full resurrected glory. And it is by modeling what it means to be a human that we are shown the next step that we are invited to take. Just as He suffered in the flesh and rose from the dead in full glory, we too will follow His example and be resurrected in the same exact way when God makes all things new in light of our current suffering. What more reason do you need to take up your cross and follow Christ? What do the desires of your flesh have to compare to the glory and joy found in the Holy Spirit? If Christ descended to earth and sacrificed Himself for you, what is stopping you from humbling yourself and loving your neighbors, the poor in wealth and in spirit, the outcasts, the orphans, the widows, and even your enemies since Christ first loved you? What's stopping you from ceasing to live how you once did in order to live by the Spirit? There are plenty of things that seem to stop me from doing these things, and I fail every day. And that's okay. Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection is the mechanism by which God's strength sustains us. He will meet you where you are, and all we are asked is to recognize our need and accept His invitation to live with our spirit in accordance with His. It's a long journey to figuring all this stuff out, but Peter leaves us with some solid advice: "The end of all things is near; therefore, be serious and discipline yourselves for the sake of your prayers. Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins."

Lord, remind us of all the reasons we have to follow Your Son, Jesus. Remind us of our need for Him and the joy we have in the life He gives us. Remind us that, in our suffering, He suffered first. Remind us that, though the world may hate us, it hated Him first. Remind us that He died and rose again so that we may never taste death. Supply our strength and be our perseverance as we strive to finish the race You have set before us. Thank You for the depth of Your sacrifice for us, Lord Jesus. Let our gratitude influence the way we live for You. We ask this in the powerful and precious name of Jesus. Amen.

David Couch

March 17- fifth Sunday of Lent

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the Lord. "This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the Lord. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the Lord. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more"

notes:

I must admit that this was my first time reading anything out of the book of Jeremiah, but it blows my mind how many times Jesus is prophesied about before his time. The fact that this was written around six hundred years before his birth shows that God is always looking out for us and has nothing but the best planned for us even if we don't see His work in motion. To me, this set of verses is a great reminder that He is always working for our benefit and that we can rest peacefully knowing that He's always got us.

Father, thank You for Your Word. It remains unchanged and will never fail me. When I need to hear Your voice, speak to me through Your scripture. Help me to look to Your Word whenever I'm in doubt and learn how to hear Your voice.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Langham Parr

March 18

Psalm 119:9-16

notes:

We are drowning in a sea of images and attractions that are in movies, TV shows, on the internet, and anywhere we have access to in today's world. Everywhere we go and look we are bombarded with things that do not honor God. How do we stay pure in a culture that constantly is pushing and pulling us in directions that are against God? Our world tells us that sinful pleasures are a human right. We cannot do it alone, because we have to have strength that is stronger than the temptations. By reading God's Word and abiding by what it says, we can find ways to remove the temptations out of our lives. This includes even finding people to surround yourself with that will encourage us in our daily walk with Christ. I know this is talked about tons, especially in terms of sexual immorality, but it is far more than that. I think beginning the day with the Lord and continuing in the company of Christ is key to keeping pure.

If I could give every single person in the world one piece of advice, it would have to be: do not constantly ask yourself 'is it right or wrong,' but rather 'is it commanded,' and it will change your life. This means that in any situation where you don't know what decision to make, ask if God would command it. Is it worshipful? Life giving? Restful? I use this a lot to see what God is truly wanting me to do. God gives us Scripture to see just how we should be keeping on the path to salvation. We can even use Scripture to pray about our decisions, too. Psalms is one of the best resources to do this with. Most of the time we get caught up in the 'how' or 'what' in prayer. God is always there, watching over us, waiting for us to talk to Him about our situations. My favorite analogy for prayer is describing it as a little kid telling his or her parents about the coolest thing they saw that day. Imagine the child saying, "I saw a really cool dog today!!!!" The parents are just as excited as the child is even though they saw the same thing and have a picture of their kid looking at the dog. This is the type of "communion" relationship God wants with us. We should have conversations with Him to keep pure in His name.

Dear God, lead me and show me the path to purity and release. We cannot thank You enough for the guidance You have given and will continue to give, as we are commanded by You. I will look to You as I walk and discern what is life-giving to pursue You. In Jesus name, Amen.

