

Lent Resource *2020*



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The Season of Lent



The season of Lent is the period prior to Easter. The period, which lasts from Ash Wednesday to Easter, extends for 40 days (excluding Sundays). The observance of Lent varies greatly among Christians, both in denominational participation, and according to personal practice. It is most prominent in the life of the Catholic Church, but it is valued by members of most denominations as well as non-denominational churches.

Lent is regarded as an opportunity for reflection, as the time approaches to commemorate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The contrast of experience and emotion, in recalling these two events is to be expected. It would not be exaggeration to think of Good Friday and Easter as the best and worst events in history. This tension affects the nature of the reflection that believers engage in.

Many believe that the compelling theme of Lent should be remorse. We should, according to this school of thought, be considering our collective guilt, which required Christ to lose his life. Others celebrate the coming of Christ as a divine gift, for which they are grateful. Additionally, the theology of redemption and the new covenant between God and humanity occupy much of the consideration of this season.

Ultimately, persons will determine for themselves how involved they will be in Lenten observation and how to conduct their observance. Congregations, regions, and special shared gatherings will offer opportunities to choose from. These writings seek to be among the resources from which our members and friends can draw.

Daily Readings for Lent 2020

Ash Wednesday, February 26 – Easter, April 12

Wednesday February 26, 2020 Ash Wednesday	Thursday February 27, 2020	Friday February 28, 2020	Saturday February 29, 2020
<i>Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12</i>	<i>Psalm 51</i>	<i>Psalm 51</i>	<i>Psalm 51</i>
<i>Psalm 51:1-17</i>	<i>Jonah 3:1-10</i>	<i>Jonah 4:1-11</i>	<i>Isaiah 58:1-12</i>
<i>2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10</i>	<i>Romans 1:1-7</i>	<i>Romans 1:8-17</i>	<i>Matthew 18:1-7</i>
<i>Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21</i>			

Sunday March 1, 2020	Monday March 2, 2020	Tuesday March 3, 2020	Wednesday March 4, 2020	Thursday March 5, 2020	Friday March 6, 2020	Saturday March 7, 2020
<i>Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7</i>	<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Psalm 121</i>	<i>Psalm 121</i>	<i>Psalm 121</i>
<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>1 Kings 19:1-8</i>	<i>Genesis 4:1-16</i>	<i>Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28</i>	<i>Isaiah 51:1-3</i>	<i>Micah 7:18-20</i>	<i>Isaiah 51:4-8</i>
<i>Romans 5:12-19</i>	<i>Hebrews 2:10-18</i>	<i>Hebrews 4:14-5:10</i>	<i>Matthew 18:10-14</i>	<i>2 Timothy 1:3-7</i>	<i>Romans 3:21-31</i>	<i>Luke 7:1-10</i>
<i>Matthew 4:1-11</i>						

Sunday March 8, 2020	Monday March 9, 2020	Tuesday March 10, 2020	Wednesday March 11, 2020	Thursday March 12, 2020	Friday March 13, 2020	Saturday March 14, 2020
<i>Genesis 12:1-4a</i>	<i>Psalm 128</i>	<i>Psalm 128</i>	<i>Psalm 128</i>	<i>Psalm 95</i>	<i>Psalm 95</i>	<i>Psalm 95</i>
<i>Psalm 121</i>	<i>Numbers 21:4-9</i>	<i>Isaiah 65:17-25</i>	<i>Ezekiel 36:22-32;</i>	<i>Exodus 16:1-8</i>	<i>Exodus 16:9-21</i>	<i>Exodus 16:27-35</i>
<i>John 3:1-17</i>	<i>Hebrews 3:1-6</i>	<i>Romans 4:6-13</i>	<i>John 7:53-8:11</i>	<i>Colossians 1:15-23</i>	<i>Ephesians 2:11-22</i>	<i>John 4:1-6</i>
<i>Matthew 17:1-9</i>						

Sunday March 15, 2020	Monday March 16, 2020	Tuesday March 17, 2020	Wednesday March 18, 2020	Thursday March 19, 2020	Friday March 20, 2020	Saturday March 21, 2020
<i>Exodus 17:1-7</i>	<i>Psalm 81</i>	<i>Psalm 81</i>	<i>Psalm 81</i>	<i>Psalm 23</i>	<i>Psalm 23</i>	<i>Psalm 23</i>
<i>Psalm 95</i>	<i>Genesis 24:1-27</i>	<i>Genesis 29:1-14</i>	<i>Jeremiah 2:4-13</i>	<i>1 Samuel 15:10-21</i>	<i>1 Samuel 15:22-31</i>	<i>1 Samuel 15:32-34</i>
<i>Romans 5:1-11</i>	<i>2 John 1:1-13</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 10:1-4</i>	<i>John 7:14-31, 37-39</i>	<i>Ephesians 4:25-32</i>	<i>Ephesians 5:1-9</i>	<i>John 1:1-9</i>
<i>John 4:5-42</i>						

Sunday March 22, 2020	Monday March 23, 2020	Tuesday March 24, 2020	Wednesday March 25, 2020	Thursday March 26, 2020	Friday March 27, 2020	Saturday March 28, 2020
<i>1 Samuel 16:1-13</i>	<i>Psalms 146</i>	<i>Psalms 146</i>	<i>Psalms 146</i>	<i>Psalms 130</i>	<i>Psalms 130</i>	<i>Psalms 130</i>
<i>Psalms 23</i>	<i>Isaiah 59:9-19</i>	<i>Isaiah 42:14-21</i>	<i>Isaiah 60:17-22;</i>	<i>Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3</i>	<i>Ezekiel 33:10-16</i>	<i>Ezekiel 36:8-15</i>
<i>Ephesians 5:8-14</i>	<i>Acts 9:1-29</i>	<i>Colossians 1:9-14</i>	<i>Matthew 9:27-34</i>	<i>Revelation 10:1-11</i>	<i>Revelation 11:15-19</i>	<i>Luke 24:44-53</i>
<i>John 9:1-41</i>						

Sunday March 29, 2020	Monday March 30, 2020	Tuesday March 31, 2020	Wednesday April 1, 2020	Thursday April 2, 2020	Friday April 3, 2020	Saturday April 4, 2020
<i>Ezekiel 37:1-14</i>	<i>Psalms 143</i>	<i>Psalms 143</i>	<i>Psalms 143</i>	<i>Psalms 31:9-16</i>	<i>Psalms 31:9-16</i>	<i>Psalms 31:9-16</i>
<i>Psalms 130</i>	<i>1 Kings 17:17-24</i>	<i>2 Kings 4:18-37</i>	<i>Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41</i>	<i>1 Samuel 16:11-13</i>	<i>Job 13:13-19</i>	<i>Lamentations 3:55-66</i>
<i>Romans 8:6-11</i>	<i>Acts 20:7-12</i>	<i>Ephesians 2:1-10</i>	<i>Matthew 22:23-33</i>	<i>Philippians 1:1-11</i>	<i>Philippians 1:21-30</i>	<i>Mark 10:32-34</i>
<i>John 11:1-45</i>						

Passion or Palm Sunday April 5, 2020	Monday April 6, 2020	Tuesday April 7, 2020	Wednesday April 8, 2020	Maundy Thursday April 9, 2020	Good Friday April 10, 2020	Holy Saturday April 11, 2020
<i>Isaiah 50:4-9a</i>	<i>Isaiah 42:1-9</i>	<i>Isaiah 49:1-7</i>	<i>Isaiah 50:4-9a</i>	<i>Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14</i>	<i>Isaiah 52:13-53:12</i>	<i>Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24</i>
<i>Psalms 31:9-16</i>	<i>Psalms 36:5-11</i>	<i>Psalms 71:1-14</i>	<i>Psalms 70</i>	<i>Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19</i>	<i>Psalms 22</i>	<i>Psalms 31:1-4, 15-16</i>
<i>Philippians 2:5-11</i>	<i>Hebrews 9:11-15</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 1:18-31</i>	<i>Hebrews 12:1-3</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 11:23-26</i>	<i>Hebrews 10:16-25 or 4:14-16, 5:7-9</i>	<i>1 Peter 4:1-8</i>
<i>Matthew 26:14-27:66 or 27:11-54</i>	<i>John 12:1-11</i>	<i>John 12:20-36</i>	<i>John 13:1-17, 31b-35</i>	<i>John 13:1-17, 31b-35</i>	<i>John 18:1-19:42</i>	<i>Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42</i>

Easter Sunday April 12, 2020
<i>Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6</i>
<i>Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24</i>
<i>Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43</i>
<i>John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10</i>

Daily Meditations

Wednesday
February 26, 2020
Ash Wednesday

Yet even now, Says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.

Joel 2:12-13 NRSV

Today is both Ash Wednesday and the first day of the season of Lent. Throughout the world, many Christians will spend at least a portion of this day with a conspicuous display of ashes on their foreheads. Throughout this season, many Christians will engage in Lenten meditations, readings, meals, and the practice of “giving up” something personal for Lent. During this same period, many Christians will do none of these things, either judging them to be unnecessary in their celebration of the resurrection of Christ or being unfamiliar



with Lenten practices.

For many of us, Christian practice is what happened in the church that we grew up in. What we did there is what Christians ought to do. If it was not included in the practice of our faith, it is either not needed, or even wrong to do. We are not formed by denominational polity, the history of the Church, or theological study. We are formed by the teachings of our childhood pastors. Lenten practices, for such believers, coincide with what happened back home.

Other believers may appear to be “collectors” of liturgical practices. They engage in an expansive variety of observances that they have formed, learned, or heard about. The apparent conviction is that more practices will make us more Christian. Even if that is not the case, more liturgical practices will at least increase our chances of getting it right.

Joel seems to have anticipated that either of these approaches to our faith practices could find us more focused on our practices than on God’s practices. Every day of Lent, we can grow in our understanding and appreciation of the actions of Jesus. Joel invites us to “rend our hearts” instead of our clothing, so that the weight of our symbolic actions does not supplant the actual actions, on the part of our Savior, that have redeemed us.

