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**Lent**

**2025**

**Grace Anglican Community**

**Journey to Jerusalem**

It’s Lent again. Time to go to the closet and pull out the hair shirt. Or is it?

For anyone unfamiliar with hair shirts, they are garments made from rough animal hair (usually that of goats) worn as a top or under a shirt and against the skin so the coarse hair will rub and scratch the wearer. This discomfort serves as both an act of penitence and a constant reminder of faith so as to better avoid the temptation to sin.

Some might imagine the season of Lent to be like wearing a hair shirt, a time to remind ourselves what miserable sinners we are. The worse we feel about ourselves the better. While some might see it that way, I don’t think that is quite right.

A better way of thinking about Lent is an annual physical. Once a year, I see my doctor who tests my heart and lungs and blood. If something is wrong, we work to correct it.

In a way Lent is like that for our relationship with God. We are reminded on Ash Wednesday that we are dust and to dust we shall return. It is a reality check regarding our mortality and the thing that is most important in life… and death, namely God. We are also invited to turn our spiritual lives up a notch by spending more time in prayer, fasting, and Bible reading. These practices are intended to help us reflect on our relationship with God. And if something is found to be wrong, it can be corrected.

In Lent, we also consider the work of Jesus on our behalf. That the son of God, would love us so much that he would die an agonizing death on a cross in our place… ponder that long enough and it will take your breath away.

We hope and pray that this devotional will help you as we move closer to the cross and empty tomb. The readings follow the lectionary from the 2019 Book of Common Prayer. The writers are your friends and family here at Grace.

Don’t think, however, that this is a cheesy home-made product. Quite the opposite. The writers have been hand selected for their knowledge and their faith. The pages of this devotional contain some meaty stuff. Chew on it and grow.

Please thank our authors for the time they put into this and their insights. They are Henry Covert, Sue Dowell, Rita Lanham, Linda Lundquist, Dixie Mattingly, Ekene Ogbunamiri, Michael Popp, Frankie Rodriquez, Bill Russell, and me.

And while all glory goes to God, none of this would be possible without our esteemed publisher, Bill Russell.

On the journey together,

A picture containing animal, invertebrate, arthropod, insect

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# Ash Wednesday, March 5 Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

**1 Blow a trumpet in Zion;  
    sound an alarm on my holy mountain!  
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,  
    for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near,  
2a day of darkness and gloom,  
    a day of clouds and thick darkness!  
Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains  
    a great and powerful people;  
their like has never been before,  
    nor will be again after them  
    through the years of all generations.**

**12“Yet even now,” declares the Lord,  
    “return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
13and rend your hearts and not your garments.”  
Return to the Lord your God,  
    for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;  
    and he relents over disaster.  
14Who knows whether he will not turn and relent,  
    and leave a blessing behind him,  
a grain offering and a drink offering  
    for the Lord your God?**

**15Blow the trumpet in Zion;  
    consecrate a fast;  
call a solemn assembly;  
16gather the people.  
Consecrate the congregation;  
    assemble the elders;  
gather the children,  
    even nursing infants.  
Let the bridegroom leave his room,  
    and the bride her chamber.**

**17Between the vestibule and the altar  
    let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep  
and say, “Spare your people, O Lord,  
    and make not your heritage a reproach,  
    a byword among the nations.  
Why should they say among the peoples,  
‘Where is their God?’”**

Man and the devil continue to have their day on earth. In 1984, Rev Dr. David Jenkins, a controversial theology professor who allegedly rejected the Virgin Birth and described Jesus Christ’s resurrection as “a conjuring trick with bones,” was consecrated as Bishop of Durham, England. Despite a 12,000-signature petition to the Archbishop of York to rescind the decision, Jenkins was deemed suitable for the office. What could have been a day of rejoicing turned into mockery of God’s church on earth. Shortly after, York Minster Cathedral was struck by unexplained lightning, leading 14 unbelieving meteorologists to call it an act of divine judgment. Perhaps, the hand of God?

God desires worship in total surrender from His creation. His ways were made known to man through His moral laws. Deuteronomy 28 speaks of blessings for obedience and punishment for disobedience. Disasters are therefore a stark reminder of God’s judgment, direct or not. The devastation from locusts in Joel 1 would have recalled the curse: *You will sow much seed but harvest little, as locusts devour it.* But our loving God still redeems those that are repentant in His patience and long-suffering.

However, the day of the Lord is coming, when God will have His final say expressed in judgement and wrath. Revelation describes the seventh trumpet as marking the moment when the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, at the pouring of the seven bowls of God’s wrath on earth. The God who created the universe will de-create it. Who can endure it? Only those who turn to the Lord, fasting, weeping, and mourning. For to the overcomer’s, He will place His protective seal, and they will never be harmed by second death. Let us a church family heed the call today.

*We confess all our sins and we pray for the Holy Spirit to direct our lives so we live for God’s glory and honor.*

*Amen.*

# Thursday, March 6 Psalm 103:8-14

**8The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,**

**long-suffering and of great goodness.**

**9 He will not always chide us,**

**neither will he keep his anger for ever.**

**10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,**

**nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.**

**11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,**

**so great is his mercy also toward those who fear him.**

**12 As far as the east is from the west,**

**so far has he set our sins from us.**

**13 As a father pities his own children,**

**so is the Lord merciful to those who fear him.**

**14 For he knows whereof we are made;**

**he remembers that we are but dust.**

This Psalm highlights a common Lenten theme; that we are but dust. We are finite, limited creatures, which makes it difficult for us to really wrap our minds around our infinite God. Thus, it is helpful that this Psalm uses physical imagery to explain just how merciful God is.

God’s mercy is as high as the heavens. Modern astronomy has given us a glimpse of just how massive the universe is. Let that sink in. When you look up at the sky, let that be a reminder of the magnitude of God’s mercy for you.

God separates our sins from us as far as east is from west. East and west are polar opposites. Praise God that he so thoroughly removes our sin.

God treats those who come to him for forgiveness as a father pities his own children. How beautiful it is that this infinite and all-powerful God has tender mercy toward us as his children.

During this time of Lent, we take an honest look at our sins. But as we contemplate the heinousness of our sin, let us also bask in the good news of the gospel! The Lord doesn’t give us what we deserve, he gives us mercy.

*Almighty God, you have not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities; grant that we, who for our evil deeds deserve to be punished, by the might of your grace may mercifully be relieved; through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

*Amen.*

*BCP 2019; Occasional Prayer 79*

# Friday, March 7 2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

**20Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

**1 Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. 2For he says,**

**“In a favorable time I listened to you,  
    and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”**

**Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. 3We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, 4but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, 5beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; 6by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; 7by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; 8through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; 9as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; 10as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.**

Jesus’ death on the cross made it possible for us – sinners to the core – to be reconciled to our holy God. We do not earn God’s favor by works of service or good deeds or even by trying not to sin, but by confessing that we are sinners in need of a savior and accepting Jesus as our Lord and Savior. Jesus, whom God made to **be sin** though He knew no sin.

Jesus took on our sin, the sin of the world for all people for all time, on the cross. He suffered the punishment we deserve. At our conversion, when we accept Jesus, God clothes us in His righteousness. He no longer sees our sin but sees only the righteousness of His Son. We are transformed. We are new creations in Christ. Striving ceases and the work of the Holy Spirit transforms us into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another (2 Corinthians 3:18).

Therefore, we are equipped to be ambassadors for Christ, to do the work of the Kingdom of God until Jesus returns, to the glory of Jesus Christ. We are sent into the world with His good news of salvation and reconciliation.

And while Paul cites many obstacles we may face on our journey, he also points us to the solution to overcome: by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; by truthful speech, and the power of God.

Are any of these lacking? Ask God to fill you, to guide you, and to empower you and watch Almighty God work His wonders in and through you.

*Heavenly Father, help us, each and every one, to be Your faithful ambassadors, clothed in the righteousness of Christ, shining His light in this dark and hurting world.*

*Amen.*

# Saturday, March 8 Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

**1 “Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**

**2“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 3But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, 4so that your giving may be in secret.  And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

**5“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 6But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

**16“And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

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

Even living on this side of the resurrection we can fall victim to the other’s admiring, even envious gaze when directed our way. After all, we owe all we have to all the others who have passed through all our living whether encouraging us to seek the more they seem to possess or discouraging us from seeking the less they settled for. Their sway over us does not cease when we follow the One who truly possesses more, the One who truly desires for us to have his more too, who made us just for that reason, who is ready to give it away for eternity as he can never run out of it.

Yet, the allure of the other’s praise remains so thrilling, so intoxicating, so futile.

Righteousness is a word in decline these days. Not so if you read the Bible a lot. Seems all its authors liked that word and so used it frequently. There it refers to behaviors that adhere to God’s nature such as giving to those in need or devoting ourselves to his presence to just honor him through his gift of our being, especially when we set our own needs aside.

He sees these things we do that honor him, that glorify him, that reveal him, as do the others. The question for us is whose recognition do we really prefer?

*Father God, who sees in secret, forgive us our vainglory. A day in your courts is like a thousand outside, and there is none like you. Your appreciative, life-giving gaze has no equal and is like no other. Let it engulf us lest our hearts remain restless.*

*Amen.*

# First Sunday in Lent, March 9 Deuteronomy 26:1-4

**1 “When you come into the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance and have taken possession of it and live in it, 2you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from your land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you shall put it in a basket, and you shall go to the place that the Lord your God will choose, to make his name to dwell there. 3And you shall go to the priest who is in office at that time and say to him, ‘I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our fathers to give us.’ 4Then the priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down before the altar of the Lord your God.**

This section starts with “when”—a very definite tone to start with. God promised to give Abraham a land overflowing with milk and honey. In addition to this God promised that He would make a great nation of his descendants, and He kept his promise to Abraham. So, when this group of people came into the land God promised them, they are to gather the first fruits of their harvest and present them to the priest in order to give thanks to the Lord. This was in celebration of God’s faithfulness and blessings that He bestowed on the Israelites.

However, those of us on this side of the cross don’t have to bring sacrifices and offerings to the priest any longer because Jesus was the final sacrifice and is now our high priest and advocate in Heaven. Our inheritance is to live with Jesus and all the multitudes who belong to him, giving thanks and praise before the throne of God.

But right now, as we live on this earth, our first fruits are still the thanksgiving we give to God for his bountiful love, faithfulness and steadfast care for us. He saves us and provides for us. Let us give thanks!