Emily Legg

March 19

Hebrews 5:5-10

What comes to mind when you think of a priest? I tend to think of some Catholic dude in a black robe and a white collar, and oh yeah... he's Italian too... but I digress. But what does it really mean to be a priest in the Bible? Understanding this is the key to understanding what it means for Jesus to be called the "High Priest" in Hebrews 5:5. notes:

I think if you were to ask someone with moderate Biblical knowledge about priests in the Old Testament, they'd probably point to someone like Aaron (Moses's good ol' bro) who is, semi-literally, the father-of-all-priests from the moment that Moses receives the Law from God while wandering in the wilderness. As soon as Aaron hits the scene, God gives him and his sons a bunch of instructions for their role as priests. This includes things like anointing with oil, serving as mediators between God and His people, tending to the tabernacle/temple, wearing a funny outfit called an ephod, and most importantly, offering sacrifices to God on behalf of Israel.

Now, priestly sacrifices were very important to the Jewish people, as it was the medium by which they could draw near to God as a fellowship. In addition to atoning and forgiveness of sin, some offerings' purposes included making peace with God or giving thanks for all He has done. Because of their importance, a faithful Hebrew would be understandably skeptical of a supposed priest (a "High Priest," at that) who does not come from the line of Aaron since God specially ordained them to perform all these priestly duties.

Knowing this, the author of Hebrews needs to give a pretty compelling argument of how our Lord Jesus is qualified to be not just any priest, but the High Priest over all creation despite Him being of the tribe of Judah and not of the line of Aaron (a Levite) like many would expect such a man to be in. This is where our good friend Melchizedek comes in. Never heard of him? That's okay... he's only mentioned on like two different occasions in the Old Testament. In short, Melchizedek is the very first priest ever mentioned in the Bible, and not only is he a priest, but he actually is the king of Salem (what would later become Jerusalem) at the time of Abraham. When Abraham is passing through Salem, Melchizedek greets him and offers him bread and wine (sound familiar??), blesses him after having won a great battle, and Abraham ends up tithing all his possessions to him. Although very brief, this first encounter between a priest and God's first prophet is bound to be of extreme significance. According to the author of Hebrews, Melchizedek had no record of his own genealogy, nor record of his birth or death, and yet was one of the most righteous priests to ever live.

notes:

So, what's this got to do with Jesus? The Author of Hebrews is making the point that if Melchizedek was one of the greatest priest-kings to ever live while having no genealogy, then what's stopping Jesus from being called the High Priest and King of kings even if He is not in the order of Aaron? According to the author of Hebrews, who uses some prophecy from Psalm 110 to back it up, Jesus is a "priest forever; according to the order of Melchizedek." And just like Melchizedek was priest and king of Salem, Jesus is our High Priest and King of all creation. Likewise, as our own Priest-King, Jesus fills every role of a priest that you would expect. He anoints us with the Holy Spirit, He is the one Mediator between God and all mankind, He tends the temples of our bodies to make way for the Spirit to dwell, He is clothed in righteousness, and He offered Himself as the sacrifice to end all sacrifices for the sins of the world. If a priest under the Old Covenant made a sacrifice for atonement or forgiveness of sins, he himself along with the sacrifice would need to be made fully holy by anointing beforehand. Likewise, Christ plays the role of both Priest and Sacrifice simultaneously on the cross, as He in His perfection was the only One worthy of both performing and being the sacrifice for the sins of the entire world.

As I finally wrap this up, I just want to encourage all who are reading this to realize the role that Jesus plays as the High Priest in your life. Think about His personal service to you and the entire body of Christ in all that He does in His constant intercession for us. It is by Him alone Who we can give thanks and praise to God our Father, and it is by Him alone Who we are invited to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice, perfect and pleasing to God. Please pray with me.

Holy and Most High Priest, we thank You for Your constant intercession for us. It was You Who freely put Yourself on that cross and gave Yourself for each of us. Not only that, but it is by You alone that we draw near to the Father and are anointed with the Holy Spirit. Teach us these things as our High Priest, and correct us as our King. We love you, Lord Jesus. We ask these things in Your Holy and Powerful Name, Amen.