God of Deliverance,

We thank you for your sacrificial actions. Help us to discover the new life that is delivered to those of us who yoke ourselves with Christ.

In Gratitude,

Amen

Thursday
February 27, 2020

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions, Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. Against you, you alone, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.

Psalms 51:1-4 NRSV

Like the psalmist, most of us know when we have misstepped and need to repent. However, unlike the psalmist, we are not ready to be chastised or as some people would say “called to the carpet.” We walk around in denial, hiding or at least attempting to hide the truth from other people and even from ourselves. We even try to hide from God.

In our efforts to deny the truth, we find excuses. We even try to rationalize what we have done or not done. After all, we are all human and it is not easy

to face the truth. It is also not easy to confess our weaknesses and failures, especially to others. God's correction is not always as harsh as we think it will be, but it is necessary.

God waits patiently for us, in order to correct our missteps. We often judge ourselves more harshly than God. Other people often do the same. They judge us and others by their personal standards and values.

Loving and gracious God,

Thank you for your loving guidance and correction. You alone, know how much correction we need.

In Your Care,

Amen

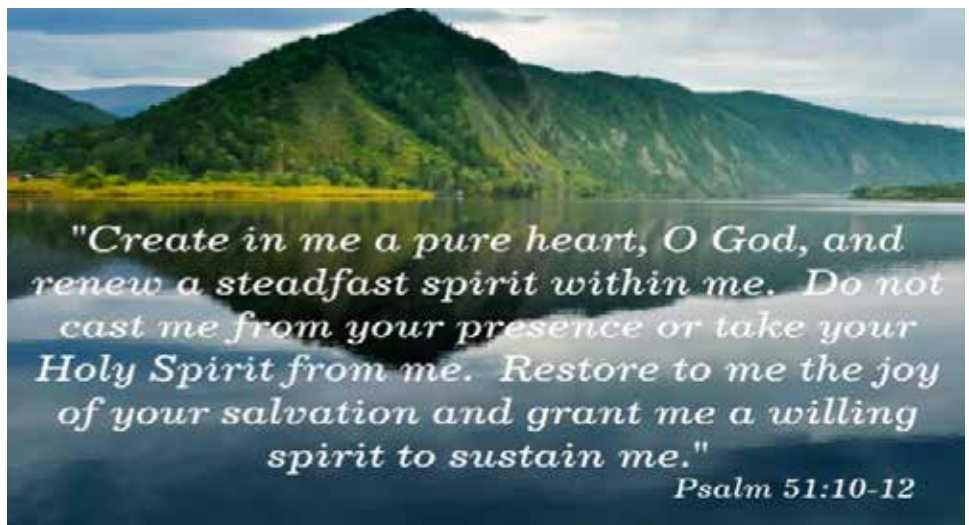
**Friday
February 28, 2020**

Jonah was furious. He lost his temper. He yelled at God, "God! I knew it – when I was back home, I knew this was going to happen! That's why I ran off to Tarshish! I knew you were sheer grace and mercy, not easily angered, rich in love, and ready at the drop of a hat to turn your plans of punishment into a program of forgiveness.

Jonah 4:1-2 The Message

The revisionist claims made by Jonah are among the most outrageous dialogs that anyone in scripture had with God. Instead of admitting that he was afraid to go obediently to Nineveh (instead fleeing toward Tarshish), Jonah asserts that he knew better than God, in the first place. He "knew" that God would forgive the Ninivites, instead of inflicting punishment upon them.

The wisdom of Jonah assures



us that punishment would have been a better outcome than for God to reconcile with those at Nineveh. It has clearly been a huge waste of time for Jonah to deliver all these threats concerning God's judgement only to end up with a peaceful resolution. Why travel all this way with no fireworks?

I vote for God. Although there are plenty of people that I might be inclined to direct God's wrath upon, I know that someone would include me on their list of recipients of such wrath. God was right during the days of Jonah and remains right in these days. Those who favor continuously escalating hostilities are working in the interest of ultimate destruction. Only those of us who live up to Jonah's self-assessment could afford that result.

Lord of Foresight,

You knew best with Jonah and you continue to know best. May we cease in our arrogant claims that seek to assess your divine wisdom. Reconcile us to your ways.

By Your Grace,

Amen

**Saturday
February 29, 2020**

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit to sustain me.

Psalm 51:10-12 NIV

The psalmist pours out his heart to be cleansed, changed, and made right. He sounds as if he is ready for the change that is about to take place within him. He is prepared to be cleansed of his sins and made right in the presence of God. His spirit appears to be willing.

This passage sounds too ideal, especially when we realize how difficult it is to let go of what we are comfortable with and go full speed ahead with the change. Change means moving away from our comfort zone and embracing the unknown. Changing is not a pleasant thought for many of us. We like the familiar. It is what we are most comfortable with. The unknown stirs up conflictual feelings of anxiety and fear.



We, being human, will confess with our lips that we are comfortable; but quickly say stop when the process of change begins. Never get too comfortable with where you are on your journey of faith, as God may have other plans for your life. Cultivating a willing spirit takes time. If we are to grow spiritually, even when we know change is good, it may take some time for us to adjust and become comfortable with that change.

Creator God,

Help me to be more willing and open to change, even when it feels uncomfortable.

Amen

**Sunday
March 1, 2020**

The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

Genesis 2:15 NRSV

It seems that one of the regrettable, yet sometimes comical, attributes of our humanity is the tendency to claim entitlements. In the case of the creation narrative, we have spread the false claim that God required nothing of the

humans in the garden prior to their fall. Apart from the guidance about which trees to eat from or to leave alone, generations have claimed that we had no responsibilities until they were assigned as punishment.

Each ensuing generation and members of every occupational or demographic population have continued to invent ways of believing that we have no responsibilities. In "congregational worship" most of us observe the preacher, listen to the choir, and trust the worship leader to read the right scripture. Participation of congregants has diminished even with praise teams to urge them, large print to accommodate them, and prayer request forms to facilitate them. We sit and "watch" worship happen.

It would serve us well to rediscover that God has had expectations of every person who was born or created. Many things are provided for each of us, but nobody was granted immunity from being a contributing citizen of creation. Rather than resenting everything that is required of us, we should count it a blessing to be included in God's plans for the world.

Diligent God,

Because we are created in your image, we realize that we are to be productive. Forgive us when we seek to escape the particular tasks to which we are assigned. Bless us with the means to carry out our callings with gratitude and joy.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

**Monday
March 2, 2020**

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you, do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORDS unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing all you who are upright in heart!

Psalms 32:7-11 NIV

The words spoken by the psalmist in this passage of scripture provide comfort to many. You are not in a place of respite when you know that your enemies surround you. Fearful and shaken are better words to describe how we may feel when the enemy traps us. The word enemy brings very unpleasant feelings within us. Sometimes a person or group of people have a negative attitude against certain people. They can make the targeted persons feel rejected or cause them

significant discomfort. How, when, or where can anyone find the ability to sing in the face of trouble and opposition. The world, even the church, can be a very hostile place.

When two women began attending our church service regularly, it was noticed by regular church attendees that their clothing was dirty and ragged. They stood out, as the congregation was considered middle class. Eventually, someone took it upon themselves to tell them their clothing choices were inappropriate for the church. This action was not a wise choice as they stopped coming to church. When asked why they stopped attending church, it was reported by a parishioner that they felt ashamed and rejected.

Eventually, someone at the church, with whom they had developed a relationship, with got them to return. They stayed and got more involved and eventually, joined the church. As other people in the church got to know them, they began to form new relationships. They were experienced bakers. The church began to receive the benefits of their skills when they provided baked goods for church fundraisers!

These two women could have become so disappointed or angry that they never returned to the church. This would have been a significant loss. God knows, loves, and accepts the flaws, but people do not. God also has a plan for you and everyone else on this earth, even with our flaws and imperfections.

Help us, oh Lord, to see the beauty in others and withhold judgment. Help us to lead with love and not with negativity.

Amen

**Tuesday
March 3, 2020**

Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty!

Psalm 32:1-2 NLT

Forgiveness is not usually experienced as having much significance. Even children in school realize that the fact that they were not punished for infractions does not change the increased scrutiny to which they are accorded. Ex-offenders are treated as if they are in the process of committing whatever crime that they served time for. Our experience with being "forgiven" is not one of being finished with the deed

and it's burdens.

When we allow our earthly expectations to impact our reception of God's forgiveness, we are unimpressed. We live our lives awaiting the next reference to our sins or the next occasion of having our past to limit our future. We simply doubt, based on experience, actual forgiveness.

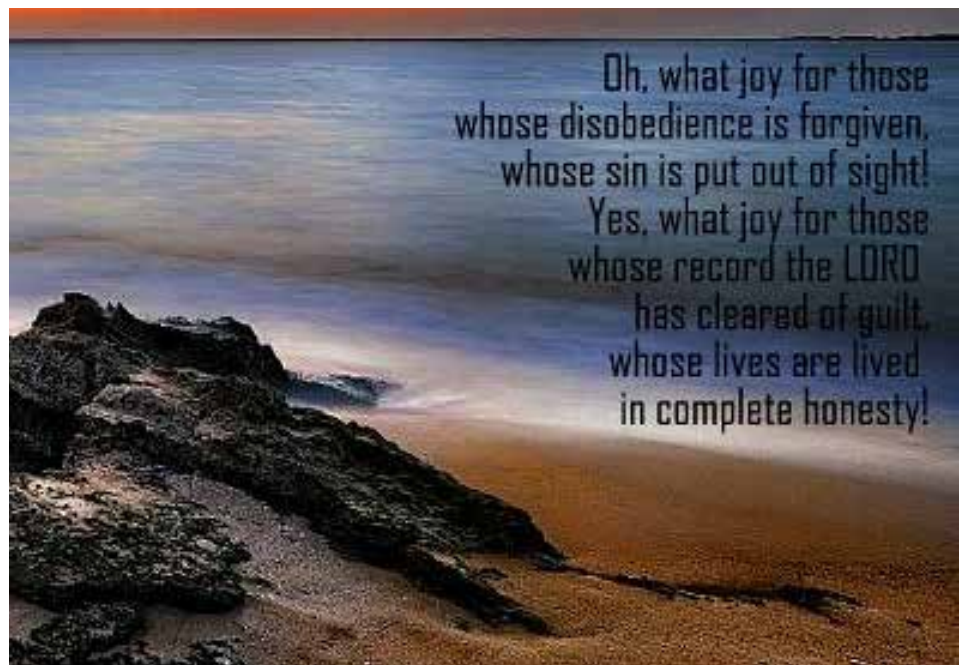
God does actually forgive. There are no probation officers to check in with. There are no forms to submit periodically. The record has been expunged and the news has been hand delivered by Jesus. "O what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight!"