*Thank you, Heavenly Father, for providing your abundant blessings on those of us whom you call your children. In Jesus’s Name we pray.*

*Amen.*

# Monday, March 10 Deuteronomy 26:5-11

**5“And you shall make response before the Lord your God, ‘A wandering Aramean was my father. And he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number, and there he became a nation, great, mighty, and populous. 6And the Egyptians treated us harshly and humiliated us and laid on us hard labor. 7Then we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression. 8And the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great deeds of terror, with signs and wonders. 9And he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10And behold, now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground, which you, O Lord, have given me.’ And you shall set it down before the Lord your God and worship before the Lord your God. 11And you shall rejoice in all the good that the Lord your God has given to you and to your house, you, and the Levite, and the sojourner who is among you.**

In the creed-like statement of Deuteronomy 26:5–11, the author recalls the Israelites’ four centuries of enslavement in Egypt in which they were treated *harshly* and were *humiliated* as they were forced to perform *hard labor* (v. 6). Indeed, the Israelites were utterly dehumanized by their Egyptian overlords, who refused to acknowledge the divine image in which all human beings are made. The result was that the Egyptians believed that they could do whatever they pleased with the lives of their Israelite servants, even committing genocide in order to control the number of Israelite males in their midst (Exodus 1:15–16).

But it is precisely at this point of Israelite desperation that Deuteronomy 26 extols Yahweh’s supernatural acts of deliverance and liberation. After hearing and seeing the oppression of His people, Yahweh takes action to emancipate the Israelites and, by many *signs and wonders* (v. 8), He eventually ushers them into the prosperity of the Promised Land.

The author of Deuteronomy then articulates the only fitting response to Yahweh’s beneficence: thanksgiving, worship, and rejoicing. This is a profoundly instructive example for us, for we, like the Israelites, were once enslaved. But rather than being enslaved to political powers, we were all once enslaved to the power of sin. And yet, through the work of Christ and our union with Him, *sin will have no dominion over* us because we *are not under law but under grace* (Romans 6:14).

And so, the marvelous expression of Yahweh’s liberation of the Israelites in Deuteronomy 26 points us toward an even deeper truth: *if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed* (John 8:36).

*Father God, may we never cease to give You thanks and praise for the freedom that we have received through Your Son. And may we never cease to offer that freedom to those who are in need of it.*

*Amen.*

# Tuesday, March 11 Psalm 91:1-6

**1 Whoever dwells under the defense of the Most High**

**shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.**

**2 I will say unto the Lord, “You are my refuge and my stronghold,**

**my God in whom I will trust.”**

**3 For he shall deliver you from the snare of the hunter**

**and from the deadly pestilence.**

**4 He shall defend you under his wings, and you shall be safe under his feathers;**

**his faithfulness and truth shall be your shield and buckler.**

**5 You shall not be afraid of any terror by night,**

**nor of the arrow that flies by day,**

**6 Of the pestilence that walks in darkness,**

**nor of the sickness that destroys at noonday.**

On the surface, Psalm 91 would seem like a divine promise of safety in all situations. The problem is that this apparent promise is not consistent with human experience. One of the biggest questions that people ask is this: why do bad things happen to good people? That is a hard question, especially considering Psalm 91 and other similar scriptures.

When we encounter difficulties like this, we have to remember that any single portion of scripture must be understood within the context of the entirety of scripture. In the case of this psalm, Jesus can help clarify things for us.

Near the end of Jesus’s ministry, he told his disciples *I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart****; I have overcome the world.***(John 16:33) One imagines his followers had these words deeply imbedded in their hearts and minds as they were imprisoned, beaten, stoned and crucified. This is how they could endure painful, unjust suffering – even death- in peace. They understood that Jesus was victorious over every evil or danger they could ever face.

Taken as a whole, therefore, what we see in scripture is a God who is intimately interested and protective of his children. There is safety in God. And note this: if we are under God’s care (under his wings), who is it that suffers the snare or arrows of the hunter? Not us. Like a mother bird, Jesus is the one who is struck down.

Bad things happen to good people: sickness, injustice, evil in every form, and finally death. But Jesus makes sense of it all. His is the peace that passes understanding. He has overcome the world.

*I will say unto the LORD, “You are my refuge and my stronghold, my God in whom I will trust.”*

*Amen.*

# Wednesday, March 12 Psalm 91:7-13

**7 A thousand shall fall beside you, and ten thousand at your right hand,**

**but it shall not come near you.**

**8 Indeed, with your eyes you shall behold \***

**and see the reward of the ungodly.**

**9 Because you have said, “The Lord is my refuge,”**

**and have made the Most High your stronghold,**

**10 There shall no evil happen to you,**

**neither shall any plague come near your dwelling.**

**11 For he shall give his angels charge over you,**

**to keep you in all your ways.**

**12 They shall bear you in their hands,**

**that you hurt not your foot against a stone.**

**13 You shall tread upon the lion and adder;**

**the young lion and the serpent you shall trample under your feet.**

Most of us are familiar with this passage. It beautifully expresses God’s assurance of protection from plagues, pestilence, and sheer evil. I recite it and take comfort in it, especially when things are going my way. But when life gets tough, I often feel distant from God. In moments of panic, I forget the words of the Psalm I once cherished. How do we keep trusting during adversity? How do we avoid despair when others around us falter? Honestly, I don’t feel close to God during these times. I forget that dwelling in God’s presence doesn’t mean immunity from suffering.

Romans 8:18 reminds us, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us.* These words resonated with me while supporting a close friend through a life-altering event. Despite our prayers, God answered in His way, not ours. She will spend the next eight years in a federal detention center, an outcome no one imagined. The night before she left for "her missionary camp," she invited me to an evening service to celebrate God’s goodness. Watching her praise, worship, dance, and pray with wholehearted joy, I asked her secret. She replied, "This is not strength. I chose to empty myself and let the Holy Spirit fill me." That is what dwelling in God’s presence means. Our joy isn’t dependent on our circumstances but on God’s power within us.

My friend will be okay because she has chosen God as her refuge. His angels have taken charge over her. Her choice to hold firmly to God's words is already bearing fruit for the kingdom. She is spreading the message of salvation through her weekly Bible studies with fellow inmates. That’s the power of a Holy Spirit-filled life! Can we empty ourselves of doubts, egos, and human inclinations to enjoy the fullness of God’s protection and assurance of victory? Then we can truly live out the words of this beautiful Psalm.

*We come to you with nothing. We offer ourselves as sacrifices for your service now and always.*

*Amen.*

# Thursday, March 13 Psalm 91:14-16

**14 “Because he has set his love upon me, therefore I will deliver him;**

**I will lift him up, because he has known my Name.**

**15 He shall call upon me, and I will hear him;**

**indeed, I am with him in trouble; I will deliver him**

**and bring him honor.**

**16 With long life I will satisfy him, \***

**and show him my salvation.”**

Psalm 91 is one of the more beloved psalms in Christendom. The words echo the promises of God we have received: promises of trust, protection and the blessed assurance of our salvation.

When reading it, though, I must remind myself to change voices. The praise and affirmation of the first thirteen verses can be read like many other psalms. When I get to verse 14, however, the voice changes.

At the start, I am reading the words of the writer of Psalm 91, and they sound beautiful and sacred and hopeful. Then, beginning with the fourteenth verse, God speaks.

Read the whole psalm to see what I mean. When you get to Verse 14, read as if you are God speaking to the hearer—you. Read this part again but change all the third person pronouns to the second person: *Because you have set your love … therefore I will deliver you … and show you my salvation.*”

Which is what this journey by Jesus to Jerusalem is all about. Read it. Believe it. Let it change your world. Again.

*Open my eyes, Lord. Open my ears. Help me absorb the fullness of your mercy given through Jesus, my Savior.*

*Amen.*

# Friday, March 14 Romans 10:4-13

**4For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.**

**5For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. 6But the righteousness based on faith says, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) 7“or ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); 9because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. 11For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” 12For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. 13For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”**

We are not made right with God by doing good works, by giving to the poor, or by helping those less fortunate. Yes, those acts are pleasing to God and can be a natural outflowing of our love for Him, but in and of themselves, they do not make us right with God.

We must confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in our heart that God raised Him from the dead. And we are saved; saved from sin and death; saved for eternal life with God. Not by anything we do but by His grace and by the blood of Christ sacrificed for us at Calvary.

It is a very powerful thing to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord. Stop for a moment and say these words aloud, don’t just read them, but say them aloud:

“Jesus is Lord!”

“Jesus is Lord!”

“Jesus is Lord!”

Yes, we are saved when we confess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord, but there is also a spiritual power that sustains us and uplifts us as we confess our faith throughout the day. I invite you to try it today.

Whatever difficult circumstances you may find yourself in, keep professing your faith: “Jesus is Lord!” No matter what trials you face or worries you have, declare: “Jesus is Lord!” For the joy set before you, proclaim: “Jesus is Lord!” In thanksgiving, raise your voice: “Jesus is Lord!” When you eat your next meal, affirm: “Jesus is Lord!” As you lay your head on your pillow at night, pray: “Jesus is Lord!”

*Jesus, everyone who calls on Your Name will be saved. Thank You for Your saving grace and Your amazing love. Thank You that there is POWER in Your Name. You are Lord!*

*Amen.*

# Saturday, March 15 Luke 4:1-13

**1 And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness 2for forty days, being tempted by the devil. And he ate nothing during those days. And when they were ended, he was hungry. 3The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread.” 4And Jesus answered him, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone.’” 5And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time,6and said to him, “To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.” 8And Jesus answered him, “It is written,**

**“‘You shall worship the Lord your God,  
    and him only shall you serve.’”**

**9And he took him to Jerusalem and set him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10for it is written,**

**“‘He will command his angels concerning you,  
    to guard you,’**

**11and**

**“‘On their hands they will bear you up,  
    lest you strike your foot against a stone.’”**

**12And Jesus answered him, “It is said, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” 13And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.**

There it is … that tree, set before us yet again. All we need to do is to reach for it, to grasp it, consume its fruit and we will have it all. No need to trust, no need to believe, no need to wait … just do it, just go for it. You only go around once. Life is short. You deserve a break today. Have it your way … for tomorrow we die.

But what if death lurks only in the grasping, the taking, the consuming, the exclusion that our willful forgetting accomplishes regarding the warning, the truly concerned true counsel “… *for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*.”

What if eternal life, life that cannot cease, life that is abundant by its very nature is in the trusting, the believing, the waiting, the now of it all? What if St. Teresa is right?

“All things are passing away:

God never changes.

Patience obtains all things

Whoever has God lacks nothing;

God alone suffices.”

There it is … waiting only for us to wait for it.

*Lord Jesus, you refused to grasp. Help us to turn to the side and there see you waiting with us, patiently, unhurried, moment by moment, day by day, year by year. Our sure exit is only through that narrow gate that lies open even now if we will just wait for it.*

*Amen.*

# Second Sunday in Lent, March 16 Genesis 15:1-6

**1 After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” 2But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” 4And behold, the word of the Lord came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” 5And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” 6And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.**

*And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness*. God has told Abram not to fear for his reward will be great. Then God made a very big promise to Abram, a promise that he will have many descendants from his own body. And Abram believed that promise.