David Couch

March 20

John 12:20-33

Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus." Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. Jesus replied, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. Jesus said, "This voice was for your benefit, not mine. Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

notes:

Hola everyone, I'm back again but with a major spoiler. I am so sorry to break it to you but Jesus dies. "Nooooo, VK!! How dare you spoil the story for us?" You might say. Well if you think I give spoilers, Jesus gives SPOILERS. He literally popped on the scene and was like "Hey guys, I'm the Son of God. Oh and I'm going to die but I'm coming back." Jesus is just so cool and prophetic like that. But here, He even gave details down to what He would say in the garden of Gethsemane. Yet, somehow the disciples were surprised when everything Jesus said came to pass.

But Jesus's message was more than a picture of His death and resurrection, it was the purpose of it. Jesus is the first seed and to be fully planted to become the vine (John 15:1), He had to die. Then He points out that after, we're the new seeds that grow on the vine and that means we have to follow Jesus's example and be willing to lose our life both figuratively and literally for the Gospel. The foreshadowing of Jesus's death really points out that He is who He claims to be. No one can just predict their death to even the very last thing they say.

The last part of this passage makes me laugh because Jesus is like, "Father, show them Your real glory" and the Father is like, "Bet, I have done it before and I'll do it again" and Jesus turns back to the crowd was like "Chat, that was for y'all btw and not me."

Everything Jesus says is to show you who He is. Even when the voice of the Father comes into play, it's to show you who Jesus is. "This voice was for your benefit, not mine" Jesus had said.

So here's the question... When you hear God speak, do you believe Him? Jesus has proved Himself over and over again and every prophecy about Him and the ones He gave about Himself came to pass. Oftentimes, it's hard to remember who Jesus is. Lamb of God, the one who died and rose on the third day. We often think of Him as a story but He is REAL. We can listen to Jesus because He already proved Himself. Lastly, He doesn't say just anything, He says everything for our benefit. And that's why He's the capital 'W' Word.

Jesus, You're the Word of God for a reason and scripture says that Your words will never pass away. Help me to listen to Your promises and want to know who You are even more. Remind me of Your promises for my life. Keep me in reverence of You, always willing to believe what You have said. Holy Spirit, I ask that You will use scripture to renew my mind and give me wisdom and understanding. Where I may be lacking faith, I ask that You instill that part within my soul. In Jesus' name, Amen.

VK Brandt

A decorative border of black line art illustrations of various flowers, leaves, and berries surrounds the text. The illustrations include lilies, tulips, and small round berries on stems.

1 Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

**2 Serve the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.**

**3 Know that the Lord is God.
It is he who made us, and we are his;
we are his people and the sheep of
his pasture.**

**4 Enter his gates with thanksgiving
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him; bless his name.**

**5 For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever
and his faithfulness to all
generations.**

Psalm 100

March 21

Celebration

Prayer. Fasting. Meditation. Bible reading. These are the spiritual practices we most often think about the ways we worship God, especially during the season of Lent. This time is usually a solemn season as we remember the 40 days Jesus spent in the wilderness. We spend time listening and doing things, most often uncomfortable or foreign ways, to draw us closer to God. But we are also called to embrace the profound joy that comes from acknowledging and participating in God's redemptive work in our lives and are invited to explore a different spiritual practice- the practice of celebration.

notes:

Celebration is not a unique spiritual discipline and is in the world every day. We have a few big celebrations, like Christmas and Easter, but we can get caught in the rhythm of celebrating what is in our society, like the 4th of July or New Year's. While there is nothing wrong with celebrating in these activities (believe me, I love a good shindig), celebration is, first and foremost, a gift from God. In a world that can get focused on narratives of brokenness and gives us numerous ways to numb our negative feelings, we forget that God created a good world. Lent is a way to confront our brokenness and turn to God in repentance, leading us to celebrate the beauty, hope, and grace permeating every aspect of our existence.

In the Bible, we see celebrations take place in many different forms, like feasts and dancing before the Lord and even Paul singing through imprisonment. Jesus was even accused of being a glutton in Matthew 11 because he rejoiced in life so fully. The Bible even ends with a Threefold Hallelujah in Revelation 19. Celebrating is needed because it's too easy to forget. Celebrating is needed because times aren't always good. Celebrating is needed because it can remind us that the bad times don't last forever.

So, as we go into the last week of Lent, engage in the spiritual practice of celebration and be reminded of the truth that our God is a God of joy. In the midst of lamenting, may we also choose to celebrate His goodness and faithfulness.

