

# Journeying Together To the Cross

*A Lenten Devotional Written by the faithful  
in Fauquier County and beyond*



## **An Invitation to Journey Together to the Cross**

The last two years have been more than challenging on so many levels, and one of the unfortunate results has been a separation of people. People on opposite sides of the political spectrum separate from one another. Masking, distancing, and quarantining have separated us. Even in church, we now have hybrid worship which connects us across space, but many have not returned to in person worship gatherings. But it is Lent, and Lent is a time when God's people are united in a common purpose, which is to repent, be more intentional to set us aside time for spiritual disciplines, and for many to hold a fast. We do this to prepare for Christ's death and resurrection.

In response to the separation we all experience, Carl Chapman and I realized that maybe God is inviting our community to be united in a different way this year. So we put together this Lenten Devotion, which we hope will help shape a meaningful Lent for you. Included are writers from thirteen churches all located within or close to Fauquier County, as well as representatives of different ethnicities and denominations, but all seek to walk more closely with the Lord.

Each devotion includes the name of the writer, what church they attend, a scripture to reflect upon, then a devotional reflection and prayer. Included are each day of Lent, including Sundays.

We hope that you will pause each day to read, reflect, and pray, knowing that we all *Journey together to the Cross*.

Tim Tate and Carl Chapman, Pastors, Warrenton United Methodist Church

**Joel 2:12-17 (New Revised Standard Version)**

*<sup>12</sup> Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> Who 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?*

*<sup>15</sup> Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; <sup>16</sup>gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. <sup>17</sup> Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the Lord, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O Lord, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations.*

*Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"*

**(Re)Turning Together towards the Cross**

Call me odd or simply Presbyterian (perhaps one and the same!), but I love Ash Wednesday. As the first day of Lent, this day offers an opportunity for repentance and spiritual renewal as we begin our journey to the cross and the empty tomb. The problem is that we're pointed in the wrong direction! Our brokenness, our egos, our idolatry—basically our sin keeps us from finding our way on our own.

This is the reality of the prophet Joel in our reading above. To be honest, Joel paints a gloomy outlook for the people of Israel, but not one without hope. After outlining just how bleak it is for Israel, he offers a prophetic invitation on God's behalf: "Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart." (v.12) The main word in the Old Testament for repentance is this word, return (Hebrew word, *shuv*). It signifies a dramatic change of direction—to turn away from the things that separate us from God and one another—that we might draw nearer to God and neighbor.

In this time of pandemic exhaustion and bitter division on just about every issue under the sun, perhaps Lent can be a time where we might "return" together towards the cross and the empty tomb. Joel reminds us that no matter how separated we might feel from God and one another, there is still hope for our collective "return." May we do so with honesty and humility as we take these first steps of repentance and renewal towards Jerusalem.

**Prayer (adapted from selected verses from Psalm 51, NRSV)**

<sup>1</sup> Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. <sup>2</sup> Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. <sup>10</sup> Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. <sup>11</sup> Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. <sup>12</sup> Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. Amen.



### **Acts 7:30-34**

*30 "After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: 32 'I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.' Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look. 33 "Then the Lord said to him, 'Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.'*

### **Devotion**

At the age of about 80, Moses leaves his wife and child to follow God's command - *Now come I will send you back to Egypt.* Does God have to show his presence to you through a burning bush before you listen? God talks to us all the time. Do we stop our busy lives to listen for his voice?

Many people only talk to God when something bad is happening in their lives but God is our Abba Father and loves us all the time and is concerned about our welfare. Don't be like the Nation of Judah in Isaiah 66 when God said *...for when I called no one answered, when I spoke no one listened.* We need to listen for God, sometimes delivered through his promptings, and then respond to his direction like Moses did. God is with you every hour of the day. Listen for his voice and respond to his commands.

### **Prayer**

Almighty God, when I realize that Jesus' paid the price of my adoption into your family and gave me the right to come to you as Abba Father, I am awestruck and amazed. Moses' reaction should be my own and you placed your spirit inside me and long for me to call you Father. So now, even as I pray this prayer, I bow in your presence to thank you, worship you and fall at your feet in love. I'm a little child at the feet of Papa, the almighty God who is my Father. Thank you forever. Amen.



**First Friday in Lent — March 4, 2022 — Lori Bakewell; Warrenton UMC**

**Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16**

*1 Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.*

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

*9 If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling,*

*10 no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.*

*11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways;*

*12 they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.*

*13 You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.*

*14 "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him; I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.*

*15 He will call on me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.*

*16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."*

**Devotion**

A child cries out in fear or pain and those who protect him respond. The cry is instinctive and the response equally so. A child calls and trusts that the adult will answer.

As adults, we yearn for someone who comes when we call, who can make it all okay just by showing up. God offers us that presence. His love is faithful and his response when we call is immediate. All we need to do is acknowledge his refuge. All we need to do is trust and call out. How simple. How beautiful. How oddly challenging.

Somewhere between childhood and adulthood we lose the confidence that allows us to call out and believe we are heard, we are loved, and our cries will be answered. Our busy lives include many demands and expectations. What must we do for our families, for our jobs, for our friends, our communities, our world? The list is long and we grow tired of juggling and figuring. Our buckets empty but still we must pour. We know God is there, at least in theory. But surely he must want something from us as well.

And so he does. God wants us to love him. He wants us to trust him and call on him and when we do, he wants us to know that he will always answer. Holding this as our truth, we can go through life with God's name on our lips. In our joy or fear, triumph or downfall, quiet or chaos, God responds to our call. When we bring his name into every aspect of our day, we deepen the relationship that leads to our salvation.