Fear not and believe. If we read God’s promises throughout the scriptures, we will see that fear and faith (believing) do not mingle well. If we have faith in what God says, we should not fear anything that comes our way.

Now Abram had no idea how this promise was going to be accomplished. He just believed that it would happen and waited. It is hard to wait on the Lord. We want to do it our way and get on with it—"let’s go get it done!”

But God knows what we need and when we need it. He will accomplish his plan in his time. So, Abram believed and didn’t fear, even when the promise was not fully completed in Abram’s life. Still, he believed, and God counted it to him as righteousness.

So, how does this apply to us? Jesus came from the Abrahamic line and is the offspring referred to in this section of scripture. By our belief and trust in Jesus’s death and resurrection, we too are now offspring of God. We too are counted righteous before God!

*Give me, O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no unworthy thought can drag down; an unconquered heart, which no tribulation can wear out; an upright heart, which no unworthy purpose can tempt aside. Bestow upon me understanding to know you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, and faithfulness that finally may embrace you.*

*Amen.*

*(Thomas Aquinas)*

# Monday, March 17 Genesis 15:7-18

**7And he said to him, “I am the Lord who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess.” 8But he said, “O Lord God, how am I to know that I shall possess it?” 9He said to him, “Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon.” 10And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half. 11And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.**

**12As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him. 13Then the Lord said to Abram, “Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. 14But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. 15As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. 16And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.”**

**17When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,**

In Isaiah 55:9, Yahweh proclaims: *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.* And yet, this infinite Creator is willing to reach out to His finite creatures and promise them lovingkindness and assurance for the future. Not only that, but He promises to use them as instruments of His plans for the redemption of the world.

Genesis 15:7–18 bears witness to covenantal promises between Yahweh and Abram. In an oath ritual that reflects God’s accommodation to Abram’s time and place, Yahweh promises Abram that, after four hundred years of servitude, his many descendants will inherit a land of their own. Centuries later, the covenant promise manifests in the birth of the nation of Israel. And it is through Israel that Yahweh’s salvific designs for humanity are to be carried out. For just as the Abrahamic covenant would give birth to Israel, it would be through Israel’s Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, that the covenant would be fulfilled.

And, in a pure expression of divine grace, the promise of the Abrahamic covenant would not be restricted to Abram’s biological descendants, but to all who have faith in Christ Jesus. As Saint Paul writes, *those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith* (Gal. 3:9). And as Yahweh had proclaimed in His calling of Abram, *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (Gen. 12:3b). Thus, for us as disciples of Jesus, the glory of His fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is that *if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise* (Gal. 3:29).

*Father God, we are so grateful that You have adopted us into Your family through faith in Your Son. May we share Your promises with all those who have not yet received them.*

*Amen.*

# Tuesday, March 18 Psalm 27:1-8

**1 The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear?**

**The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom then shall I be afraid?**

**2 When the wicked, even my enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh,**

**they stumbled and fell.**

**3 Though a host were encamped against me, yet my heart would not be afraid,**

**and though war rose up against me, yet would I put my trust in him.**

**4 One thing have I desired of the Lord; one thing I seek:**

**that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life,**

**5 To behold the fair beauty of the Lord,**

**and to seek him in his temple.**

**6 For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his tabernacle;**

**indeed, in the secret place of his dwelling he shall hide me, and set me high upon a rock of stone.**

**7 And now he shall lift up my head**

**above my enemies round about me.**

**8 Therefore I will offer in his dwelling an oblation with great gladness;**

**I will sing and speak praises unto the Lord.**

The world is a dangerous place. Violence seems a constant reality. But no worries. You will be fine.

On one level, we know that is blatantly false. Last year, 233,000 people were killed in armed conflicts. But maybe they weren’t all Christians.

No, the world is a dangerous place for Christians too. Last year, approximately 5,000 Christians were killed because they were Christians. And yet, this psalm says…

The essence of Psalm 27:1-8 is not that nothing bad can happen. Rather, it declares that in a chaotic, perilous world, there is only one safe place: with God. The psalmist describes it as *dwelling in the house of the Lord*, *seeking him in his temple*, *hiding in his tabernacle*. These are all the same. They are material descriptions of being with God, under his intimate, personal care.

There was a Chinese man named Alfred Wong who knew that very well. In the 1970s, he was arrested and imprisoned for being a Christian. The guards were cruel, the conditions were deplorable. Eventually, he was released and came to the United States. His testimony is unforgettable:

“I feel sorry for you Americans. You don’t know the presence of God like I do.”

Psalm 27 describes a nearness to God that negates all else. In that way, it echoes Romans 8:38-39: *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

Yes, the world is a dangerous place. Violence seems a constant reality. But no worries. You will be fine.

*One thing have I desired of the Lord; one thing I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, To behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to seek him in his temple.*

*Amen.*

# Wednesday, March 19 Psalm 27:9-17

**9 Hearken to my voice, O Lord, when I cry unto you;**

**have mercy upon me and hear me.**

**10 You speak to my heart and say, “Seek my face.”**

**Your face, O Lord, will I seek.**

**11 O hide not your face from me,**

**nor cast your servant away in displeasure.**

**12 You have been my helper;**

**leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.**

**13 When my father and my mother forsake me,**

**the Lord takes me in.**

**14 Teach me your way, O Lord,**

**and lead me in the right way, because of my enemies.**

**15 Deliver me not over to the will of my adversaries,**

**for there are false witnesses who have risen up against me, and those who speak wrong.**

**16 I would utterly have fainted,**

**had I not believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.**

**17 O wait for the Lord; be strong, and he shall comfort your heart.**

**O put your trust in the Lord.**

David's transition from eloquently describing his security in God in the first half of the Psalm to a posture of plea and petition in today's passage is deeply moving. After boldly proclaiming his faith in God's deliverance from foes, David sought God's face, pleading that He would not hide or cast him away. David's experience mirrors our own; even when we have the right words, fear can still grip us.

This was also true for Peter. With enough faith, he walked on water, defying the law of buoyancy if he kept his focus on Jesus. But the moment his gaze shifted, his humanity took over, and he began to sink. Peter called out for Jesus to save him, just as David reminded God of His role as helper and salvation. Even when our Lord was delivered to His adversaries and false witnesses to be crucified, He cried out to His Father for comfort and strength. When our worries grow larger than our faith, we drift from the source of our salvation and begin to sink into doubt and despair.

I do not know your current circumstances, but I want to remind us all that our God remains immutable and unchanging. Nothing about us is a surprise to the Him. His promises are steadfast as He cannot lie.

I pray that in those moments that will surely come, we remember that even when forsaken by loved ones, God will never leave us. May we find solace in the certainty and assurance of witnessing the Lord's goodness, knowing His banner over us is love. He holds all creation in His hands and remains omnipotent. Whenever worry arises, may our praises lift up so that God's peace and grace rain down. In times of waiting, may we stay strong and find comfort in His promises. What a promise indeed.

*Father, we pray that our faith be stronger than our doubts so that we continue to see your goodness in the land of the living.*

*Amen.*

# Thursday, March 20 Philippians 3:17-4:1

**17Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. 18For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. 19Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. 20But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.**

**4 Therefore, my brothers, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm thus in the Lord, my beloved.**

Sheep, goats. Wheat, chaff. Pearls, swine. Paul writes that, in fact, there are people who God says he will not save. Paul calls them enemies of Christ. This is one of the more difficult things to ingurgitate: some will be left out.

Paul does not write this easily. It brings him to tears as he encourages the faithful of Philippi to stand firm. He wrestled with the notion of whether everyone will be saved, and you can read his thinking in his letter to the Romans, particularly the first eight chapters. His engagement with this question was personal. His mother was a Hebrew. His father was a Roman citizen. Neither were known to be followers of Jesus.

Would God deny his parents the glorious eternal life that Paul had been proclaiming to the whole known world? I think we see the answer in the tears he shed.

Nonetheless, this is an encouraging passage. I will be gravely saddened if a loved one ends life as an enemy of the cross of Christ. My sadness will be transcended by being eternally present in the power of God through Jesus Christ completed by the Holy Spirit.

*Gracious and Loving God, grant us the courage and boldness with compassion to share the gospel of salvation in the opportunities you place in our lives. May our trust be in you that mercy abounds. Thank you for calling us to be your friend, Jesus.*

*Amen.*

# Friday, March 21 Luke 13:22-30

**22He went on his way through towns and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem. 23And someone said to him, “Lord, will those who are saved be few?” And he said to them, 24“Strive to enter through the narrow door. For many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able. 25When once the master of the house has risen and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, open to us,’ then he will answer you, ‘I do not know where you come from.’ 26Then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.’ 27But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!’ 28In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God but you yourselves cast out. 29And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God. 30And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.”**

It seems we have a problem. We want to do things our way and we want to be saved too. We want to eat our cake and have it left. We can’t have it both ways. We are either a believer or we are not. And whether or not we believe determines whether or not we enter through the narrow door.

Some people think they should be able to enter through the narrow door because they are good people, helping the poor and needy, caring for the elderly, fighting for justice. These are all **good** things, but good works do not earn salvation.

Jesus said, *I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture* (John 10:9). Not **“a”** door, but **“the”** door. He also said, *I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me* (John 14:6). Not **“a”** way but **“the”** way. The narrow door is Jesus.

However, there is still another problem. It’s not enough to know who Jesus is. Many people know of Jesus, but to be saved from sin and death requires a personal relationship with Him.

Lord, will those who are saved be few? The answer depends on us, my dear brothers and sisters in Christ. We are God’s messengers. We are the ones who are to share the gospel with those who have not heard. We are the ones to share the love of Jesus Christ and lead others to a personal relationship with Him.

*Lord Jesus Christ, so clothe us in Your Spirit that we, reaching forth our hands in love, may bring those who do not know You to the knowledge and love of You; for the honor of Your Name.*

*Amen.*

# Saturday, March 22 Luke 13:31-35

**31At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, “Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you.” 32And he said to them, “Go and tell that fox, ‘Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. 33Nevertheless, I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following, for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.’ 34O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 35Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”**

It is both difficult and dangerous to turn away from the city of Man. After all, we all come to experience that we literally *are* thanks to its nurture, its teaching us all that we know and love and fear. We are its offspring, like it or not, and it is what it is, as we say.

The good news—the truly good news for which we are *desperate*—is that there is a city of God. Clearly this news must come to us from outside of the city of Man, that is from God himself. For everything we might think or imagine regarding the divine we must construct ourselves, stuck as we are in the city of Man, which, being what it is, must always remain fully human.

So part of the difficulty in turning away God himself has remedied by coming to give us the good news that there truly is *a still more excellent way* than our living, striving, and dying in the city of Man. The rest he leaves up to us.

But God will not remedy the danger in turning away. He has left all of that up to us—we citizens of the city of Man—to remedy, because *we* *are the danger*. We kill and stone all who would turn away from our city, who refuse to worship our gods, who dare to receive and live into the good news that there really is a different city where there is no danger, no striving, and no death. That city’s inhabitants are not like us—they are made new, by God himself.