Are you ready to party yet? I know I am! Here are a few ways to practice celebration and see the beauty in the world around you.

- Celebrate a friend- whether it's a birthday, getting a good grade on a test/project, or just for them being them. Share a meal, send a congratulatory text, or just shower them with joy.
- Celebrate a "unique holiday"- if you are on track and reading this on Mar.

Heavenly Father, as we conclude this time of devotion, may we come before You with our hearts overflowing with gratitude and joy. May we use the celebration to shape our lives, reminding us of Your goodness, faithfulness, and love. We thank You for this season of Lent and for the opportunity to grow closer to You, and as we continue on may we shine brightly with the joy that comes from knowing You.

Caroline Deck

March 22

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

notes:

As we are about to enter into Holy Week, let us not lose the importance of Jesus's incarnation. Jesus lived a human life so he understands the daily life of work, fatigue and sadness, but he also knew the truest joy. Jesus already had the glory far before he entered the world and yet because of his sacrifice, we too can participate in this glory and find delight in the Lord. Let us ponder what it would look like/what would happen if we started celebrating habits based on the resurrection in our everyday life. On the next page, Wendell Berry gives us a glimpse into his day-to-day practice of resurrection in his poem, the Mad Farmer Liberation Front.

God, let us join in the chorus of giving thanks, for You are and always have been, good. Let us rejoice in Your provision, for Your steadfast love endures forever. We thank You for Your enduring love and how it is accessible to us in all of our moments, large and small, joyful and sorrowful, and even in the chaos of today. Lord, let Your message not be lost in our hearts and minds and let us find encouragement in You. Amen.

Caroline Deck

March 22

Psalms 118:1-2, 19-29

1 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!
2 Let Israel say,
"His steadfast love endures forever."

19 Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.
20 This is the gate of the Lord;
the righteous shall enter through it.
21 I thank you that you have answered me
and have become my salvation.
22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.
23 This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.
24 This is the day that the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad in it.^[a]
25 Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us success!
26 Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.^[b]
We bless you from the house of the Lord.
27 The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with branches,
up to the horns of the altar.^[c]
28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;
you are my God; I will extol you.
29 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,
for his steadfast love endures forever.

Love the quick profit, the annual raise, vacation with pay. Want more of everything ready-made. Be afraid to know your neighbors and to die. And you will have a window in your head. Not even your future will be a mystery any more. Your mind will be punched in a card and shut away in a little drawer. When they want you to buy something they will call you. When they want you to die for profit they will let you know. So, friends, every day do something that won't compute. Love the Lord. Love the world. Work for nothing. Take all that you have and be poor. Love someone who does not deserve it. Denounce the government and embrace the flag. Hope to live in that free republic for which it stands. Give your approval to all you cannot understand. Praise ignorance, for what man has not encountered he has not destroyed. Ask the questions that have no answers. Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias. Say that your main crop is the forest that you did not plant, that you will not live to harvest. Say that the leaves are harvested when they have rotted into the mold. Call that profit. Prophesy such returns. Put your faith in the two inches of humus that will build under the trees every thousand years. Listen to carrion — put your ear close, and hear the faint chattering of the songs that are to come. Expect the end of the world. Laugh. Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful though you have considered all the facts. So long as women do not go cheap for power, please women more than men. Ask yourself: Will this satisfy a woman satisfied to bear a child? Will this disturb the sleep of a woman near to giving birth? Go with your love to the fields. Lie easy in the shade. Rest your head in her lap. Swear allegiance to what is highest your thoughts. As soon as the generals and the politicians can predict the motions of your mind, lose it. Leave it as a sign to mark the false trail, the way you didn't go. Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary, some in the wrong direction. Practice resurrection.

March 23

John 12:1-11

notes:

In this section of John's account of the gospel, we are presented with Jesus's anointing by Mary. Anointment in this period was done ceremoniously to symbolize that God, for some reason, had chosen someone for a sacred purpose. Jesus even comes to us as the Messiah in the New Testament, which itself means "anointed one." If that is so, why would Mary feel the need to anoint Jesus herself? Although there may be more in-depth answers than my own, I hypothesize that Mary was giving a gesture of love and acceptance in a time where Jesus was betrayed, hated, and ultimately crucified for what he proclaimed. I found inspiration for this conclusion in the very next verse, where Judas Iscariot showed that even he, a disciple of Jesus, would rather profit from a trade than pay ceremonious respect to Jesus.