Lord of Renewal,

We joyfully embrace your forgiveness, once we move beyond our doubt. Help us to move beyond our efforts to understand or to quantify your blessings.

In Gratitude,

Amen



**Wednesday
March 4, 2020**

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where my help comes? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Psalm 121:2-4 NRSV

On days when I have not had a good night's sleep the night before, a nap seems like a good idea. Unfortunately, there are days when the opportunity to take such a break is not convenient. Although I try, I cannot stay awake.

Many people have found themselves in this predicament. A new mother has to care for her baby and can only snooze when her baby takes a nap. Her baby is dependent on her. A soldier, who is assigned to stand guard over the camp, has been given much responsibility. He fully knows the magnitude of the task that he is given. One slip-up could cost the lives of many.

Those who are true believers understand this scripture passage well. God is always watchful and in control. God cares for us even when we misstep!

We give thanks to you Lord, for your mercy and goodness endures forever! We thank you, Lord, for your grace and your compassion. It is by that grace that we survive.

Amen.

**Thursday
March 5, 2020**

I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers. Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

2 Timothy 1:3-5 NIV

The writer of 2 Timothy (believed to be Paul) realizes that Timothy has attributes that have not emerged as matters of course. He is a dear friend of Timothy and has witnessed maturity and sensitivity that has clearly resulted from his upbringing, particularly as conveyed by his mother and grandmother. Timothy has displayed deeper and more profound faith than that of most young men. Paul credits the

nurturers in Timothy's life.

It is not uncommon for parents, relatives, and friends to regard newborn babies as blessings. We give thanks to God for so endowing us as to provide a child for us to love and to nurture. Even those who seldom speak the language of faith are moved to approach the role of child raising as divinely ordained. We celebrate each "bundle of joy," while often overlooking those who are given to care for these bundles.

We should all continue to adore the babies that come into our lives, even those that capture our attention in restaurants and grocery stores. They bring out the best in us. We should also thank God for those who work to bring out the best in the children that God has placed in our hands. Each of us should make a list of those who contributed to our formation. Having done so, we should find each of them who can be found, and express our gratitude to them.

God, Our Parent,

We have been blessed by the personalized narratives that formed each of us. We thank you for all who have been used by you to reveal our possibilities to us. Empower us to pass this blessing on to those that we influence or form.

By Your Grace,

Amen



Friday
March 6, 2020

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go, I will counsel you with my loving eye on you, do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you. Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORDS unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him. Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing all you who are upright in heart!

Psalm 32:8-11 NIV

God is always available to guide us in the right way, but sometimes we are not ready or willing to be guided. We want to be in charge. We may even think we can do a better job than God. Why, we might ask, should we turn over anything to a God who we cannot physically see.

To some, fast living and fancy clothes and cars look exciting. They want lives and seek higher paying jobs that will afford them that life. Unfortunately, they are never satisfied with what they have and continue to want more. They find that they are never happy or satisfied with what they have. They continue to feel empty. When they lose their high profile job, and everything comes crashing down on them, their life spins out of control. Sometimes they realize that the life they have built is not what they thought it would be.

God will not judge them or their immature way of thinking. Too often, we try to do things our way first before allowing

our way to be directed by God. Just like sheep, we stray from the pasture. God gently guides us to the right path.

Gracious and Loving God,

Gently nudge us when we seek worldly things that do not satisfy. Direct our steps and our thoughts toward you. Open our hearts and minds to building a relationship with you.

Amen

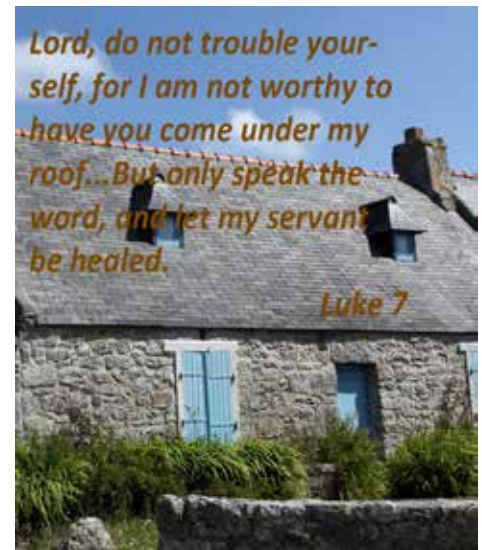
Saturday
March 7, 2020

And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.

Luke 7:6-7 NRSV

Most of us miss out on many opportunities in life, believing ourselves to be unworthy of that which is made available to us. In our humility, we avoid situations that represent us as deserving of attention or recognition. The centurion in the text cared enough to desire the healing of his valued servant, yet thought it to be an imposition to approach Jesus with his request. Those who came to Jesus described him as worthy.

It could be seen as unfaithful for us to keep silent when the knowledge of the needs of those around us is revealed to us. There are times when you are the only one who knows of a particular prayer concern.



If you fail to pray, no prayer goes forth. All that God reveals to each of us is revealed for a divine purpose.

The centurion was right to see himself as unworthy of the response that Jesus would render. We are all unworthy of the blessings of God. Every blessing is a gift, not a payment. It is more reflective of who God is than who we are.

Healing Lord,

Hear us when we call upon you and give us voice when you implant the need to speak in us. We are unworthy, but thoroughly loved.

With Boldness,

Amen

Sunday
March 8, 2020

He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is your keeper; the LORD is your shade at your right hand.

Psalm 121:4-5 NRSV

It is late afternoon. I sit reading this passage of scripture. I recall days when I had little or no sleep the night before. I chuckle, with the awareness that I have drifted into sleep several times, yet I push on.

Rest is needed to refresh our bodies. Eventually, the need for more sleep will become a demand and not a suggestion. You will either drift off before you realize it or you will plan to take a nap. The human need for sleep is undeniable.

Unfortunately, the consequences of sleep deprivation are too often realized after the fact. Then, we must live with the results. We can accidentally hurt ourselves or someone else. The implications and risks are too high.

God is always looking out for us, even when we do not realize that we need keeping. God surrounds us with a light of love. God's love is a promise that will not be broken, even when we mess things up.

Gracious and Loving God,

Let us continually be open to your wisdom and guidance. Let us learn to lovingly care for ourselves and others as you model for us.

Amen

**Monday
March 9, 2020**

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea,[a] to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have

you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food." Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people.

Numbers 21:4-7 NRSV



We approach the cross with a sense that we are faithfully walking with Jesus. We have often failed to do so. We sometimes walk with the Israelites. When Moses has come to rescue us from Egyptian captivity, we have doubted his leadership. We have even craved the "comforts" of Pharaoh's enslavement.

When Jesus has come into our midst, healing, teaching, and blessing, we have subjected him to our analysis and critique. We have questioned him concerning what day of the week that he has blessed us. We have challenged his authority to bless those who he chose to bless. We have not always walked with Jesus.

We should know that Jesus did not come to correct

typographical errors or administrative glitches. He came to overcome and atone for sin. The sin is ours. We have not always walked with the Lord.

Lord, Our Companion,

Walk with us and let us walk with you. Only then, can we repent of our selfish sinfulness. Lead us to the cross with you.

By Your Stripes,

Amen

**Tuesday
March 10, 2020**

Blessed are all who fear the Lord, who walk in obedience to him. You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours.

Psalms 128:1-2 NIV

It has always amazed me how different people interpret what it means to walk upright and in obedience to God. Even my family and closest friends understand how to "walk in obedience" differently. When I observe their walk with God I see differences.

When asked to verbalize their understanding of what it means to "walk in obedience," their response may not match what I have observed. What we all need to remember is that each person's walk is between them and God. They do not have to satisfy us. My best answer is to say that "observing their walk" sometimes helps me to define my own. Therefore, it is better to try to understand them, rather than judge them.

I have concluded that anyone who wants to “walk in obedience,” must remain open to change. As we grow in faith and experience God’s love, the change will happen naturally. We can not form ourselves around a set of rigid values and beliefs and expect to change.

Awesome God,

*You love us unconditionally.
We thank you, Lord, for
allowing us to grow and
experience all the blessings
you have stored up for us.*

Amen

**Wednesday
March 11, 2020**

*“For here’s what I’m going to do:
I’m going to take you out of these
countries, gather you from all
over, and bring you back to your
own land. I’ll pour pure water
over you and scrub you clean. I’ll
give you a new heart, put a new
spirit in you. I’ll remove the stone
heart from your body and replace
it with a heart that’s God-willed,
not self-willed. I’ll put my Spirit in
you and make it possible for you to
do what I tell you and live by my
commands. You’ll once again live
in the land I gave your ancestors.
You’ll be my people! I’ll be your
God!*

Ezekiel 36:24-28 MSG

Many of us have received it as a compliment when someone has observed about one of us, “you clean up well.” The understanding has been that we have proven to be more presentable or attractive than was previously realized. The observation praises the recipient for the discovered beauty.

In the Ezekiel reading, it is not the beauty of Israel that is of note. The clean-up is not a fashion makeover. It is a correction. God has observed, through the prophet, that the people of God have behaved in such ways as to dishonor God’s name. It is necessary for them to be redirected, so to curb the misrepresentation of the identity of our creator of which we are guilty. We are not being cleaned up or dressed up to reveal our beauty, but to restore for all the understanding of God’s beauty.

We could all benefit from periodic reminders that we are representatives of our God. My words are those of a child of God. Your actions reflect on the one who sent you. While we grow to understand our own names, and what glory they call us to, let us endeavor to preserve the name of God.