And being made new, the inhabitants of the city of God receive its rejected Herald with the blessings due an eternal Lord.

*Blessed Lord, Father God, Holy Spirit who gives life itself, Blessed Trinity, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings are in your city! Alleluia, we shall dwell in this house of our Lord forever!*

*Amen.*

# Third Sunday in Lent, March 23 Exodus 3:1-6

**1 Now Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian, and he led his flock to the west side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed. 3And Moses said, “I will turn aside to see this great sight, why the bush is not burned.” 4When the Lord saw that he turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, “Moses, Moses!” And he said, “Here I am.” 5Then he said, “Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” 6And he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.**

Fire from a bush that wasn’t burned up—that would get your attention. Fire tends to get anyone’s attention. In fact, fire is mentioned over 500 times in the Bible—from Genesis, with the smoking smudge pot and flaming torch when God made the covenant with Abram, to Revelation and the lake of fire.

And fire is mentioned usually in reference to God in some way or another. Flame, fire, lightning—all have signified the presence of God. This episode of Moses and the burning bush is one of the most recognizable stories that includes fire.

Now Moses had been taking care of his father-in-law’s sheep for many years, probably around forty. He wasn’t doing anything out of the ordinary that day. He saw a bush that wasn’t being consumed. He was very curious, and he said let me go explore this. And then God stepped in!

Moses was not expecting God to call to him out of the bush. It would have been very scary to hear a bush talking, but Moses didn’t faint or run away. Instead, he hid his face for he knew God is holy.

God had been preparing Moses during these long years of ordinary work for the work of leading God’s people out of Egypt. Moses didn’t know that was going to happen when he encountered the burning bush. The same thing happens in our lives too. God prepares us for his work through the little events in our lives. We think they are insignificant but when God directs our path we see how and by what means he has brought us to this point.

*Thank you for being the Light for our path.*

*In Jesus’ name,*

*Amen.*

# Monday, March 24 Exodus 3:7-15

**7Then the Lord said, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings, 8and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 9And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them. 10Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” 11But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?” 12He said, “But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.”**

**13Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” 14God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” 15God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.**

One of the most awe-inspiring qualities of the God of the Bible is that He listens and responds to those who call upon Him for salvation. The Almighty Father, the “maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, visible and invisible,” is pleased to pour out His saving grace upon His creatures. And that is precisely what is described in the narrative of Exodus.

Unlike the capricious and violent deities of the pagan nations, the God Who reveals Himself to the Israelites as Yahweh is Love. As Yahweh speaks to Moses from the burning bush at Mount Horeb, He identifies with the suffering of His people, proclaiming their deliverance from enslavement and their inheritance of the Promised Land. He empowers Moses to become His herald, and He reminds the Israelites of His faithfulness as *the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob* (v. 15). And Yahweh also proclaims that, after the liberation of the Israelites has been accomplished, they will serve Him on the very same holy mountain.

Just as the ancient Israelites cried out to God for freedom from bondage, their descendants longed, for centuries, for the coming of the Messiah, the one who would *save his people from their sins* (Matthew 1:21b). In Jesus of Nazareth, God responded to the call of His people for salvation. Christ is now the burning bush, the holy mountain, the tabernacle, the temple, the presence in whom *all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell* (Colossians 1:19b). And through His life, death, and resurrection, the freedom of eternal salvation is available *to everyone who believes* (Romans 1:16b).

*Father God, You have freed us from slavery to sin and death, once-for-all. May Your Spirit empower us to proclaim the offer of Your salvation to a world yearning to breathe free.*

*Amen.*

# Tuesday, March 25 Psalm 103:1-5

**1 Praise the Lord, O my soul,**

**and all that is within me, praise his holy Name.**

**2 Praise the Lord, O my soul,**

**and forget not all his benefits:**

**3 Who forgives all your sin**

**and heals all your infirmities,**

**4 Who saves your life from the pit**

**and crowns you with mercy and loving-kindness,**

**5 Who satisfies you with good things,**

**renewing your youth like an eagle’s.**

“Praise the Lord and pass the banana pudding.” Granted, I never heard anyone say those exact words. But there have been people in my life who praised the Lord all the time, for no apparent reason. Honestly, I found them to be sincere but rather off-putting. That is no longer the case.

C.S. Lewis is helpful in this matter. At one point in his life, he was offended by God’s desire for us, even his command to us, to praise him. He wrote, “Gratitude to God, reverence to Him, obedience to Him, I thought I could understand,” he says,” [but] not this perpetual (acclaim).” Eventually, though Lewis had a breakthrough.

Praise, he discovered, is a natural outcropping of the pleasure we receive from life. Great restaurants, beautiful sunsets, even spectacular baseball plays almost reflexively evoke praise because of the pleasure they bring us. Likewise, if we know God, who is supremely beautiful, supremely worthy, supremely good, and supremely loving, adoration and praise cannot be stifled. To know God is to praise God.

But here is the fascinating thing. God demands our praise, not because he needs an ego boost. Rather God demands our praise because it is good for us. Lewis writes, “The duty exists for the delight.” Praising God, produces joy.

At Grace, we praise God a lot through our music. As we do, it is possible to feel delight increasing through the congregation. Many of you know that.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the Psalms (Israel’s song book) is saturated with instruction to praise the Lord. There are 150 psalms, and the word “praise” is included 137 times. Psalm 103 is one of those psalms and it urges us to hold nothing back. *“Praise the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, praise his holy Name.”*

*Lord God, we praise you now and throughout eternity.*

*Amen.*

# Wednesday, March 26 Psalm 103:6-12

**6 The Lord executes righteousness and judgment**

**for all those who are oppressed with wrong.**

**7 He showed his ways to Moses,**

**his works to the children of Israel.**

**8 The Lord is full of compassion and mercy,**

**long-suffering and of great goodness.**

**9 He will not always chide us,**

**neither will he keep his anger for ever.**

**10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,**

**nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.**

**11 For as the heavens are high above the earth,**

**so great is his mercy also toward those who fear him.**

**12 As far as the east is from the west,**

**so far has he set our sins from us.**

Numbers and hard data have always resonated with me—perhaps it's the mathematician in me. Recently, I delved into the concept of forgiveness in America and discovered some intriguing insights. About 67% of Americans believe that the U.S. population is generally forgiving, 60% consider crimes like murder, abuse, and sexual offenses, or any intentional crimes, as unforgivable. 60% feel that forgiveness should be contingent on the offender's apology and subsequent changes.

It’s no wonder that many of us struggle to understand our all-forgiving God. Let’s remind ourselves of what we know through His words. Jesus’s forgiveness and healing of the paralytic man was based on his friends' faith, not the sick man's. To the unnamed woman who bathed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair, He said *Your sins are forgiven*. An offering of free grace and mercy laced with love was given by our Lord to the woman caught in adultery.

Reflecting on the unimaginable forgiveness Jesus offered on the cross, R. C. Ryle wrote, “These words were probably spoken while our Lord was being nailed to the cross, or as soon as the cross was reared up on end. It is worthy of remark that as soon as the blood of the Great Sacrifice began to flow, the Great High Priest began to intercede.”

Today's passage reflects our God’s Grace and Mercy. It encapsulates our Christian belief and sets it apart from other religions. Our God is compassionate and merciful, unchanging through the ages. He does not hold onto anger but blots out our sins as if we never sinned. He offered His only Son in a vicarious atonement, exchanging His righteousness for our sins. While we can't fully comprehend it, just as we will never know the distance from east to west or from heaven to earth, we do know that He never deals with us according to our sins and wickedness.

*To the one who forgives all, we pour out our heart of worship. May we learn that true forgiveness that comes us from you.*

*Amen.*

# Thursday, March 27 1 Corinthians 10:1-5

**1 For I do not want you to be unaware, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3and all ate the same spiritual food, 4and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ. 5Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness.**

Paul expertly weaves themes from the Exodus into his message to the Christians in Corinth. He tells us that all the Jews participated in the same spiritual experiences: they all followed the cloud in the wilderness, they were all “baptized” in the crossing of the Red Sea, they all witnessed the miracle of water flowing out of the rock at Meribah. Yet, despite the Jews’ shared spiritual experiences, God was not pleased with most of them because the Jews desired evil: they put God to the test, they gave into temptations, they worshiped idols. Put more succinctly: the Jews that God was displeased with did not have faith.

What does this tell us? Spiritual participation isn’t enough. God isn’t after mere church attendance; baptism isn’t an automatic ticket to heaven. God is after our hearts, our obedience, our undivided worship, and our faith.

While Christians are susceptible to the same failings of the Jews, we also have access to the same Christ. Just as Christ (in the form of the Rock from which water flowed) followed the Jews, Christ also follows us. Jesus is an ever-present friend who will strengthen our faith, help us persevere in temptation, and draw us into a deeper relationship with him.

This Lenten season, may we follow Christ more closely.

*O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you for ever.*

*Amen.*

*BCP 2019, Occasional Prayer 74*

# Friday, March 28 1 Corinthians 10:6-13

**6Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. 7Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, “The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.” 8We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. 9We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, 10nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer.11Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. 12Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. 13No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.**

Idolatry, sexual immorality, rebellion, and faithlessness—these are examples of the Israelites’ sin that Paul brings to our attention. Sin is a very serious thing. Do not take it lightly. These are all examples of what **not** to do. They are provided for us for our instruction, to understand that our situations are not unique. Our temptations are real, and they are also common. Wrong desires and temptations happen to us all, No one is immune. It’s how we respond to them that sets us apart.

God knows our particular weaknesses and how we may be tempted. He faithfully gives us a way to overcome those temptations as they arise. Don’t try to stand on your own when tempted but look to God for the way out. Pray to Him for help. Heed His guidance. Submit to the power of the Holy Spirit in you. Surround yourself with other faithful Christians to support you and help you. Immerse yourself in the Word of God.

Don’t give into temptation but overcome temptation by the power of the Holy Spirit. *God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.*

*Jesus Christ our Lord, who was tempted in every way as we are, yet did not sin: by Your grace we are able to triumph over every evil and temptation, and to live no longer for ourselves alone, but for You who died for us and rose again.*

*Amen!*

# Saturday, March 29 Luke 13:1-9

**1 There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? 3No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. 4Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? 5No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”**

**6And he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. 7And he said to the vinedresser, ‘Look, for three years now I have come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down. Why should it use up the ground?’ 8And he answered him, ‘Sir, let it alone this year also, until I dig around it and put on manure. 9Then if it should bear fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.’”**

There is no forever here. The creation has firm rules, most of which we have yet to understand, but one thing seems clear: there was a beginning to it. And we have all learned something else about being here, something learned the hard way: all beginnings here have endings.