However, amongst the betrayal and controversy of Jesus, verses 9-11 show us that many of the Jews were flocking to Jesus, rather than remain in the traditions of Judaism, at the influence of Lazarus – you know, the one raised from the dead.

After reading this passage, I take away a couple of notes:

1. Mary showed Jesus great love and respect, even though her perfume could have been used for another purpose, as Jesus said, "you always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." Therefore, we Christians are taught to use what we have wisely.
2. Judas was not being very thoughtful of others, was he?
3. Lazarus, the one raised from the dead, was a great host to Martha, Mary, Judas, and Jesus. Moreso, his actions brought many Jews to Jesus. Reflecting on this makes me ask myself, "What are we doing today that brings people to Jesus, and how can we do more of it?"

Wesley friends, keep up the good work in the name of God. With Holy Week and that last round of regular exams about to kick off, things will be busy. Keep your head high and heart strong because God is with us.

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the lessons we've learned from Mary's love, Judas's greed, and Lazarus's witness. Help us use our resources wisely, love sacrificially, and lead others to Jesus. Give us strength for the busy days ahead. Amen.

Jacob Hohn

March 24- Palm Sunday

John 12:12-16

Happy Palm Sunday! Reading this scripture reminded me of the feeling of joy I have when I go back home and, as soon as I open the door, I hear the pitter patter of our two dogs running to greet me at the door. Then I see them wagging their tails and their glistening eyes just embracing my presence. I think this must be the same kind of joy the people had when Jesus was coming into Jerusalem.

notes:

In this story, the crowd was so overjoyed with Jesus coming to town that they were laying down their cloaks and palm leaves for his path into the city. They were cheering and praising him shouting, "Hosanna Hosanna!" At the time, the disciples did not quite understand what was going on, but they later they realized this was the prophecy all along, and I can totally relate to the disciples in this story. Reading this reminded me how important it is to continue to give praise and worship to the Lord even when I do not understand what is going on. One important thing I have learned while being in college is that I am not always going to understand why things happen to me or to others, but I can trust that God has a purpose for these circumstances. I really love the analogy that my life looks like a bunch of tangled up knots of the back of a tapestry, and I cannot make anything make sense when I am looking at it, but my creator who is on the other side of the tapestry can see that everything is going into the exact place where it is meant to be. I want to encourage you that the next time you do not understand a situation or circumstance that you try to choose praise and joy instead and trust that the Creator has a plan made just for you.

Heavenly Father,

On this Palm Sunday, we are reminded of the joy and praise that filled the hearts of those who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. Help us, like the disciples, to trust in your plans even when we don't understand them fully. May we choose praise and joy in every circumstance, knowing that You are weaving together a beautiful tapestry of our lives. Thank you for your love and guidance. Amen.

Caroline White

March 25

Isaiah 50:4-9a

notes:

This passage takes a look at being the Lord's obedient servant and what that relationship requires. We are His children, but one of our roles is to work as His servants in this world. The definition of servant is "a person who performs duties for others" or "a devoted and helpful follower/supporter". God works in many miraculous ways, and we are a vital part of that. He has faith in our ability to reach this world and to serve Him well.

A main theme of this text is having faith in God as well as being unashamed about having a relationship with Him. Both of these sound elementary, but some moments can be harder than others, especially when we get wrapped up in the ever-changing views of this world. The text opens up by telling us that the Lord provides a way for the author to comfort the weary, wakes him up each morning, and explains His will to him. It is a good reminder that God not only understands our pain or confusion and takes the time to counsel us, but also that He calls us to action everyday we wake up on this Earth, not just on special occasions.

The next verses then discuss how the author not only listens whole-heartedly to God but embodies that true obedience by living for Him rather than this world. The author turns the other cheek to those that hurt him and does not shy away from mockery/scorn. He acknowledges that people can and will be cruel. Unfortunately, that can be the case when trying to openly live out our faith. But this is what we are called to do, to live faithfully and unashamedly of our God, and to lead others by example with love, determination, and humility. Whatever the actions of others may be, the Lord will be near and will lend a hand when we need it. Using Romans 8:31 to sum up the rest of the passage, "if God is for us, who can be against us?".