Lord God,

*We are yours and all that
comes from us points to you.
May we bring well deserved
glory and honor to your name.*

In Faithfulness,

Amen

**Thursday
March 12, 2020**

The Israelites said to them, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.”

Exodus 16:3 NIV

The words “If only” are generally associated with complaints or regrets. Whenever I say these words or hear others say these words, I know it is grieving for something they feel was lost. These words verbalize a complaint against one’s self for making poor choices.

We are sometimes too quick to complain and not see what we have gained or achieved. Sometimes we need to look forward and not backward. The God we serve always has a blessing for us and is aware of our needs. The God we serve loves enough to keep us from perishing.

Little did the Israelites know that God had a plan to bless them more than they could ever imagine. If we were to continue reading this passage



of scripture, we would quickly see that God fed them and they had more than enough.

You, oh Lord, are a God of the impossible. When we yield to your way, you make a way out of no way. It is you that delivers us when we can not deliver ourselves.

Amen

**Friday
March 13, 2020**

Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care.

Psalm 95:6-7 NIV

In most of our congregations, an invitation to bow at the altar results in few, if any, coming forward to kneel. In fact, most congregants do not respond to the opportunity to share prayer requests. Common explanations of these two realities range from the potential pain that some

members experience as a result of arthritis or other physical to the inadequacy of the pulpit area. These are legitimate explanations, but a larger issue may be our collective resistance to "Lordship."

It is a common practice for ships that represent the nations of the world to dip their flags, as a sign of respect and courtesy, when they are approached by another nation's ships. Some nations refuse this act of deference, believing that the dipping of their flag is the equivalent of bowing before another nation. The United States is one such nation.

It is observable that many people, in the context of worship or prayer, resist any stated or implied directives in public worship. The request can be as small "close your eyes." We are simply unable to "dip our flags" even before the Lord. Clearly, it is common to wrongly believe that God's greatness diminishes us. Jesus assures us that lifting him up will result in our being lifted with him.

Omnipotent Lord,

Before your name, we must all bow. Enable us to experience our greatest capacity by embracing and celebrating your Lordship. Through you, we are at our best.

In Humility,

Amen

**Saturday
March 14, 2020**

The people of Israel called the bread manna. It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey. Moses said this is what the Lord has commanded. "Take an omer of manna and keep it for the generation to come, so they can see the bread I gave you to eat in the wilderness when I brought you out of Egypt."

Exodus 16:31-32 NIV

Moses did not realize the significance of passing on manna. For Israel, manna was considered bread. Bread is food. Passing on the manna was an act of love and consideration that others would be fed. The eating of food helps to sustain the body, therefore helping maintain life.

The tradition which began centuries ago still exists today. It has become a common tradition among women to pass on a piece of dough to begin when someone makes yeast rolls or bread from scratch.

Some have called this "friendship bread." If a person receives a portion of dough, they prepare yeast rolls or bread for their household. They continue the tradition by passing it on to someone else. It

*Come, let us bow in worship,
let us kneel before the Lord our Maker;
for he is our God
and we are the people of his pasture,
the flock under his care.*

Psalm 95:6-7

is expected that the tradition of passing the mixture will never stop.

Today bread has become a common staple and comfort food in many cultures and households. Fresh bread is part of many meals. The breaking of bread with friends and family is a ritual many of us look forward to having. Warm thoughts of love are felt when someone smells fresh bread baking.

As we break bread, whether at a family table or during communion, we should be reminded of how God always provides for us. The manna for the Israelites came just when it was needed. It was also just enough for what they needed.

Loving God,

Thank you for providing and sustaining us. Thank you for helping us find ways of being together as friends or family. May love always be the central theme as we gather together.

Amen.

Sunday March 15, 2020

Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Romans 5:1-5 KJV



In each of our lives, there are valuable lessons learned because of the many things that go wrong for us. Whether the result of our own errors or of unavoidable circumstances, life teaches at the "graduate level." We have discovered "one by one" that fire is hot. Thoughtless words from our mouths have invited prompt and thorough instruction from a host of volunteer educators. Eating wrong things at right times has enhanced our understanding of the human digestive tract.

Spiritual lessons have also come to us in serendipitous ways. As we have fumbled around the locations and situations to which we have been exposed we have discovered God's grace and God's sense of humor. Each of the attributes described in the text is discovered and employed as we journey from spiritual oblivion to a knowing relationship with God.

Jesus was often called "Rabbi," though he was never employed by a local congregation. His identity as such was descriptive of his recurring role in unveiling the lessons that were contained in the imperfections and inadequacies of people.

Rabbi,

We encounter daily lessons that result from our tribulations. For the growth and learning, we give you thanks. For the struggles, we seek your mercy.

In Faith,

Amen

Monday March 16, 2020

"I removed the burden from their shoulders; their hands were set free from the basket. In your distress you called and I rescued you, I answered you out of a thundercloud; I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Hear me, my people, and I will warn you — if you would only listen to me, Israel!

Psalm 81: 6-8 NIV

Why is it that we wait until we are in distress to call to the Lord for help. It is likely because we continue to think that we can do everything and anything under our own power, and strength. God works best when we realize that we can not do everything. Whenever we think all options have been exhausted, God

works miracles.

I recall a story of two men playing chess. One player had assured himself that he had the game locked up and that his opponent did not have another move. His opponent refused to give in and studied the chessboard for over an hour. He refused to give in. He studied the board carefully. Then, with confidence, he loudly declared "I have another move." He made his move and won the game.

"God always has another move." We have to trust that God's move is in our best interest. With God all things are possible.

God of Miracles,

Your possibilities are far beyond what we can imagine. We trust that you will never fail us.

Amen

Tuesday March 17, 2020

I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.

1 Corinthians 10:1-4 NRSV

When people embrace something that they believe to be special they want to believe that it is unique. In the case of religious beliefs, there are key indicators that one is seriously engaged and on the right track.

We listen carefully to what name people call God by. We note which scriptures they quote (or if they fail to quote scriptures). One of the ultimate signs of "true" Christianity is that you view baptism the way that I do. Central to this concern are the questions:

- Was it your decision to be baptized or your parents'?
- How wet did you get (immersion or sprinkled)?
- What words were spoken (in what name)?

In a very real sense, we have engaged in a legalistic approach that has devolved into a series of human "litmus tests," rather than the beginning of a lifelong journey of faith.

In the 1 Corinthians text, the writer seeks to guide the readers back to the recognition that all spiritual practices and sacraments are intended to facilitate our relationship with God. Every sacrament, each prophet or teacher, and all of our special events and holidays should be for the purpose of deepening our faith. For those of us who profess to be Christian, all that we do points to Jesus.

God of Truth,

You have instituted various ordinances and practices, in order to guide us into your presence. Let us not become so enraptured with the paths that we travel that we worship the path. Bless us to persevere until we reside safely in your kingdom.

In Love,

Amen

Wednesday March 18, 2020

This is what the Lord says: "What fault did your ancestors find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. They did not ask, 'Where is the Lord, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, a land of drought and utter darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?' I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.

Jeremiah 2:5-7 NIV

Whenever we experience difficult periods in life, it is hard to imagine how and even when things will get better. Those of us who are Christian pray to God to help us during these trials. God gives us hope and courage to hang in there.

Unfortunately, we too quickly forget the difficulty we have been through, with God's help. Forgotten are the lessons we learned. The Israelites were appreciative at first, but, they also promptly forgot what was provided for them. With the help of God, their leader made great sacrifices for them. The Israelites, according to this passage, showed little appreciation and began to defile their inheritance.

We too can take the blessings afforded to us for granted. We must be mindful, not only to show appreciation at the moment, but to continue to show gratitude. God gives without expectation and demand for us to give back. But

God is praised when we give thanks and appreciate what has been freely given.

We thank you, God, for the blessings you provide to us as we travel through life's deserted and barren places. Help us Lord, to remember to show appreciation for your continued love and attention to our needs.

Amen

**Thursday
March 19, 2020**

Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?"

"But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal."

1 Samuel 15:17-21 NRSV

I am very much like Saul. I suspect that most of you, who read this meditation, are like Saul too. In the text, it appears that Saul genuinely believes that he has carried out God's instructions. He has been directed by Samuel, who was sent by God, to accomplish a

battle plan in a clearly defined manner. No captives, human or animal, were to be taken. The king and his soldiers could not bring themselves to bypass the sheep and cattle that was, in their sight, there for the taking.

One way of understanding the occasions when we fall short of full compliance is to claim to not understand. We need to support such claims with some indication that the instructions are unclear or that the hearer is not capable of understanding. Because both Saul and Samuel were anointed by God for their unique callings it is not the case that capacity or comprehension was inadequate.

Like Saul, we are inclined to "sample the grapes." We convince ourselves that there is no harm in seeing if the grapes in the store are sweet before purchasing them. We embellish upon God's clear directives to the point that what we are pursuing is no longer clear or of God. Like Saul, we will be held responsible for doing what God actually calls upon from us.