The name of Jesus, not universally known as yet, but fairly well known even so, sets before all its knowers an invitation: grow and produce “fruit.” Now don’t take that literally, but don’t fail to see the truth of it. Jesus offers to enrich a human life so it will produce something good for itself *and* for others. And that *and* is as firm as there is no forever here. The name of Jesus can produce something good for all its knowers and for others, too.

But there is another firm rule here in the creation, another one learned the hard way, one we cannot get around: to receive the growth and fecundity the name of Jesus offers always entails change for us trees. Growing and producing fruit for the owner of this vineyard requires us to turn away from living lives that really produce nothing when it is all said and done, and to submit ourselves to the ministration of his very earnest vinedresser.

Otherwise, we’ll just be cut down at our ending here.

*Holy Spirit, wise Counsellor and Defender, help us to remember that just because there is no forever here does not mean that there is no forever.*

*Amen.*

# Fourth Sunday in Lent, Sunday, March 30 Joshua 4:19-24

**19The people came up out of the Jordan on the tenth day of the first month, and they encamped at Gilgal on the east border of Jericho. 20And those twelve stones, which they took out of the Jordan, Joshua set up at Gilgal. 21And he said to the people of Israel, “When your children ask their fathers in times to come, ‘What do these stones mean?’ 22then you shall let your children know, ‘Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.’ 23For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over, 24so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever.”**

This may be one of my favorite concepts in all of Scripture: the “Ebenezer.” Yes, you are reading that right—just like Scrooge from *A Christmas Carol*. Ebenezers were first introduced in Joshua as stones of remembrance, “stones of help” literally, which were *those 12 stones*. They were objects to help the people remember what God had done for them, and who they were in relation to him. In the case of the 12 here, they represent how God got the Israelites from Egypt to the promised land over the Jordan river *on dry ground*.

This concept has never gone away. We see it persistently throughout the Old Testament, both before and after Joshua, especially in Biblical names. More importantly, the cross and the empty tomb are massive Ebenezers for us. In fact, this whole Lenten season is full of them, from the Ashes at the beginning of Lent to the empty tomb Easter morning.

You may ask, “Why so many?” It is because we are forgetful, which is our ultimate enemy as we walk out the church door on Sunday mornings. Much of the time, our worship becomes a blur in our memories of what happened while we gathered to glorify God. We go back to our normal lives and ways of living. We may even take a nap and then move on to Monday.

So, as we go through this season, press into the practice of the Ebenezer. Carry a cross on you, change your lockscreen, or even carry a rock. Do not lose the reality of who you are as Scrooge did. Always “remember who you are,” as Mufasa in *The Lion King* says.

*Lord, thank you for always helping our fragile minds remember who you are. Help us throughout this season of Lent to remember who we are to you and in you. Lord, let us never forget.*

*Amen.*

# Monday, March 31 Joshua 5:1-12

**1 As soon as all the kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan to the west, and all the kings of the Canaanites who were by the sea, heard that the Lord had dried up the waters of the Jordan for the people of Israel until they had crossed over, their hearts melted and there was no longer any spirit in them because of the people of Israel.**

**2At that time the Lord said to Joshua, “Make flint knives and circumcise the sons of Israel a second time.” 3So Joshua made flint knives and circumcised the sons of Israel at Gibeath-haaraloth. 4And this is the reason why Joshua circumcised them: all the males of the people who came out of Egypt, all the men of war, had died in the wilderness on the way after they had come out of Egypt. 5Though all the people who came out had been circumcised, yet all the people who were born on the way in the wilderness after they had come out of Egypt had not been circumcised. 6For the people of Israel walked forty years in the wilderness, until all the nation, the men of war who came out of Egypt, perished, because they did not obey the voice of the Lord; the Lord swore to them that he would not let them see the land that the Lord had sworn to their fathers to give to us, a land flowing with milk and honey. 7So it was their children, whom he raised up in their place, that Joshua circumcised. For they were uncircumcised, because they had not been circumcised on the way.**

**8When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. 9And the Lord said to Joshua, “Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you.” And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day.**

**10While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho. 11And the day after the Passover, on that very day, they ate of the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12And the manna ceased the day after they ate of the produce of the land. And there was no longer manna for the people of Israel, but they ate of the fruit of the land of Canaan that year.**

The Old Testament describes many recollections of the tragic disobedience of God’s people as they traveled out of slavery in Egypt to the land which Yahweh had sworn to give them. They had believed the *bad report* about the Promised Land that the ten spies had provided them (Numbers 13:32). They had treated God with contempt by refusing to believe in Him despite all the miraculous signs He had performed among them (Numbers 14:11). The Israelites *did not obey the voice of the Lord* (v. 6a). Yahweh, therefore, swore that not one of these people who had treated him with such contempt would ever even see the land flowing with milk and honey (Numbers 14:23).

And then, God performed an astounding act for His people. He chose to bless *their children, whom he raised up in their place* (v. 7). He gave a people who had continually *grumbled against* Him (Numbers 14:29), and who did not trust in His mighty power, an inheritance in the Promised Land. After Joshua had circumcised *the sons of Israel* (v. 2b), Yahweh proclaimed that He had *rolled away the reproach of Egypt* from His people (v. 9a).

Similarly, Easter reminds us of God’s ultimate act of saving grace. As Saint Paul declares, *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). For our sake, God *raised up* His only Son (Acts 2:32). Our Blessed Savior took our sin and shame and rolled it away from us forever. And He bestowed upon us *an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven* (1 Peter 1:4). Through Easter, we know that *God is love* (1 John 4:8b).

*Father God, You offer the gift of Your boundless grace even to those who, like us, are so often ungrateful and unworthy. May our lives reflect the mercy and love that You first showed us.*

*Amen.*

# Tuesday, April 1 Psalm 34:1-10

**1 I will always give thanks unto the** **Lord;**

**his praise shall ever be in my mouth.**

**2 My soul shall make its boast in the Lord;**

**the humble shall hear this and be glad.**

**3 O praise the Lord with me,**

**and let us magnify his Name together.**

**4 I sought the Lord, and he heard me;**

**he delivered me out of all my fears.**

**5 They looked unto him, and were made glad,**

**and their faces were not ashamed.**

**6 Look, the poor man cries, and the Lord hears him,**

**and saves him out of all his troubles.**

**7 The angel of the Lord camps round about those who fear him,**

**and delivers them in time of need.**

**8 O taste and see how gracious the Lord is;**

**blessed is the one who trusts in him.**

**9 O fear the Lord, you that are his saints;**

**for those who fear him lack nothing.**

**10 The lions lack and suffer hunger,**

**but those who seek the Lord shall lack nothing that is good.**

Psalm 34 is one of those psalms where the dramatic circumstances behind it are not specified. In this case, David was caught between two enemies: Saul, the King of Israel, and Achish, the Philistine king of Gath. David escaped the wrath of Saul by running to Gath (1 Samuel 21:10) where he escaped the wrath of Achish by pretending to be insane (21:13-15). Pretty clever. Psalm 34 describes David’s effusive response of thanks and praise for being delivered from double trouble.

Sometimes the words “thanks” and “praise” are used interchangeably. But there is a subtle difference between them. We thank God for what he does. We praise God for who he is. Similar, but different. David uses both words in this psalm and in verses 1-3, David invites us to make constant thanks to and praise of God. He then goes on to encourage his readers to fear (trust) God because God is near those who fear him. Try it, David says. *O taste and see how gracious the Lord is…. for those who fear him lack nothing.*

The nearness of God, safety with God, praise and thanksgiving of God—these are familiar themes in the Psalms. Which raises some questions. How aware are you of God’s presence in your life? How much credit do you give to God for the good things in your life? And, in particular, have you learned the art of praise?

Yes, praise is something that God deserves, but sometimes we don’t know how. No worries—there is no greater place to learn than the Psalms. If you want to learn to praise God, try saying these psalms out loud. They can serve as training wheels—or better yet, a booster rocket.

Psalms 34, 85, 92, 95, 100, 103, 111, 117, 145, and 150. Let us praise His name together!

*Lord, you are worthy. Teach us how to praise you.*

*Amen.*

# Wednesday, April 2 Psalm 34:11-22

**11 Come, children, and listen to me;**

**I will teach you the fear of the Lord.**

**12 Who among you desires to live,**

**and longs to see good days?**

**13 Keep your tongue from evil,**

**and your lips from speaking lies.**

**14 Turn from evil and do good;**

**seek peace and pursue it.**

**15The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous,**

**and his ears are open to their prayers.**

**16 The countenance of the Lord is against those who do evil,**

**to root out the remembrance of them from the earth.**

**17 The righteous cry, and the Lord hears them**

**and delivers them out of all their troubles.**

**18 The Lord is near to those who are brokenhearted**

**and will save those who are crushed in spirit.**

**19 Great are the troubles of the righteous,**

**but the Lord delivers him out of them all.**

**20 He keeps all his bones,**

**so that not one of them is broken.**

**21 But evil shall slay the ungodly,**

**and those who hate the righteous shall be desolate.**

**22 The Lord delivers the souls of his servants,**

**and all those who put their trust in him shall not be destitute.**

Who doesn't want to live a long and prosperous life? I sure do, and I'd wager the ink in the printer that you do too! The usual advice includes maintaining a healthy diet, taking thousands of steps daily, and never missing a doctor’s appointment. The factors influencing longevity are numerous and constantly evolving.

However, in God’s economy, the secret to longevity lies in a life that mirrors His character—when His transferable attributes are evident in humanity. That’s the essence of David’s Psalm. It serves as a reminder that the fear of the Lord is the foundation of a long life. When we live in continuous worship and awe of His glory, our tongues are kept from evil, and our lips from deceit. This is remarkable when considering that excessive words can open the door to evil; *He who guards his mouth preserves his life, but he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction*. (Proverbs 13:3) David taught his men, and teaches us today, to depart from evil and fully turn towards God and goodness. Such a person seeks and pursues peace with both men and God.

I'm grateful that God doesn't leave us to strive alone to reflect His image. He assures us of His nearness to the brokenhearted and those crushed in spirit. Whether through the acts of our sinful nature or human persecution and adversity, there is corresponding and surpassing divine preservation through His abundant Grace.

David spoke beyond his experience and prophesied about the coming Messiah’s bones. We stand on that declaration today because it is true—God cannot lie. "Christ’s bones were in themselves breakable but could not actually be broken by all the violence in the world, because God had fore decreed, 'a bone on him shall not be broken.'”

*I stand on your promises and trust that you will deliver us through the perils of the ages.*

*Amen.*

# Thursday, April 3 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

**17Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; 19that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. 20Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. 21For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.**

I am often amazed by the doctrine of substitutionary atonement, in which Christ gives us His righteousness in exchange for our sins—a truth summarized in verse 21. That amount of grace seems unimaginable, almost too good to be true. Luther referred to this concept as the "wonderful exchange":

“That is the mystery which is rich in divine grace to sinners: wherein by a *wonderful exchange* our sins are no longer ours but Christ’s and the righteousness of Christ not Christ’s but ours. He has emptied Himself of His righteousness that He might clothe us with it, and fill us with it. And He has taken our evils upon Himself that He might deliver us from them.”