Dear Lord, thank You for this wonderful day You have made. We come to You during this time to lift You up and dwell on your many blessings in our lives. You are always close by, actively guiding us and calling us to do great things. Help us live everyday passionate about our relationship with you. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.

Olivia Seeley

March 26

Psalm 31:9-16

notes:

In this psalm, David is miserable. He is hated by all around him, slanderers and schemers reveling in the opportunity to destroy a threat to worldly power. This hatred from the powerful elite extends to bystanders, who flee from David on the streets when they see him.

David can only rely on God in these times, hated by the world around him for no fault but a king's jealousy. He is at once weak and dependent, sad and alone. This is our hero, and it's his moral high point.

We all know that David will go on to succeed Saul and sin in the eyes of God. He will occupy the same (inherently) unchristian position as King (created only as a COMPROMISE of God's leadership), and being placed above others will lead to his worst actions (also centered around "jealousy").

This psalm is his high point in terms of devotion to God. When he was materially at his lowest, when the state itself was trying to kill him, he was closer to God than he would be for most of the rest of his life. As Christians, it is not our duty to fetishize asceticism or the life of a fugitive, but merely to understand the fact that throughout history, the true prophets have been the ones being martyred, not the ones wielding force to martyr others.

In the season of Lent, we must acknowledge temptations on an individual level, but I would like to invite all churches to acknowledge the most dangerous temptation of the church itself: to seek legitimacy through corruptive means such as the state and power, rather than seeking goodness through helping others.

Throughout history, so-called spiritual leaders have claimed to stand for Christ's values, but when we look for Christ and find Monarchs, Caesars, or Presidents, we have misstepped somehow along the path.

God cannot be served at the same time as profit: Jesus himself says "you cannot serve God and money". When we look for Jesus's face, is it an insult to see businessmen and politicians as the inheritors of his mantle?

What of the innumerable martyrs of state violence, from Gnadenhutten to Zechariah to the Ponce Massacre to the Jesuits in El Salvador. We proudly say: "If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets." But let's face it: most prophets were killed by people of their own faith, and if we found another prophet, we'd kill them just as quickly due to fear. We ostracize the kinds of people who Jesus chose as his followers and companions, and if Jesus himself were here today, we'd kill him too.

So what must be done? It is a simple answer. Focus on goodness and principle. If the church's aim is to help people and foster love amongst people, even the strongest state repressions cannot stop it, and the strongest disagreements cannot split it. It may sound utopian, but we have God on our side.

Dear God, may we be more afraid of failing our humanity than we are of losing our lives. May we be aware of our own shortcomings, that we can call You deeper into ourselves. May we act as those without power, or create a world beyond it. Amen.

Jordan Cutchens

March 27

Philippians 2:5-11

notes:

This scripture at first glance seems really dense. It tells of the humility of Jesus and how he ultimately was obedient to the point of His death on the cross- which paid the price for all of our sins.

But I think these verses are an invitation to attempt to live how Jesus lived. The phrase at the beginning of verse 5 sticks out to me- "In your relationships with one another". I find it important that the concept of humility is brought up within the context of being in community with other people. The only way to be humble in the presence of others and serve them like Jesus served is to at some point be around other people.

And the invitation to live like Jesus lived definitely isn't an easy one, but you have to start somewhere. Verse 7 says "he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant". Jesus considers others to be more important than himself (even though He is "in very nature God"). I think we in some small way can all aim to care for others well in our everyday lives - to consider them to be more important than we consider ourselves.

I challenge you all to find one action you can take to care for someone else this week. "To the glory of God the Father".

Today let us remember the Lord's prayer

Our Father, which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy Name. Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, As it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, As we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, The power, and the glory, Forever and ever. Amen.

Hays Jones

March 28- Maundy Thursday

Jesus washes the disciples feet and service

Read: John 13:1-17

notes:

As we get closer to Easter and celebrating Jesus' resurrection, we also remember the last days of Jesus' earthly ministry. As Jesus and the disciples sat down for the last supper, their feet needed to be cleaned as was customary in their culture. Typically this was done by a servant of the host. Jesus taking the position of a servant was shocking to his disciples and from the reaction of Peter in verses 7 and 8, they likely thought that they were disrespecting Jesus by allowing him to wash their feet. Ultimately, they do allow Jesus to wash their feet and make them clean both physically and spiritually.