Lord of Clarity,

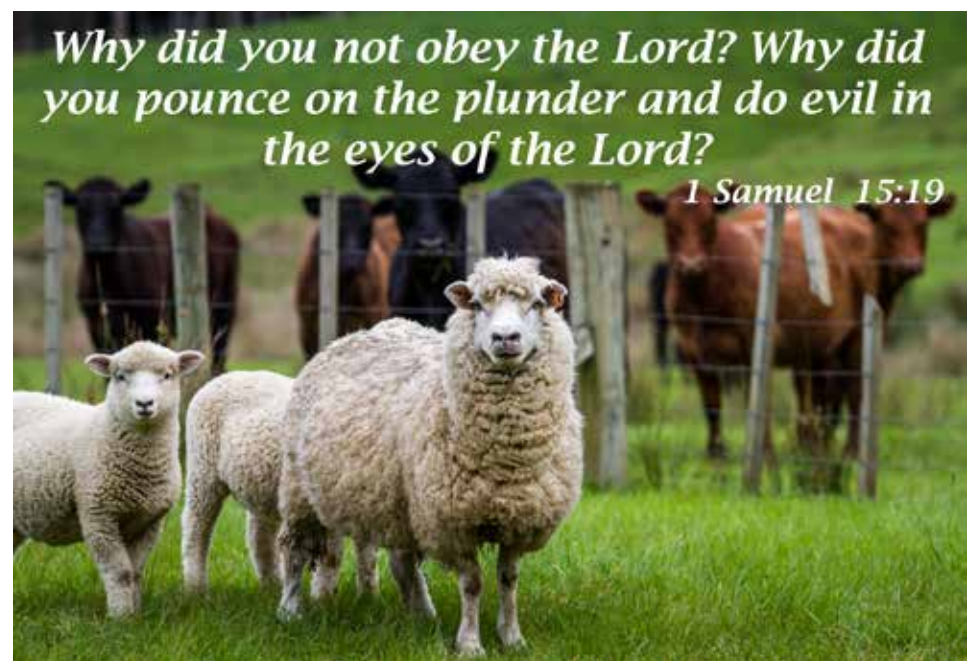
Forgive us for the many times that we lie to you and ourselves. Although you can never be fully known, your guidance is not beyond our comprehension. Protect us from the destructive consequences of our egocentric faithfulness.

In Obedience,

Amen

**Friday
March 20, 2020**

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely your goodness and love will follow me all



*the days of my life, and I will dwell
in the house of the Lord forever.*

Psalms 23 NIV

The 23rd Psalm is genuinely the most beloved passage of scripture in the Bible. Children and adults quiet down to listen when it is recited. Most people can recognize and recite it from memory, even if they don't consider themselves to be Christian.

Have you ever thought about why it is so popular? Maybe because it brings so much comfort and assurance of God's Love. It is the "go to" scripture that reminds us of how important we are to God. It assures us that we are worthy of God's Love and attention, even in our brokenness and our imperfections.

Soldiers have reported that this passage of scripture brought them through many nights during combat. Prisoners in solitary confinement have made similar confessions. This passage provides and fills us with hope. It also assures us of God's love. For some, it is a beacon of light that will break through the darkness.

*Thank you, Lord, for the
provision of hope. Continue to
send us beacons of light that
serve as hope in the darkness
that surrounds us.*

Amen.

**Saturday
March 21, 2020**

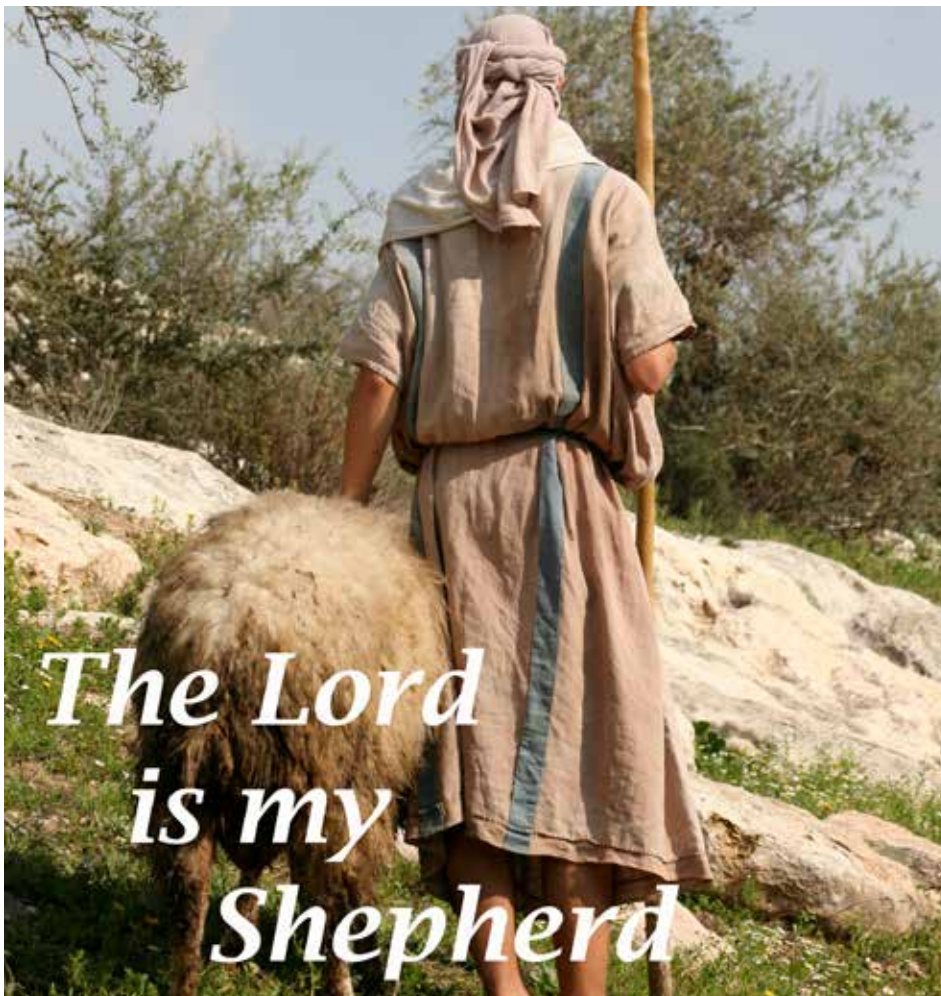
*In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God, and
the Word was God. He was in the
beginning with God. All things
came into being through him, and
without him not one thing came
into being. What has come into
being in him was life, and the life
was the light of all people. The light
shines in the darkness, and the
darkness did not overcome it.*

John 1:1-5 NRSV

Jesus is the Light! Darkness sought to, and continues to seek to, extinguish the light. Darkness is the enemy of Light. It seeks to hide truth and substitute falsehoods. The light presents, exposes, and empowers truth. Darkness is unable to accomplish deceit when the Light is brightly shining.

These spiritual observations should be understood apart from deceptive and confusing claims about the optics of the text. In confusion or with malicious intent, these scriptural claims have been extended to speak of dark skin or white hats. The false notion has been set forth that God prefers light colors over dark ones, in people or apparel. Such thinking resides in the darkness which the light has come to dispel.

God's creation contains and utilizes every color and every shade. The darkness which is to be overcome is the darkness that views truth as an enemy. This enmity is resultant from the reality that spiritual darkness is determined to defeat God's Light. The Light shines in darkness and will never be overcome by it.



Lord of Light,

Shine on us so that we can shine for you. Guide us to accept and celebrate the full spectrum of your creation and to view all that is of you to be good. Let truth prevail in spite of us and then in us.

By Your Illumination,

Amen

**Sunday
March 22, 2020**

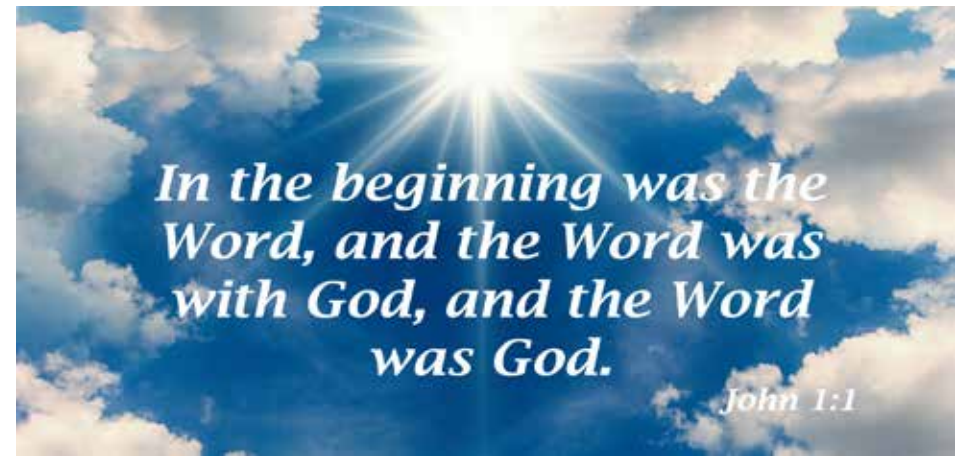
The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out, I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have for myself a king among his sons."

1 Samuel 16:1 (NIV)

When Saul failed to live up to the potential that was seen in him, by God and Samuel, Samuel took it personally. He grieved so deeply over the disappointment that it impaired his ability to do what needed to be done. It must have seemed like the end of the road if the one who was anointed by God could not do the job.

We often place too much promise in the performance of mortals. Whether our political leaders, our pastors, or members of our families, humans fail. Samuel had, in behalf of God, warned the Israelites of the likelihood of failure, when they insisted on having a king. Most of Saul's failures were among those that Samuel had named.

In this case and in others, God knows to move on. Each of us keeps God in practice



of moving beyond the failures of humanity. Saul was not removed prematurely, but the next king was identified. David might never have been king, except for Saul's failure. God always has a way to move on.

God of Progress,

We continue to fail, yet you bring victory from our faltering. Certainly, if you can deliver creation from the void, you can redeem your world and its kingdoms from our downfalls. Bless us, to learn how and when to move on.

In Victory,

Amen

**Monday
March 23, 2020**

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice

saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting."

Acts 9:1-5 NRSV

Among the amazing things about the man who came to be known as Paul is that he was at one point as opposed to the Christian movement as he eventually was for it. This is demonstrative of a frightening reality that we all get to witness regularly. That reality is that we are capable of being completely and sincerely wrong. We would all like to believe that God would prevent us from ever being that wrong, but we have all believed that which bears no semblance of truth.

The awareness that we can be so lost should give us patience as we engage with those who we believe to be presently lost. The reality that God can redeem any of us, regardless of the depth of our "lostness," should actually be a source of encouragement. Although nobody knows God's timetable, any who continue to seek God's face will find it.

The Damascus encounter finds Saul, who is called by name, asking "who are you Lord?" Whether he realized it

consciously or not, Saul knew in his spirit that this encounter was with the one true God. Ultimately, we all know the voice of God. If we persist, we can find our way to our God.