The wonderful exchange is amazing grace indeed. But God’s grace doesn’t stop there! He also makes us new creatures, transforming us into the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another. And He blesses us by allowing us to take part in the ministry of reconciling others to God. God’s grace overflows.

*O God, of your goodness, give me yourself, for you are enough for me. I can ask for nothing less that is completely to your honor, and if I do ask anything less, I shall always be in want. Only in you I have all. Amen.*

*BCP 2019 Occasional Prayer 92*

# Friday, April 4 Luke 15:11-24

**11And he said, “There was a man who had two sons. 12And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the share of property that is coming to me.’ And he divided his property between them. 13Not many days later, the younger son gathered all he had and took a journey into a far country, and there he squandered his property in reckless living.14And when he had spent everything, a severe famine arose in that country, and he began to be in need. 15So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. 16And he was longing to be fed with the pods that the pigs ate, and no one gave him anything.**

**17“But when he came to himself, he said, ‘How many of my father's hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! 18I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. 19I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Treat me as one of your hired servants.”’ 20And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. 21And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’22But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. 23And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. 24For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate.**

Jesus is telling us that no matter how far you think you have fallen, if you confess and repent, you will be forgiven and received into the arms of our Father. No sin is too great. No wandering too far. He is ready to receive you, wherever you are.

Have you wandered away? I found myself there recently. I had engaged in behavior that was displeasing to God.

One afternoon while in a self-righteous rant, I was convicted by the Holy Spirit of my sin. The ugliness of my sin was revealed to me. I immediately repented. I was grieved and I no longer wanted to slop the pigs. I rushed back into the arms of our Father. He was waiting for me, looking for me. I confessed my sin and received His forgiveness. I felt so unworthy, but His grace poured over me. I wanted to wallow in sorrow, but He celebrated!

In his book, *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, Dutch priest Henri J. M. Nouwen wrote, “The Father is always looking for me with outstretched arms to receive me back and whisper again in my ear ‘You are my Beloved, on you my favor rests.’” If you are repentant, that is how you will be received.

No matter where you find yourself today, know that if you confess your sin, *God is faithful and just to forgive you your sin and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness* (1 John 1:9). He is waiting for you, my friend. Run to Him and be received in His arms.

*Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, thank You for having mercy on me, a sinner. Thank You that You always stand ready, looking for me, to restore me and welcome me into Your loving arms.*

*Amen.*

# Saturday, April 5 Luke 15:25-32

**25“Now his older son was in the field, and as he came and drew near to the house, he heard music and dancing. 26And he called one of the servants and asked what these things meant. 27And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound.’ 28But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, 29but he answered his father, ‘Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends. 30But when this son of yours came, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him!’ 31And he said to him, ‘Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. 32It was fitting to celebrate and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost, and is found.’”**

What is Jesus saying here? Let’s consider His audience, their time, and their place in history. Luke’s Gospel was written in Greek and shared within a largely Hellenistic Gentile and Jewish audience around 60 AD. Jesus told the parable during his ministry in Jerusalem where many of the Sanhedrin leaders were becoming increasingly critical of him, seeing him as a threat. The parable is the third in Luke’s Gospel about God’s love and pursuit of the lost, the crescendo of the trio.

We see a father so overjoyed and full of love for his returning wayward son that he forgives him before his son can utter his “I’m not worthy” speech. The father brings him fine clothes, calls the servants to prepare a feast, and invites the village for food, singing, and dancing. At the time, the father’s behavior would have been considered at least undignified, a disgrace at worst.

Then the older son comes in from working in the fields to learn his younger brother has returned and the community is celebrating! His anger is palpable. He refuses to enter the house, shocked at the very thought of celebrating. His father comes out to him, but his words are both accusatory toward his father and dismissive of his brother: … *this son of yours …*

The father’s loving response portrays our Father’s. God loves and pursues us all with full abandon, yearning to count us alive in Him, forgiving and accepting our returns with abundant fanfare, inviting all the saints in Heaven to join in the celebration. He even extends His love to us when we self-righteously refuse to celebrate along with them.

*Praise the open arms of our heavenly Father who welcomes us from the brink of destruction due to the quicksand of our folly and sin. Keep us evermore at your table in the company of your beloved Son and with the saints of heaven.*

*Amen.*

# Fifth Sunday in Lent, April 6 Isaiah 43:16-18

**16Thus says the Lord,  
    who makes a way in the sea,  
    a path in the mighty waters,  
17who brings forth chariot and horse,  
    army and warrior;  
they lie down, they cannot rise,  
    they are extinguished, quenched like a wick:  
18“Remember not the former things,  
    nor consider the things of old.**

*Thus says the Lord…* is always a powerful way to start out. In this case, God is reminding Israel through Isaiah of what He has done. He is reminding them that He is their deliverer, specifically out of Egypt. But despite reminding them of their past, God tells His people **not to dwell on it**. He is both reminding them of His ability and making them look forward.

I think this is quite relevant in this season of Lent. We look back to the cross along with all the other symbols of Lent, yet we are reflecting on the present and how to change, to move forward. Similar concept—at least, I think so. God wants to remind us of what He has done but does not want to dwell on or inhabit it. He always wants our relationship with Him to move forward, to grow and expand. He is calling us into the depths based on the foundation of His faithfulness in the past.

As a reflection, write down what God is reminding you of, and then write down how you will move forward with Him. Write how the past with Him pushes you forward.

*God constantly remind us of your faithfulness and your deliverance. Push us forward Lord. Take us to the depths while reassuring us of our foundation. Help us to not dwell on the past but be reminded of your victory.*

*Amen.*

# Monday, April 7 Isaiah 43:19-21

**19Behold, I am doing a new thing;  
    now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?  
I will make a way in the wilderness  
    and rivers in the desert.  
20The wild beasts will honor me,  
    the jackals and the ostriches,  
for I give water in the wilderness,  
    rivers in the desert,  
to give drink to my chosen people,  
21the people whom I formed for myself  
that they might declare my praise.**

In Isaiah 43:19–21, the prophet communicates God’s promises to demonstrate to the world, through the people of Israel, that He is the only Savior. Yahweh will show that He is the Lord by performing new works of deliverance. Some seven hundred years prior, He had accomplished the greatest deliverance in the history of the world by liberating His chosen people in the Exodus from Egypt. Isaiah anticipates an even greater period of deliverance that began with the return from the Babylonian exile, climaxed in the Incarnation and the formation of the church, and that will continue into the eternal future of *new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells* (2 Peter 3:13b).

Easter Sunday calls us to consider the greatest of Yahweh’s saving deeds. The God of Israel “came down from heaven, was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and was made man.” And the child that was born of Mary would come to accomplish a deliverance far greater than that of the Exodus: *… when we were dead in our trespasses,* He *made us alive* (Ephesians 2:5), for *if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come* (2 Corinthians 5:17). Through His life, death, and resurrection, He liberated His people from *the law of sin and death* (Romans 8:2b) and promised them eternity in His Presence where *death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore* (Revelation 21:4b).

And now, let us rejoice in the unfolding of Isaiah’s prophecy, for Christ is *making all things new* (21:5a).

*Father God, You have freed us from the old kingdom of this world and brought us into the new kingdom of Your Beloved Son. May we never cease to declare Your praise for all that You have done for us.*

*Amen.*

# Tuesday, April 8 Psalm 126:1-3

**1 When the Lord overturned the captivity of Zion,**

**then were we like those who dream.**

**2 Then was our mouth filled with laughter**

**and our tongue with shouts of joy.**

**3 Then they said among the nations,**

**“The Lord has done great things for them.”**

No more pencils, no more books. No more teacher’s dirty looks.

Remember those days? School was out for the summer, and it was like being set free. All the pressure and stress of school was in the rear-view mirror. Nothing but fun in the sun was ahead. What a great feeling!

Psalm 126 can relate, only more so. We don’t know the specific occasion referred to in the psalm. And some translations (ESV) say, *When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion…* Is the psalmist referring to a literal captivity or perhaps another form of adversity? Perhaps plague, or famine or siege. We do not know, and it really doesn’t matter.

We can all identify with the sense of euphoria that comes with being restored, being released, set free. Giddy is a good word to describe the feeling expressed in the psalm. Maybe you have experienced something similar.

But Psalm 126 is more than a feel-good story. It is also a God story. Who is it that acted on behalf of the psalmist? The Lord.

When going through hard times, it is tempting—even easy—to feel as if God has forgotten us or looked the other way as we suffer. Not so. Psalm 23:4 reminds us of the reality: *Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.*

If you are living in a form of captivity—health, financial, relational, etc.—know this. You are not alone. The Lord is with you. Lean on him for strength. Cry out to him for comfort. Wait for him to release you, for it will happen eventually.

When that release comes, you will experience something akin to the joy found in Psalm 125. And you will have a story to tell—*The Lord has done great things.*

*Set us free, Lord, that we might laugh and shout your praises.*

*Amen.*

# Wednesday, April 9 Psalm 126:4-6

**4Restore our fortunes, O Lord,  
    like streams in the Negeb!  
5Those who sow in tears  
    shall reap with shouts of joy!  
6He who goes out weeping,  
    bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
    bringing his sheaves with him.**

Regret is something we all experience. I’ve had many moments when I wished I had done things differently or avoided certain choices altogether. I think back on lost friendships, missed opportunities, decisions I didn’t make, and broken relationships, lamenting the foolish and irresponsible actions I’ve taken.

Regret is a natural part of life; but if left unchecked, it can become overwhelming, devastating, and harmful. It can lead to mental ill-health, depression, and panic attacks. Its impact can be truly harsh.

This was the predicament of the Israelites in our Psalm today. After about 70 years in exile, they were finally returning to their holy land through God's mercy. Yet they were filled with regret, guilt, and shame, recognizing that their past sinful actions—idolatry and forsaking holy laws—had led to their separation from God.

Being close to God reveals His righteousness, unveiling our sinfulness, potentially filling us with a profound despair and grief such as Isaiah expressed: *Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips*. (Isaiah 6:5)

But instead of hiding from God’s presence as Adam and Eve did in Eden, the Israelites trusted God to restore them. They envisioned their restoration like the Negev wadis suddenly gushing from seasonal rains that bring life and renewal to that desert.

Although the consequences of the past are not erased, God redeems us through our regrets, guilt, and shame. Our tears of sorrow will be transformed into dances of joy. Jesus bore the guilt and shame on the Cross so that we can now sing the song of restoration and live as the redeemed of God.