John 13:12-15 After Jesus had washed their feet and put on his outer clothes, he took his place at the table again. Then he asked his disciples, "Do you understand what I've done for you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you're right because that's what I am. So if I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. I've given you an example that you should follow."

The Lord is encouraging us to serve each other like he served the disciples. Tonight we will be washing each other's feet as a symbol of this service. As you move through this experience of serving and being served, think about the other ways in which service has or will play a part in your life.

Sometimes service is going to be uncomfortable, you may experience that during this practice, but God wants us to move through that discomfort. I have felt discomfort during service when I become so aware of my privilege in the world. I feel like I don't know what to say, or what to do when someone tells me about the hardships that they are experiencing. Even though I cannot relate to their struggles, or think that there is nothing that I can physically do to help, I feel God calling me to just listen. For many of us, the ways that God is calling us to serve are not going to come naturally. We may feel that we need to do something great to be of service to others, but I challenge you to think about the small things or the less glamorous things that we can do to be of service. This could be listening to someone's day or cleaning something up, you never know what is going to make the biggest impact on someone's life. Jesus was great, but he took on the role of a servant to serve the disciples, showing that no position or task is too lowly for him, so why should it be to us?

Heavenly Father,

As we approach Easter, help us to remember Jesus' humble act of service. Teach us to serve one another with love and compassion, even in uncomfortable situations. Show us that no act of service is too small when done with humility.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Rachel Stringfellow

March 29- Good Friday

John 18:1-19, 42

notes:

Today is the day we enter into the darkest part of the gospel story. Here we move with Jesus to the cross and watch as he suffers and dies, killed by the Romans to make an example of anyone who would claim to be King other than Caesar. And handed over by the religious leaders who would sell out their allegiance to God in order to maintain their own power and position.

And we look inside our hearts on this Good Friday and realize that we too like to make examples of those who disagree with us and come against us. And that we too work very hard to not let anyone disrupt the world we are trying to construct for ourselves, willing to crown as king whoever we need to, to keep things the way we like them.

But Jesus shows us that God's way is SO unlike our way. Jesus moves freely, unencumbered by concern for himself, for perception of what others think or say, without a desire to be right or to be in charge or to win.

Jesus' way is so unlike our way. He demonstrates God to us through compassion, mercy, submission and finally by being hung, naked and beaten on a tree outside the city, where he dies.

The God we would make would not move or act like Jesus. We would make God much more in our OWN image - one who when struck, turns NOT the other cheek, but who fights back. Not one who loves and prays for his enemy, but who knows how to make his enemies pay for what they've done; that they get what's coming to them.

But Good Friday has a way of pointing out this way in each of us and then directing us to the cross says, "Look! That's not the kind of God we've got."

...He was despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering and acquainted with infirmity; and as one from whom others hide their faces he was despised, and we held him of no account. Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth." (Isaiah 53:3-7)

Take some time now to read slowly and with great care the account of Jesus' crucifixion as found in John's Gospel. Don't rush through it. Maybe even stop for prayer and reflection after each section.

notes:

Read - John 18:1 -- 19:42

Prayer:

Forgive us, O God, for mistaking winning and being right with being disciples of Your Son Jesus. Let us sit in quiet stillness before you on this day, when the effect of our sin is seen and felt most clearly. And, by Your mercy, may a new and genuine sense of gratitude well up in our hearts today - that even when we're at our worst You come to us in order to have us and redeem us - as we see your servant Jesus high and lifted up on the cross. Amen.

Tony Jeck

March 30

Job 14:1-14

notes:

Many times in the Old Testament we see tests of faith to show God's grace and mercy. This is very clearly seen in the story of Job. Job is a man of God who had everything taken from him and demonstrated his unwavering faith in God as he suffered constant attacks from Satan. His laments serve as a great companion to God showing his divine mercy and grace to the world. On that note, let's dive right into Job 14:1-14.

In these verses Job laments, "'Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble. They spring up like flowers and wither away; like fleeting shadows, they do not endure. Do you fix your eye on them? Will you bring them before you for judgment? Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one! A person's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. So look away from him and let him alone, till he has put in his time like a hired laborer. "At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail. Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant. But a man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more. As the water of a lake dries up or a riverbed becomes parched and dry, so he lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, people will not awake or be roused from their sleep. "If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! If someone dies, will they live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come.'"