Knowing Creator,

Shine your light, so that we who seek you can come to you. Direct us to be ready to zealously engage the new challenges and assignments that you have for us. Thank you, for entrusting your Gospel work to us.

In Faith,

Amen

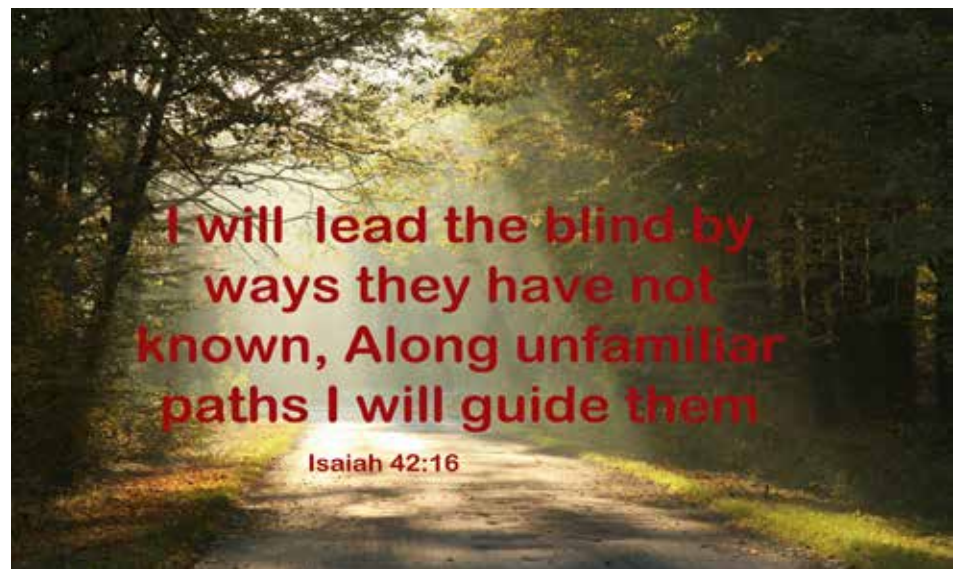
**Tuesday
March 24, 2020**

I will lead the blind by ways they have not known, along unfamiliar paths I will guide them; I will turn the darkness into light before them and make the rough places smooth. These are the things I will do; I will not forsake them.

Isaiah 42:16 NIV

This verse is critical in understanding the scriptural passage; it serves as a reminder that God is still working in our lives and has more in store for us than we can ever ask or imagine. Most of us tend to limit ourselves and stay in our “comfort zone.” We resist change and challenges. We even resist God’s guidance and instruction.

I have three brothers. One of them is blind. He was born sighted but had an accident mid-life that left him blind. The other two are legally blind because of a hereditary condition. They are sighted,



but their vision is minimal. They depend on visual aid devices to help them function. They challenge themselves to try new things. They are constant learners. It is because of how they rise up to meet challenges that they live full and productive lives.

My brothers’ limitations impacts their lives and others who are close to them. Sometimes it means leading and walking with them. Sometimes fixing their plates at meals, along with describing the locations of things on the table. Even the youngest of the children in our family knows how to support their uncles!

Each of my brothers is very independent and confident in their ability to function. They all have had specialized training to manage their condition. Two of my brothers returned to school and now use their disability to help others who have the same disabling condition.

Neither of them sits around and have “pity parties” regarding what they can and cannot do. They accept and ask for support when they need it.

Unlike many of us, we see but often refuse to seek help and support, even when needed.

Ask yourself, “How has God led me today?”

Gracious and Loving God

Help us to remember that we are yours. We can count on you, without being limited by false pride. Guide us and keep us.

In the precious name of your son Jesus,

Amen

**Wednesday
March 25, 2020
Annunciation of the Lord**

In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.” But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for

*you have found favor with God.
And now, you will conceive in
your womb and bear a son, and
you will name him Jesus.*

Luke 1:26-31 NRSV

Although the announcement that she would bear the child who would change the world came to Mary through the angel Gabriel, rather than directly from God, this is certainly an epiphany. Nobody could ever have had a more dramatic encounter with the Lord. The knowledge that God was preparing to intervene into human history was impactful enough, but Mary was informed that she would play a role in this miracle.

Imagine being presented with the eventual resume' for your child even before the birth of the child. You might be impressed to discover that your child was to become a doctor or a lawyer. Mary's revelation exceeded that scenario. Suppose you were told that your baby would grow up to be the President of the United States. Nope, bigger than that! How about an emperor or a king? Look beyond all known occupational identities. Mary

was told that her son would be the King of Kings, an identity that nobody had ever assumed or ever would again.

The announcement to Mary was for all of us. Even centuries after the birth of our Savior, we are overwhelmed and blessed by the baby who was announced that night.

Loving God,

*You sure know how to make
an entrance. Everything did
not stop when Jesus came,
but everything and everybody
was made new. We give
thanks for the very first
Christmas present.*

In Blessedness,

Amen

**Thursday
March 26, 2020**

*Out of the depths I cry to you,
Lord; Lord, hear my voice. Let
your ears be attentive to my cry
for mercy.*

Psalm 130:1-2 NIV

The writer of this Psalm appears to be in lament and woe as he cries out to the Lord. He wants God to hear

his voice, but most of all he wants God to listen to his pain. He wants God to hear and understand the depth of his misery.

Only God can know the depth of the pain as the psalmist is experiencing it. Human emotion is real. Even so, it also can be confusing. We, as human beings, tend to look only on the outside. We look for physical signs that we can see visually. The truth is the pain on the inside scares us to death. We don't want to deal with the emotional pain within us, let alone that of others.

Pain and suffering are things we all deal with at some point in our lives. God is saying in this passage, "bring it here to me." God says, "I can handle this, trust me!" When we can lay our burdens down, God can perform miracles!

Am I really able to give it all to God? Can God hear the depth of my pain?

*Hear my cry Oh Lord. Attend
to my concerns. Forgive my
sins and cleanse me of my
inadequacies. Have mercy on
me in my time of need.*

Amen.

**Friday
March 27, 2020**

*Out of the depths have I cried
unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my
voice: let thine ears be attentive
to the voice of my supplications.
If thou, Lord, shouldest mark
iniquities, O Lord, who shall
stand? But there is forgiveness*



with thee, that thou mayest be feared. I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his word do I hope.

Psalm 130:1-5 KJV

This Psalm is like many others in that it is a cry for help. The psalmist is in fear of impending danger. Calling on the Lord is a reasonable choice except for one thing. It is the Lord that the psalmist needs to be rescued from. Due to some unnamed offenses, the punishment of the Lord is at hand.

The decision to call on the Lord may seem like an obvious one. Who could deliver the psalmist or anyone else from God's wrath? Because there is no avenue or source capable of such deliverance, the psalmist must realize that the only choice is to call on God.

Even though relief can only come from God, there has to be some hope. If the psalmist did not know the Lord to be a forgiving God, even the only hope may not have led to this psalm being offered. In times such as those experienced by

the psalmist, God is the only hope available, but the only hope needed.

Lord God,

In times of trouble, we can trust in you. You alone know when we have paid our penalties. You alone can choose to extend premature forgiveness. Thank you for grace and for mercy.

In Awe,

Amen

**Saturday
March 28, 2020**

Out of the depths, I cry to you, Lord; Lord hear my voice. Let your ear be attentive to my cry for mercy. Lord, if you kept a record of sins who could stand? But with you, there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

Psalm 130:1-4 NIV

In this passage, there is a cry for mercy from the psalmist. He realizes that he has done something wrong. It is a cry for mercy; a plea for a second chance. He realizes that he is

weak and can not do it alone. He is overwhelmed by his sins. Even as he cries for help, he doubts that anything could deliver him.

There is a tension on display, between the despair of the psalmist and his awareness of God's ability to handle any challenge. Grace and mercy are extended because of God's goodwill for us. God loves us and wants the best for us. God wants us to succeed. Our words and cries for mercy are often said out of desperation. But too often, living in the grace that has been extended is easier said than done.

The Christian walk does not come easily for many of us. Having a church home and having people around us to model and guide us is helpful. Maturing in your faith is a journey. Asking for forgiveness is only the first step.

Loving God,

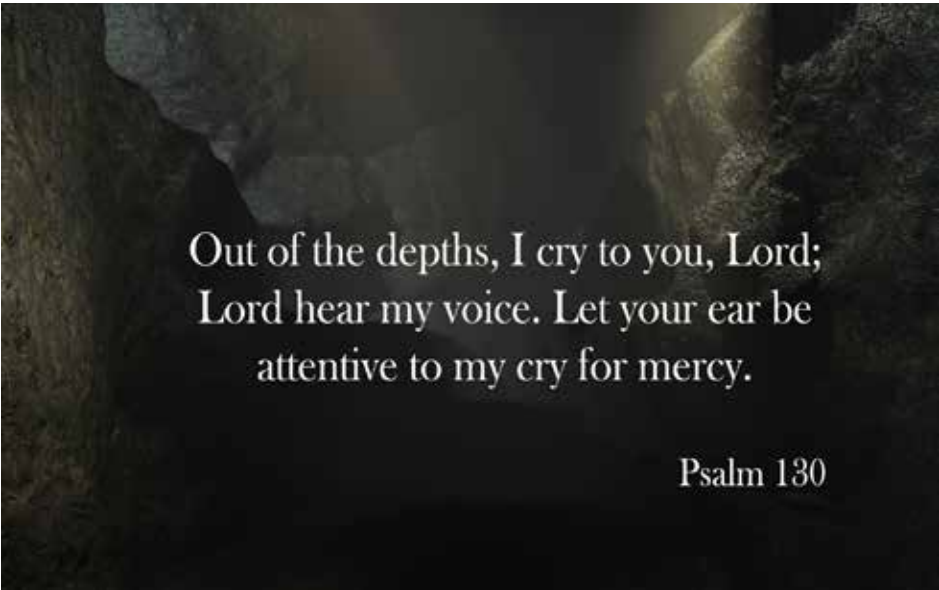
I pray and ask forgiveness for my sins. Guide me, great Jehovah, and I will praise your name.