*For the times I allow regrets, guilt and shame of my sinfulness to keep me away from approaching Your mercy seat, O Lord, remind me that you are the God that restores and brings home those that seek your face.*

*Amen.*

# Thursday, April 10 Philippians 3:7-11

**7But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— 10that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.**

When I first approached this text, the thing I homed in on was one of the Reformational principles: we are SAVED by FAITH ALONE. It is explicitly stated in verse 9, *not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ*. It is a simple truth that can’t be stated enough. As Martin Luther said, “We need to hear the Gospel every day, because we forget it every day.” So, if a reiteration of this gospel truth is all that you get from this passage, then that is a powerful reminder.

But in addition to reminding us that righteousness comes through faith in Christ, I believe that Paul is also trying to convince us of Christ’s supreme worth; he uses extreme language to get his point across. Paul calls his impressive religious resume *as loss* compared to the *surpassing worth of knowing Christ*. And he calls all things *rubbish* compared to *gaining Christ*.

Paul isn’t saying “I’m denying myself the things that I really want, in order to follow Jesus.” No, instead, Paul is saying that his desires have changed; he’s realized what will really make him satisfied is Jesus.

It reminds me of my favorite John Piper quote: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in him.” So, this Lenten season, ask God to spur on a love and desire for Christ.

*O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you for ever.*

*Amen.*

*BCP 2019 Occasional Prayer 74*

# Friday, April 11 Philippians 3:12-16

**12Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. 13Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, 14I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. 15Let those of us who are mature think this way, and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you. 16Only let us hold true to what we have attained.**

Are you a “couch potato” Christian? It’s a thing. I googled it. I even discovered a book, *Comfy Christian: Moving from a Spiritual Couch Potato to a Warrior for God.* Many of the articles/references that I found took the position that a “couch potato” Christian is someone who attends church and related gatherings but does not serve in ministry. That’s one way to look at it.

However, when the term “couch potato” Christian came to mind for me as I read this passage from Philippians, it was about being complacent with your personal growth as a Christian. Are you actively pursuing spiritual growth?

Spiritual growth takes intentionality and commitment. It doesn’t just happen as you sit idly by. While the Holy Spirit leads us and guides us through spiritual formation, He does not force it upon us. We must be willing—more than willing, as Paul writes—to press on. It is an active engagement.

One of the obstacles that may deter us is focusing on the past, as if the things we have done in our past are insurmountable. It’s called regret. Paul tells us to forget about what lies behind—the cross of Christ has covered that already and it is remembered no more. Paul also encourages us to strain forward to what lies ahead, which is a deeper fellowship with Christ as we are *transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another* (2 Corinthians 3:18).

How might you actively engage in the work of the Holy Spirit in your life?

*Heavenly Father, I don’t want to be a “couch potato” Christian. Help me to not be complacent in my spiritual formation but to press on toward all that You have in store for me. Lead me and guide me. Teach me Your ways.*

*Amen.*

# Saturday, April 12 Luke 20:9-19

**9And he began to tell the people this parable: “A man planted a vineyard and let it out to tenants and went into another country for a long while. 10When the time came, he sent a servant to the tenants, so that they would give him some of the fruit of the vineyard. But the tenants beat him and sent him away empty-handed. 11And he sent another servant. But they also beat and treated him shamefully, and sent him away empty-handed. 12And he sent yet a third. This one also they wounded and cast out. 13Then the owner of the vineyard said, ‘What shall I do? I will send my beloved son; perhaps they will respect him.’ 14But when the tenants saw him, they said to themselves, ‘This is the heir. Let us kill him, so that the inheritance may be ours.’ 15And they threw him out of the vineyard and killed him. What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? 16He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others.” When they heard this, they said, “Surely not!” 17But he looked directly at them and said, “What then is this that is written:**

**“‘The stone that the builders rejected  
    has become the cornerstone’?**

**18Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken to pieces, and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him.”**

**19The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people.**

God is patient with those who reject Him.

Luke’s Gospel narrates this parable of Jesus’s as told in Jerusalem toward the end of his public ministry. Those hearing it were familiar with the story and meaning of Isaiah 5:1-7, the Song of the Vineyard.

Jesus was a master storyteller, and his timing was God’s timing. The parable concerned a landlord (God) who left his established and well-prepared vineyard (Israel) in the care of tenants (Pharisees, scribes, temple leaders) while he went away. The tenants behaved irrationally and wickedly, sending the landlord’s servants (the prophets) away, becoming more violent with each encounter. Finally, the landlord sends his son (Jesus), and they kill him thinking that somehow, they will gain his inheritance.

The parable was a direct message about the deliberate betrayal of God’s authority, the rejection of second chances, the violent persecution of the prophets, and finally, the brutal imprisonment and crucifixion of Christ.

Towards the end, Jesus asks what will the landlord (God) do? He (Judgement)will come in person to destroy the criminal tenants and give the vineyard to others. This was a direct message to the powerful Temple elite. Jesus doubled down this teaching with the parable of the cornerstone (Psalm 118) that the builders rejected. Jesus, of course, is the cornerstone of God’s Redemption plan.

His parable enraged the religious elite who heard it and perceived correctly it was told *against them*. Their urge to arrest him was overwhelming but they feared the crowd that at the time seemed persuaded by Jesus’s teachings. So, they put off his arrest and the mockery of justice that led to his crucifixion.

They could do that. But no one can put off the return of the Landlord. God is patient until he isn’t.

*Father in Heaven, give us your saving help in all we do. Make us vigilant and discerning when faced with temptation and keep us in your safekeeping will.*

*Amen.*

# Palm Sunday, April 13 Isaiah 52:13-53:6

**13 Behold, my servant shall act wisely;  
    he shall be high and lifted up,  
    and shall be exalted.  
14As many were astonished at you—  
    his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,  
    and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—  
15so shall he sprinkle many nations.  
    Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,  
for that which has not been told them they see,  
    and that which they have not heard they understand.**

**1 Who has believed what he has heard from us?  
    And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?  
2For he grew up before him like a young plant,  
    and like a root out of dry ground;  
he had no form or majesty that we should look at him,  
    and no beauty that we should desire him.  
3He was despised and rejected by men,  
    a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;  
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
    he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

**4Surely he has borne our griefs  
    and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
    smitten by God, and afflicted.  
5But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
    he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
    and with his wounds we are healed.  
6All we like sheep have gone astray;  
    we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
    the iniquity of us all.**

The Suffering servant is always an interesting read for us. We as New Testament people can see clearly who and what this prophecy of Isaiah is all about. We can see the weight of physical, emotional, and spiritual pain inflicted on Jesus. I truly believe we can see the toll more here than in the Gospel readings themselves. The full weight just seems fully here.

So, I have a challenge since it is Palm Sunday, the start of Holy Week. Take a piece of paper and write on it:

Physical:

Emotional:

Spiritual:

Under each heading fill in what you see in this passage. Then stick it in your pocket, take a picture to make it your lockscreen, place it on your counter, or use it as a bookmark in the book you are reading. It just needs to be somewhere so you can take multiple breaks every day to focus and reflect on it as we march to the cross and the tomb.

Let it be an Ebenezer for you this week, helping you fully feel the weight of Holy Week and truly appreciate all that it represents.

*Lord thank you for this week. God ready my heart for it. Allow me to see it in new ways like never before. Help me to break up going through the motions. Help me to sit and take it all in.*

*Amen.*

# Monday in Holy Week, April 14 Isaiah 53:7-12

**7He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,  
    yet he opened not his mouth;  
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,  
    and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent,  
    so he opened not his mouth.  
8By oppression and judgment he was taken away;  
    and as for his generation, who considered  
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,  
    stricken for the transgression of my people?  
9And they made his grave with the wicked  
    and with a rich man in his death,  
although he had done no violence,  
    and there was no deceit in his mouth.**

**10Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;  
    he has put him to grief;  
when his soul makes an offering for guilt,  
    he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;  
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.  
11Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied;  
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,  
    make many to be accounted righteous,  
    and he shall bear their iniquities.  
12Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many,  
    and he shall divide the spoil with the strong,  
because he poured out his soul to death  
    and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
    and makes intercession for the transgressors.**

Isaiah’s prophecy of the Suffering Servant has been interpreted as one of the most profound descriptions of the anguish that Christ Jesus endured through His passion and death. And it raises many questions. Why would the Messiah suffer in this way? Why would a perfectly righteous man endure such shame, humiliation, pain, and agony?

The Scriptures tell us that Jesus bore this hardship because of humanity’s sinful rebellion against His Father, a rebellion in which we all have taken part. Through our sinfulness, we can understand ourselves as participants in His sufferings … We had no concern for His humanity. We joined with the mob shouting, "Crucify him, crucify him!" We whipped Him. We forced a crown of thorns on His head. We mocked Him and spit in His face. We slapped and punched Him. We drove the spikes into His hands and feet. And we passed by the cross, scoffing, ridiculing, and hurling abuse at Him.

The Lenten season confronts us with the reality that the victory over sin and death which Jesus won for us came at the cost of His life. While blood poured out of Him on the cross, He poured out His glorious grace upon us. He forgave His enemies and adopted those who abandoned Him into His family. He shared with us, who betrayed Him, His heavenly inheritance. And so, let us share in the confession of Saint Paul, who says, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* (Gal. 2:20).

*Father God, You showed Your immeasurable love for us by giving up Your Son for us all. May our lives be a testimony to Your unending grace.*

*Amen.*

# Tuesday in Holy Week, April 15 Psalm 22:1-11

**1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me,**

**and are so far from my cry, and from the words of my complaint?**

**2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not hear;**

**in the night season also, but I find no rest.**

**3 But you remain holy,**

**enthroned upon the praises of Israel.**

**4 Our fathers hoped in you;**

**they trusted in you, and you delivered them.**

**5 They called upon you, and were delivered;**

**they put their trust in you, and were not confounded.**

**6 But as for me, I am a worm, and no man,**

**scorned by all, and the outcast of the people.**

**7 All those who see me laugh me to scorn;**

**they curl their lips, and shake their heads, saying,**

**8 “He trusted in God, that he would deliver him;**

**let him deliver him, if he will have him.”**

**9 But you are he that took me out of my mother’s womb;**

**you were my hope, when I was yet upon my mother’s breasts.**

**10 I have been cast upon you ever since I was born;**

**you are my God, even from my mother’s womb.**

**11 O go not far from me, for trouble is near at hand,**

**and there is none to help me.**

What did Jesus think about while he was on the cross? We don’t know. But he must have had many thoughts during those six hours. It is reasonable, therefore, to imagine that much of the time, he immersed his mind in the scriptures. Perhaps he meditated on the servant passage from Isaiah 53:

***3****He was despised and rejected by men,  
    a man of sorrows[*[*c*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah%2053&version=ESV#fen-ESV-18715c)*] and acquainted with grief;   
and as one from whom men hide their faces  
    he was despised, and we esteemed him not.*

***4****Surely he has borne our griefs  
    and carried our sorrows;  
yet we esteemed him stricken,  
    smitten by God, and afflicted.****5****But he was pierced for our transgressions;  
    he was crushed for our iniquities;  
upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace,  
    and with his wounds we are healed.****6****All we like sheep have gone astray;  
    we have turned—every one—to his own way;  
and the Lord has laid on him  
    the iniquity of us all.*

These words certainly describe what Jesus was experiencing. Did he meditate on them? Perhaps.