But how do these verses contribute anything to God's grace and mercy? After all, isn't it just one dude complaining that he wants to die and have God remember him on judgment day after all his hard work. The answer lies in the life of Christ as Job laments, "Till the heavens are no more, people will not awake or be roused from their sleep," but we know that Christ came and died on Earth for our sins and made whole our connection to God. This allows us by our faith to ascend into heaven through God's grace in his gift of Jesus Christ, where Job did not know about or have access to this. This is further indicated when Job again laments, "Who can bring what is pure from impure? No one!" Yet God descended into man to make us whole. God has created the impure pure through the healings of the leper, the blind man, the demon-possessed man, Jairus's daughter, Lazarus, the Samaritan woman. The examples are endless of God making pure what was impure. In these examples, another of Job's questions is answered in the miracle of Lazarus, "If someone dies, will they live again?"

Yes, they will, and we already have evidence of it! When there are questions in my faith, I always latch onto the fact God is the beginning and the end, the alpha and omega, the word became flesh, and the creator of the heavens and the Earth. There is nothing without a touch of his mercy inside of it now. We are assured through Jesus of God's forgiveness, as we will not wither and die, but we are planted on good soil to spring forth and bear fruit through the living water.

notes:

God, thank You for filling me with Your Spirit so that I may act with Your grace and mercy every day. Thank You for pouring Yourself into this world to show me that I will live again with You and that I am made whole in my faith in You. I pray that You will guide me to bear the best fruit I can give and that every day, You bring me closer to living like Jesus did so that I may even glimpse your boundless kingdom here on Earth. I pray these wishes in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Ellis Ikerman

March 31- easter

Mark 16:1-8

notes:

I love the gospel of Mark. It is hands down my favorite gospel. And its unique account of the resurrection is one of the many reasons I love it so much.

It begins similarly to all the other gospel resurrection accounts - women at the tomb realize that something is amiss. As in Matthew and Luke's accounts, a figure shows up to let them know that they will not find Jesus's body in the tomb, because he has been raised from the dead.

The oldest versions of Mark's gospel end with verse 8, "so they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." The end. Wild, huh? Later versions of the gospel added one of two endings. The shorter one says the women eventually told the disciples about what had happened and briefly mentions that Jesus's resurrected body showed up and did some stuff. The longer ending includes more details of Jesus's resurrection appearances, including things like offering the great commission to the disciples.

I don't debate the veracity of either of those endings. But, on this Easter Sunday, let's assume that the Holy Spirit was up to something when the Spirit guided the author of Mark's gospel to end it in such an ambiguous way, with the women too afraid to give witness to the resurrection. We know that they had to tell someone at some point, otherwise how would anyone else know what had happened? So, what was the motivation for Mark (and the Holy Spirit) to offer an ending where news of the resurrection has not begun to spread?

Mark is widely acknowledged as the oldest/earliest of the gospels. The early Christian community is just beginning to figure out who they are and what is required of them as they commit to following the way of Jesus. Persecution and unrest are already bubbling up around them. Walking this way is not easy.

When early Christ followers heard this ending of Mark, what might their reaction have been? I suspect that the author of Mark (and the Holy Spirit through him) was placing the ball in the court of the early Christ followers, so to speak. I can almost feel the echoes of the Holy Spirit in those early communities saying, "they were too scared to spread the news of the resurrection. But now you have heard about it. You are now witnesses. So what are you going to do?"

And we know exactly what they did. They spread the word. They proclaimed Jesus's resurrection boldly and with great fervor, even when they faced very real consequences for doing so. notes:

As we read Mark's gospel account of the resurrection, may we hear a similar invitation and question. We are now witnesses to this, so what are we going to do about it? May you hear the Holy Spirit calling you by name and telling you that this is now your story. The ball is in your court. How will you proclaim the life-altering, world-rewriting reality of the resurrection of Jesus the Christ?

Holy God, may we never grow tired of proclaiming "Christ is risen!" Your victory over the forces of death and sin and evil changed the whole world. We hear in the words of Mark's gospel how we are invited into the story. Illuminate for each and every one of us the ways in which You are calling us to be those who live in the light of the resurrection, and may we partner with you to gather each and every one of Your beloved children to live in this light. It is in the name of Your glorious and resurrected Son that we make our prayer. Amen.

Paige Holaday