Amen

**Sunday
March 29, 2020**

The hand of the LORD came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord GOD, you know."

Ezekiel 37:1-3 NRSV



Out of the depths, I cry to you, Lord;
Lord hear my voice. Let your ear be
attentive to my cry for mercy.

Psalm 130

As pastors, many of us are too quick to read most scriptures from the perspective of the local church. We often do so in light of the struggles that many of our congregations have faced in recent times. We are not at fault because we desire stronger congregations. We are guilty of failing to see the health of communities, nations, businesses, and households as being necessary for our churches to be whole.

We have preached the Ezekiel text as one about restoring our churches. There is an obligatory shift from speaking of Israel to speaking about congregations. We have been sloppy in this transition. Israel was a people, a nation, and a religion. All of the institutions named above were impacted by and dependent upon Israel. Our local churches too often accept little more than weekly worship, as their place among the people.

Our congregations do not have the option of becoming nations or religions. There would be no reason to want to. We can invest ourselves more in the lives of families. We can speak to the safety and well being of our communities. We can champion the concerns of our people, in communication with agencies and businesses. When our bones are put to better use, they will seldom be found to be dry.

Lord of Life,

Hydrate and activate us. We want to be and need to be more than a past-time for our people. Call us to vitality and speak through us.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

**Monday
March 30, 2020**

Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"

1 Kings 17:17-18 NIV

There are many miraculous healings in the Bible done by Jesus. This healing was done by Elijah. Elijah had been presenting himself as a man of God. The mother had no way of actually testing this claim. All she knew was that she needed more help than any mortal could offer. She was desperate to believe, but understandably sceptical.

After the woman's son died during Elijah's stay, she began to doubt and question Elijah's intent. She demanded to know if he had come to harm her or her beloved son. There was nothing that she could have done, if the worst of her fears proved themselves to be true, but she wanted to know what she was facing.

Elijah, after assessing the situation, was able to bring this boy back to life. He presents the

power of his faith as a testimony that he was truly a man of God. Upon witness and being the recipient of this miracle, she gladly acknowledged Elijah's identity.

Healing Lord,

We thank you for all of the authentic help that you provide for us. For each messenger of your grace, we are grateful. Bless us to discern who is truly a man or woman of yours.

In Hope,

Amen

**Tuesday
March 31, 2020**

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.

Ephesians 2:1-5 NIV

Most of us have made it our practice to avoid any words or actions that implicate ourselves. We may admit our faults if someone inquires directly about them, but we tend to not volunteer the information. The problem that this behavior creates in our faith walk is that we need to confess, but Jesus is

blessing us anyway.

We need to be confessional in order to understand our place at the cross. An innocent man died in my place on that cross. Sin is the human guilt that required Jesus to come into the world. We offered but should be appreciative for the sacrifice, but can never appreciate what we fail to acknowledge. I need to confess, even if Jesus never demands it.

The instructions offered by prophets, judges, rabbis, and apostles join with those of Jesus, in calling us to be confessional. God does not stop blessing us while awaiting our acknowledgement of guilt. Our way of doing things treats the continuation of blessings as if we have “gotten away” with our sins. Even if we could, Jesus deserves our confession and gratitude.

Knowing God,

Our guilt is not unknown to you. May we confess our sinfulness, as an act of truth speaking. May this acknowledgement free us to grow in your grace.

In Truth,

Amen

**Wednesday
April 1, 2020**

I will surely gather them from all the lands where I banish them in my furious anger and great wrath; I will bring them back to this place and let them live in safety. They will be my people, and I will be their God.

Jeremiah 32:37-38 NIV

In Old Testament scripture, God punishes those who live in sin. He banished the Israelites from their land. Even though he was angry, he had mercy on them and then bought them back together again. God continually takes care of us, even when we grumble or sin. God is a compassionate and forgiving God.

Unfortunately, we, as humans, are less inclined to be compassionate and forgiving. When we feel we have been wronged by someone else, we hold that grudge forever. We can not get past our hurt. Yet, we are quick to want others to forgive us.

We may mouth words of forgiveness, but there is little action to show our forgiveness. I suspect that most of us don't know what forgiveness is. We don't understand it or know what it feels or looks like. Unfortunately, it is not modeled well by many of those around us. To achieve and grow to the point of being able to forgive, we must learn through the study of the Bible and use Jesus as our role model.

Holy and Righteous God,

Create in us clean forgiving hearts. Do not let our spiritual feet slip. Help us to learn to be more loving and patient toward others.

Amen

**Thursday
April 2, 2020**

Samuel said to Jesse, “Are all your sons here?” And he said, “There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep.” And Samuel said to Jesse, “Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here.” He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, “Rise and anoint him; for this is the one.” Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

1 Samuel 16:11-13 NRSV

David was so unlikely a candidate to be anointed as the future king of Israel that his own father overlooked him. Samuel had come to the home of Jesse, David's father, declaring that God had sent him to this home to identify the one who would be king. Jesse, knowing what was at stake, paraded seven sons before Samuel, presuming that the future king must be one of them. Each was apparently most suited in some way. Only when asked specifically if there was another son did Jesse send for David.

Jesus was also an unlikely candidate. His family was not wealthy. He was not a preacher's kid (or a rabbi's kid). Nobody in his family had standing within the Roman empire, or even lesser kingdoms. He was a product of modest means and offered hope to others of such lowly

estate.

If Jesus was born of royalty, I would not think him available to us commoners. If he were the child of a great general, those with no military connection might not feel themselves included. If his mother was a university professor, we might believe redemption to be the product of intellect. Only by sending an unlikely candidate could it be so clear that God's love is available to all.



Mighty God,

We join with the mighty and the meek, in celebrating your abiding love. Because you have included the rich and the poor, we can all trust our inheritance. Because you include the young and the old, we know that we will not outgrow or have to grow into your inner circle. You have embraced and blessed all of our particularities. For this, we give you thanks.

By Your Power,

Amen

**Friday
April 3, 2020**

Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel without being frightened in any way by those who oppose you. This is a sign to them that they will be destroyed, but that you will be saved—and that by God. For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe in him,

but also to suffer for him, since you are going through the same struggle you saw I had, and now hear that I still have.

Philippians 1: 27-29 NIV

Our walk as followers of Christ has never been easy, nor will it ever be. Even when we try hard, we are not perfect. When we fail, we must find the courage to get back up and try again. We would serve ourselves and God better if we had a plan and set some goals. Athletes are good role models of how to achieve their best results.

Athletes work with very rigorous schedules. They work hard in order to be and give their very best. Yet, they individualize their needs and set priorities. Many athletes condition themselves to re-evaluate and make changes as needed. They value and invest in themselves. They hire the best coaches. They don't spare expenses on equipment. They even have a plan for eating. They often carry their disciplines into retirement.

When we say yes to God, there is no retirement plan, how we choose to live out our lives as we grow older should

mean that we maintain our Christian values, as our values are the core of who we are. Taking our cues from athletes, we should invest ourselves in our Christian walk. This approach will present us as champions for the Lord.

Lord,

You promised to walk with me when I turned my life over to you. Grant me the wisdom and courage to hear and obey your teachings.

Amen

**Saturday
April 4, 2020**

I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit; you heard my plea, "Do not close your ear to my cry for help, but give me relief!" You came near when I called on you; you said, "Do not fear!"

Lamentations 3:55-57 NRSV



We have come to know that depression is a clinical condition, that can impair persons both physically and emotionally. Without treatment, a person can linger indefinitely in this impaired state. This appears to be the situation that the writer of Lamentations has been in. It is a situation described in the past tense because the Lord has rendered relief.

It is unfortunate that so many people in the present would never see calling on the Lord, when in distress. There is no real need to choose between help offered by a physician or therapist and help granted by God. The writer had no such choice. Before Medicare, Obamacare, HMO's, PPO's, or country doctors there was God. Now that we have all of these relatively new options, there is no need to reject that which has served us throughout time.

Great Physician,

All healing comes from you, whether directly or through those that you have blessed to render service. Continue to hear us when we cry out for health. Because you know us and love us, we have hope.

In Search of Wholeness,

Amen

**Sunday
April 5, 2020**

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?" Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

Matthew 26:20-24 NIV

Sun-Tzu, was a Chinese general who has been credited with saying, "keep your friends close and your enemies closer." The people closest to you can hurt you the most. They know your secrets, and they know your strengths and weaknesses. The world is full of people who are intent on elevating themselves at your expense.

Many people lack discipline, values, and are insecure, immature, and weak. They have not taken the time to build discipline; they are jealous and want what you have without the work to get to where you are. Instead of building character and discipline, some of those people closest to you invest their time into being sneaky and manipulative

Jesus knew that there was a traitor among those who were celebrating with him. He was able to discipline himself enough to deal with each individual gracefully. He kept his focus. Jesus did not go running and hiding in fear. Are you prepared to deal with the Judases in your life?

Lord,

Help me to keep my focus on becoming the person you have called me to be. Teach me to be more patient and disciplined; so that I may live a life worthy of your calling.

Amen

Monday
April 6, 2020

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)

John 12:1-5 NRSV

This passage includes several key figures. It is not about Martha, who served the dinner meal. That was what Martha would be expected to do. It is not about Judas, who found a profit motive even in his expectations of how Mary would use her own perfume. Jesus is the most important person present, but the story is about Mary. She is the one who, in response to the moment, acts in a manner that is uncharacteristic.

Mary anointed the feet of Jesus. This occasion was too important to be focused on the market value of the perfume. It was too distinctive to be focused on menus or meal preparation. Mary recognized the significance of the life that had been lived and the appropriateness of preparing

his body in a ritual manner.

Most of us respond to every situation, regardless of its importance, with our usual response. It may be time for some of us to consider the prosecution and execution of God to be a special occasion.

Atoning Lord,

You saw what we needed and did what you alone could do. On too many occasions, nobody but Mary appreciated your actions. Instill in us the insight needed to see what you are doing for us. May we no longer take you or your blessings for granted.