Or did he meditate on the “Messianic Psalms,” which are prophetic in nature and foreshadowed his life and ministry. We don’t know. But we do know that a portion of Psalm 22:1 was quoted by Jesus as he neared death. In a loud voice, he cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Was that the moment when Jesus, who knew no sin became sin? (2 Corinthians 5:21) Again, we don’t know. But those words *My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?* reveal that Jesus suffered a level of darkness inconceivable to any of us… *so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.* (5:21)

Ponder that. Let it take your breath away.

*Thank you, Jesus, for your incomprehensible love and sacrifice for us.*

*Amen.*

# Wednesday in Holy Week, April 16 Psalm 22:12-21

**12 Many oxen have come around me;**

**fat bulls of Bashan close me in on every side.**

**13 They gape at me with their mouths,**

**like a ravening and a roaring lion.**

**14 I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint;**

**my heart also in the midst of my body is like melting wax.**

**15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my gums,**

**and you bring me into the dust of death.**

**16 For many dogs have come about me,**

**and the council of the wicked lays siege against me.**

**17 They pierced my hands and my feet; I can count all my bones;**

**they stand staring and looking upon me.**

**18 They part my garments among them,**

**and casts lots for my clothing.**

**19 But be not far from me, O Lord.**

**You are my succor; hasten to help me.**

**20 Deliver my soul from the sword,**

**my life from the power of the dog.**

**21 Save me from the lion’s mouth,**

**and my soul in misery from among the horns of wild oxen.**

The Old Testament lays the historical foundation for understanding the New Testament with over 350 prophecies fulfilled by the birth, life, death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet, the recipients of these prophecies likely did not fully grasp their true meaning. David might have related the above passage to various events in his life—being delivered from lions and wild beasts as a young shepherd, his victory over Goliath, being spared from King Saul's rage and the Philistines, and even God's presence during his son Absalom's coup. Any of these could have inspired David's confessions of praise.

Because of the New Testament, we see Jesus and His vicarious atonement in David's words written thousands of years before the crucifixion. David's pain symbolized Jesus’s intense suffering, mockery, abuse, and being surrounded by enemies. For the first time, Jesus was abandoned by God, as our sins caused a separation between God the Father and God the Son.

Thankfully, the story doesn't end there. The cross yielded immense dividends that keep giving. Jesus suffered immensely so we could live fully in His grace. In His punishments, we are forgiven; in His wounds, we are healed. He became sin with our sinfulness, so we might be made righteous with His righteousness. He tasted death so we could share His life. His curse became our blessing. He endured poverty so we could share in His abundance. He bore our shame so we might share His glory. His rejection allowed us to be accepted by the Father. He was cut off so we might be joined to the Lord. Our old self died in Him, so the new self could come to life in us. What a great exchange.

*O what an everlasting gift that my Lord and master gifted, that I might come into His presence with fullness of Joy. I count all my earthly gain as loss as I focus on the one who Loved me in all my sinfulness.*

*Amen.*

# Maundy Thursday, April 17 Philippians 2:5-11

**5Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.**

Can you feel the rhythm of this passage? After all, it is traditionally believed to be from a hymn sung by the faithful during the time of waiting for the return. It may not have been toe-tapping or hip-swiveling, but it was probably profoundly moving, connecting believers to glory and majesty in a divine way.

The hymn’s rhythm takes us to that point. We first sing of Christ’s abasement. Something has been seized from him because of his faithfulness to his Father. He has chosen powerlessness rather than use his divine privilege to serve himself. And it cost him his life.

But that is not the end of the hymn. Our voices swell in loud unison as we sing in adulation that *Therefore God*! The self-denying act of Jesus is matched by the active response of God, *our* Father. God exalts someone to the unique status of lordship over the whole universe.

And his name is Jesus! Jesus’ selflessness gives us a sense of the scope of God’s victorious grace. In the final stanza we chime the name of the Lord of All—Jesus Christ!

*Lord Jesus, be exalted in our lives. May not only our song be filled with power, but the work of our hands as well. May our voices ring out and our hearts provide comfort as we remember the journey you took for our sake.*

*Come, Lord Jesus!*

# Good Friday, April 19 Luke 23:1-25

**1 Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate. 2And they began to accuse him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king.” 3And Pilate asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” And he answered him, “You have said so.” 4Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, “I find no guilt in this man.” 5But they were urgent, saying, “He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee even to this place.”**

**6When Pilate heard this, he asked whether the man was a Galilean.7And when he learned that he belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him over to Herod, who was himself in Jerusalem at that time. 8When Herod saw Jesus, he was very glad, for he had long desired to see him, because he had heard about him, and he was hoping to see some sign done by him. 9So he questioned him at some length, but he made no answer. 10The chief priests and the scribes stood by, vehemently accusing him. 11And Herod with his soldiers treated him with contempt and mocked him. Then, arraying him in splendid clothing, he sent him back to Pilate. 12And Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day, for before this they had been at enmity with each other.**

**13Pilate then called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people, 14and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was misleading the people. And after examining him before you, behold, I did not find this man guilty of any of your charges against him. 15Neither did Herod, for he sent him back to us. Look, nothing deserving death has been done by him. 16I will therefore punish and release him.”**

**18But they all cried out together, “Away with this man, and release to us Barabbas”— 19a man who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection started in the city and for murder. 20Pilate addressed them once more, desiring to release Jesus, 21but they kept shouting, “Crucify, crucify him!” 22A third time he said to them, “Why? What evil has he done? I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish and release him.” 23But they were urgent, demanding with loud cries that he should be crucified. And their voices prevailed. 24So Pilate decided that their demand should be granted. 25He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, for whom they asked, but he delivered Jesus over to their will.**

Judas had forced Jesus’ hand, wanting Jesus to take up arms against the Roman Empire. Instead, Jesus stands, all alone, a criminal before Pilate, the Roman governor of Judea.

If this were a Hollywood movie, we would be on the edge of our seats expecting Jesus to triumph. He is the good guy, after all. “Defend yourself!” we think, “Bring down fire from heaven and obliterate these evil doers!”

Then the scene shifts. Jesus is taken to Herod, the Roman tetrarch of the region of Galilee and Perea. Ah, here we will see Jesus triumph! “Take Herod down, Jesus!” But Jesus stands in silence before Herod. We’re starting to doubt that He will be victorious. This scene is not building to the climax we are expecting. They’re mocking Him. This is humiliating! And then back to Pilate Jesus goes.

Now Pilate declares Jesus innocent, but instead of releasing Him, Pilate gives in to the crowd’s request and releases Barabbas. Who is this Barabbas character? He is a nobody—a cheap Hollywood trick. This is not how we expected the storyline to play out. “Isn’t Jesus supposed to be King? Why doesn’t He take these guys down?”

To our dismay, Jesus does not defend Himself. He says nothing. He is headed to the cross to be crucified. We are beyond disappointed. Do we walk out of the theater and demand our money back?

Yet, this is the **Greatest Story Ever Told**. The story of God’s love for us and of our redemption. The story is priceless and the best news the world has ever known. Jesus conquers. He conquers sin and death. We are **SAVED**!

*Jesus, thank You for choosing not to save Yourself but to do the will of the Father and* ***save us****.  
 You are our King!*

*Amen!!*

# Holy Saturday, April 20 Luke 23:26-49

**26And as they led him away, they seized one Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, and laid on him the cross, to carry it behind Jesus. 27And there followed him a great multitude of the people and of women who were mourning and lamenting for him. 28But turning to them Jesus said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. 29For behold, the days are coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren and the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ 30Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us,’ and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ 31For if they do these things when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”**

**32Two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. 33And when they came to the place that is called The Skull, there they crucified him, and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left. 34And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments. 35And the people stood by, watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!” 36The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine37and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” 38There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”**

**39One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, “Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!” 40But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41And we indeed justly, for we are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.” 42And he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”**

**44It was now about the sixth hour, and there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45while the sun's light failed. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46Then Jesus, calling out with a loud voice, said, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!” And having said this he breathed his last. 47Now when the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God, saying, “Certainly this man was innocent!” 48And all the crowds that had assembled for this spectacle, when they saw what had taken place, returned home beating their breasts. 49And all his acquaintances and the women who had followed him from Galilee stood at a distance watching these things.**

Imagine being Simon of Cyrene, seemingly chosen at random—seized by Roman soldiers—to help Jesus bear the cross as His body grew weaker. Did the thought *Why me?* enter his mind as he labored behind Jesus, becoming part of the spectacle?

Imagine the whirl of sensations, harsh words, whips cracking, followers weeping, soldiers giving orders, the labored breathing and seeping blood, the sweat and groans from the prisoner, Simon may have wondered, what crime did this man commit? We know the choice of Simon being mentioned in scripture was no accident and yet we know little of him. Cyrene was a town of 5,000 on the Mediterranean Sea, and Cyrenians were part of the crowd in Acts when Peter preached, and the Holy Spirit descended.

We don’t know if Simon was present, but the name of Simon of Cyrene lives on through history as his life was upended by circumstance and for God’s purpose. Simon, a mere human, was called on to help Jesus, the Son of God. Was this a humiliation or a lesson in bearing the burdens of our brothers and sisters in Christ?

A faction of the crowd was watching and weeping for Jesus as they strained to get close. Jesus turned to the “daughters of Jerusalem,” giving comfort and warning about the future. He listened and comforted one of the criminals whose faith compelled him to beseech Christ’s blessing and without hesitation, Jesus promised him into God’s kingdom. For those who beat, mocked, taunted, and tortured him, Jesus prayed *Father, forgive them for they no not what they do*.

Suffering intolerable human and spiritual pain, Jesus had and has compassion for us as witnessed by those in the crowd who stood watch. Like Simon of Cyrene, Jesus will upend your life. How will you respond?

*Dear Jesus, may your suffering in body, mind, and spirit, born of perfect love, keep us alive in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit so that we will live our lives on earth in the certain hope of spending eternity in your presence, praising your name. We are constantly mindful of your sacrifice to redeem us from the utter foulness of sin and death. You are to be praised and enjoyed without ceasing. Strengthen us to knock down doors of resistance/hostility/ignorance/lethargy to allow our brothers and sisters to see you as you are and your acceptance of them as they are with the freedom that only your love can bring.*

*Amen.*

**Lent**

**2025**



***Life is a journey meant to be shared.***

***Come join us on The Way.***