In Blessedness,

Amen

Tuesday
April 7, 2020

"Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and will glorify it again." The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

John 12:27-29 NIV

In this passage, Jesus acknowledges that his purpose for being on earth is about to be fulfilled. Jesus shares this purpose as fact, with no emotion. There are no attempts to bargain for more time. It is the appointed time, and he knows it.

If it were me, I believe I would be on my knees, begging for more time with every bit of emotion that I could muster. But, that is the human side of me. Being human makes me weak and vulnerable to human emotions. Seldom, are there times when I would be willing to sacrifice my life for the sake of someone else. I would not hesitate to sacrifice my life for that of my child or my grandchildren. As I write this devotion, I realize that I would likely make the sacrifice for any child.

Most people love someone as much as I love children. Each of us have a limited circle of love. The difference with Jesus is that his circle encompasses every one of us.

Good and Gracious God,

Help us to broaden our circles of love. Help us also to recognize and to accept what each day and each moment demands of us. Whatever you call forth in us, is and must be acceptable to us.

In Jesus,

Amen

**Wednesday
April 8, 2020**

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking.

John 13:21-22 NRSV

The disciples looked at one another, even though this is an occasion where Jesus indicated a single betrayer. Most of us tend to look for only one person to name as responsible for whatever happens. In scriptural references, one son was a prodigal, one woman was adulterous, and one Samaritan was kind. While it is true that many individuals are distinctive in their actions, most deeds are replicated by many others.

The disciples each looked at the others. They each excused themselves, as possible suspects. They looked away, trusting that it had to be someone else to betray Jesus. In reality, they each could have found reason to name themselves. Every disciple betrayed Jesus.

We look at others too. We tell the Gospel story as being one in which "somebody" betrayed Jesus. We see Jesus on the cross because "somebody" sinned. When the welcome of the palms begins to wear off, we will leave it to "somebody" to walk with Jesus. We need to look in the mirror and see who Jesus was speaking of.

My Lord,

You died for me. You forgave my sins. You were betrayed by me. You have blessed me because you love me. This is a time to take things personally.

As One,

Amen

**Thursday
April 9, 2020
MaundayThursday**

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

John 13:34-35 NIV

When I was a child, my grandmother and every elderly woman in my life would tease me and say, "you don't know what love is!" They would always laugh when they said it. I, of course, didn't appreciate this teasing as I was struggling to understand the meaning of what they were saying about love.

When I got older, I would wonder even more every time I met a boy. Was it love, or did I just like him. When I was in the 8th grade, there was a boy in my class that I was so consumed with that I could not think straight. I realized years later that it was his looks that I was fascinated with, not him! That was not real love!

The kind of love Jesus spoke about is not easy to achieve. As I matured, I realized that more and more. The kind of love Jesus wants us to have is pure and not based on outward appearances, social status, what type of car the person drives, or any of our human values. The kind of love that does not change even when the person performs poorly in school, has a baby out of wedlock, develops a drug problem, or breaks the law. It is loving when others feel they are unloveable. You may not like or love what they did, but you still love them, no matter what. That kind of love is deep, and that bond can not be shaken or broken. It was love that caused Jesus to go willingly to the cross to die for us.



*We give thanks to you, Lord,
for your mercy and grace
endure forever and ever.*

Amen

**Friday
April 10, 2020
Good Friday**

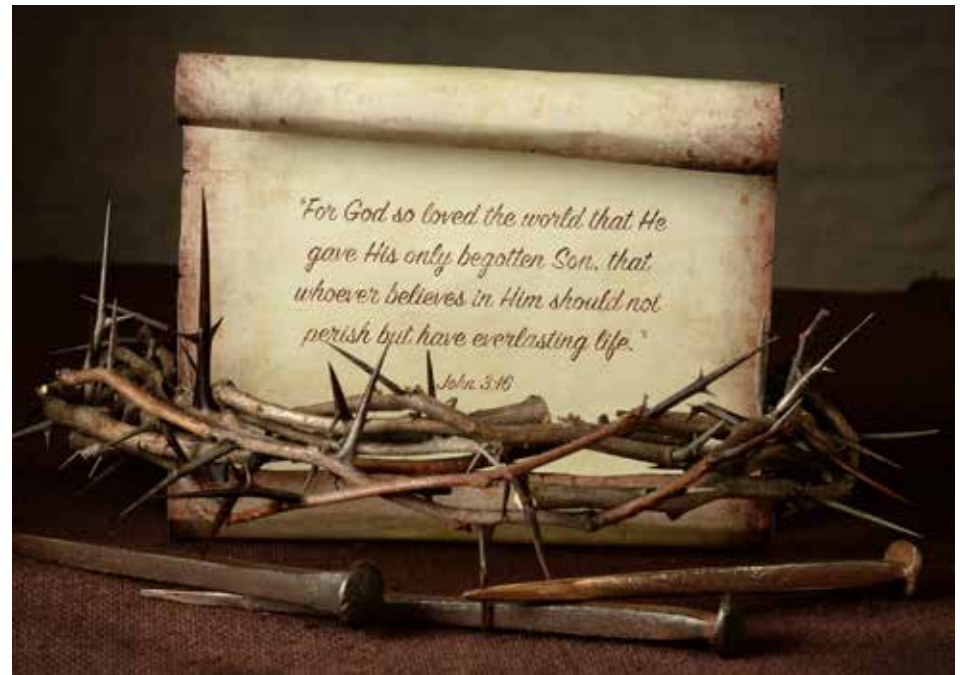
Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

John 18:10-11 NRSV

It is frightening to realize that, if Peter had his way, the chosen course of Jesus would have been altered. Without consulting with Jesus, or anyone else, Peter drew his sword and sought to initiate a battle. He must have believed that the other disciples would join in. Otherwise, he would have to know that the Roman soldiers could have killed him without bringing him to trial.

The most disturbing aspect of this scene is that Peter sought to lead, even with Jesus present. The soldiers came in search of Jesus. Jesus was talking with them about letting the disciples alone, since it was Jesus who they came for. The actions of Peter are in disregard of the preferred plan of Jesus. The next words attributed to Peter are the denial that he was one of Jesus' disciples, or that he even knew him.

I would be afraid to view the record of the number of times that I sought to substitute my plan in place of Jesus' plan. When we consider how soon,



how big, at what cost, and under whose leadership we are all guilty of taking charge when God has things in hand. How can we be called disciples if we fail to follow?

Guiding Lord,

Forgive us for our attempts to lead you. Call us to true discipleship, that trusts you to guide us even when we do not understand or agree. Your record justifies such faith in you,

In Compliance,

Amen

**Saturday
April 11, 2020
Holy Saturday**

The thought of my affliction and my homelessness is wormwood and gall! My soul continually thinks of it and is bowed down within me. But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope: The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. "The LORD

is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

Lamentations 3:19-24 NRSV

The writer of this passage seems to be troubled by many things. His soul is not at peace. Thinking about whatever is going on in his life, leaves him in deep despair. At this pivotal moment, he is able to recognize the remedial capacities of the Lord.

Many of us struggle with conflicting situations from day to day. Sometimes there are so many; our souls are not at peace. The peace we seek and need just does not come. It may sometimes feel like our troubles are like worms eating away at our spirits, keeping us in turmoil. At those times, there is no peace.

We must remember that God is there with us, especially during those times when our troubles overwhelm us. God is our fortress and our hope. Though the outlook is bleak, God is a God of possibilities, especially during our darkest nights. God is still at work.



With God, our breakthrough is coming. It is God that makes the sun rise in the morning and refreshes our spirits and gives us hope.

Morning by morning, new mercies you provide. Great is your faithfulness. Thank you, Lord.

Amen

**Sunday
April 12, 2020
Easter Sunday
(Resurrection Day)**

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."

John 20:1-2 NRSV

At last! The day that we have long awaited has arrived. The season of Lent has come to an end. Jesus has risen. We are free. Our sins have been paid for, in full.

The statements above are representative of what we should expect to hear from one another. Instead, we are hearing about new suits and fancy hats. Great care has gone into baking hams and concocting green bean casseroles. Our pancake breakfast will likely attract more attendees than our sunrise service. Were we awaiting a festival of activities or salvation through our savior?

On the day that the tomb was found empty, it seems that everybody was caught off guard. The women went to pay tribute to the dead. The disciples were moving on with their lives. They had to be located. Nobody seems to recall the several ways that Jesus told them what would be

accomplished on this morning. With all the preparing that Jesus provided, nobody was ready for Easter.

Are we ready for Easter? Did we find Lent too long or too demanding? Are we now joining the women at the tomb, in asking "where have they laid him?" We will not receive an answer. Our question is the wrong one. The question for us to ask and the answer is "where have WE laid him?"

Redeeming God,

You have spent eternity doing what you do for us. We will and must spend our lives doing what we do, in your name. Jesus has taught us and equipped us. Let us now hear your call and heed it. Nothing can stop us but us.

In Your Glory,

Amen

About the Authors

The Lenten meditations for 2020 are again provided by the Rev. Dr. Betty M. Green and the Rev. Dr. Irvin W. Green. They have had many occasions during more than 47 years of marriage and 32 years of ministry to collaborate on projects. They have presented workshops, participated in worship services, and on multiple occasions, offered Lenten or Advent resources for Disciples Home Missions. The opportunity to offer these reflections continues to be a profound honor.

Betty Miller Green is the founder and executive director of Beyond Sunday Morning Inc., a ministry formed to help to prepare congregations and their leaders to provide better pastoral care to those who have been abused. She also serves as the Associate Pastor of Woodland Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Columbus, Ohio. She has been called upon to preach or present for congregations in Ohio, Michigan, Kentucky, Kansas, Illinois, and others. She has also presented for the Capital Region, at their annual Salt and Light conference.

Irvin W. Green is the pastor of Central Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Kettering, Ohio. He has served 11 congregations in five regions. Three of his pastorates were as an Interim Pastor, for which he was trained by the Interim Ministry Network. Dr. Green has mentored dozens of ministers and ministry students and continues to regard offering guidance and encouragement to be central to his own calling.





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