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we trust in your grace and protection. Help us hold your name in our hearts and minds every moment of every day. All you ask is that we acknowledge you as our refuge and our dwelling. You want our love, Lord, and in return you give us salvation. Thank you, Lord, for coming when we call. Amen.



## **First Saturday in Lent — March 5, 2022 — Ed Jones; St James Episcopal Church**

### **Ecclesiastes 3:1-8**

- 1 There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens:*  
*2 a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,*  
*3 a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,*  
*4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,*  
*5 a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing,*  
*6 a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,*  
*7 a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,*  
*8 a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.*

### **Devotion**

In these eight verses from the Book of Ecclesiastes, the author (probably King Solomon) describes an ordering of life events that we all experience and on which we depend. These passages offer assurance that human life is not a sequence of random occurrences but an orderly pattern which reflects the direction and oversight of a guiding presence. “A season for every activity under the heavens.”

What does it mean to say that there is a time for everything, especially with respect to conditions which are direct opposites: “A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot...?” All life conditions are impermanent --in our individual lives and in the world around us. We live in constant change. The night is dark, but dawn always comes.

Different events pose different challenges, but I am learning to trust the rhythm of life with an assurance that this trajectory is steered by something greater than myself. I sense a grounding force that almost always offers the potential for growth and development. Most things that have happened in my life, welcomed and unwelcomed, have provided this opportunity.

The intersection of changing times and opportunities for growth does not happen by accident. The pattern is too intricate and too dependable. I am not in control and I don't always understand. But I am not alone. I am part of something much larger than myself. My time—our time—is in God's hands.

### **Prayer**

God...Master of time...Help us to trust the big picture of your creation as we try to manage the ebb and flow of our own times. Give us the ability to place individual events in a broader perspective and to anticipate and accept change that we may not always understand. Grant us the wisdom to accept that all life experiences provide opportunities for growth-- which can lead to lives of deeper commitment and service. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen





**Luke 4:1-13** (mainly vs. 9-12) NRSV

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. ... <sup>9</sup>Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

**Safe with God**

"He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you," always reminds me of when I visited a church member in the hospital. A few weeks earlier—while volunteering at church no less!—an aneurysm in her brain had burst. Although she was not doing great, she was so improved that we all started to have hope that she would pull through.

I was lucky that my visit coincided with two other pastors in her life—a dear friend and her sister. She needed some Coke to wake up enough to know someone was there, but it wore her out, and she fell back to sleep. As the rest of us prayed, I started a song from the bulletin I brought along. As we got to the refrain, "And he will raise you up on eagle's wings," without opening her eyes and still confused, she joined in in the song! In her heart she was using that song to fight for her life, clinging to the promises of God. It made her feel safe.

It is ironic that the devil chose this scripture to test Jesus, for by quoting it God's Son was reminded that God would protect him. Whether physical or spiritual protection were needed, God's angels would surround him and raise him up. It's almost as if the devil gave him the answer key to the test! He was safe!

We know that trust in God does not mean we will never suffer hardship, trials, or physical death. However, trust does mean we have confidence that when we do face them, God is with us, sheltering us and keeping us close.

**Prayer**

Jesus, as we journey to the cross together, remind us that we are safe with God, no matter what we face. Amen.



## **1 John 2:1-6 New International Version**

*1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world. 3 We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. 4 Whoever says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: 6 Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.*

## **Devotion**

We all come to Jesus as innocent, little children. The little children refers to all the members of the family of God, however as we mature, we are influenced by the ways of the world and we sin. John says that sin is universal, and if anyone says they have not sinned is a liar. There is forgiveness of sins through what Christ Jesus has done, and still does. It is said, “If anyone sins, we have an Advocate, it is the provision in case of need. There is Christ’s perfect provision for us, and there is the Holy Spirit’s perfect provision in us.” We have often seen the bumper sticker, “Christians are forgiven, not perfect.” The bumper sticker seems to say, “God accepts me, faults and all, so you need to accept me, too!” John does not write so that his readers have justification for their sin, but that they might conquer sin. Although Christian sin, they can conquer sin, “so they you may not sin.” If we practice sin, we will become more proficient in it. That is how we were before we received Jesus as our Savior. John’s desire is that his readers will not sin at the point of temptation. Although believers are not free from sin, they can overcome sin. God cannot condone sin in the least degree, and so He set perfection before us as the goal, “Go and sin no more!”

## **Prayer**

Lord, I am in that place again, laying my life out before you. Thank you that on the cross you cried “It is finished”. You have done it, forgiveness is complete. I can live forever in your grace, forever in your love. The power and the glory are always and forever yours. Amen



**Zechariah 3: 1-10 (ESV) A Vision of Joshua the High Priest**

*Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. 2 And the Lord said to Satan, "The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" 3 Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. 4 And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." 5 And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord was standing by.*

*6 And the angel of the Lord solemnly assured Joshua, 7 "Thus says the Lord of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. 8 Hear now, O Joshua the high priest, you and your friends who sit before you, for they are men who are a sign: behold, I will bring my servant the Branch. 9 For behold, on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes. I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day. 10 In that day, declares the Lord of hosts, every one of you will invite his neighbor to come under his vine and under his fig tree."*

**Devotion**

My parents were products of the Great Depression and remembered times of hardship. They both believed in the adage "clothes make the man" and always paid careful attention to the attire of those they met. They believed that dressing well was both a sign of authority and respect to those around you. When I entered the professional work world, they impressed upon me to use my early paychecks to dress well for work.

In chapter 3 of Zechariah, we find the amazing vision of Joshua in the presence of The Lord, Angels and Satan. Joshua, the High Priest of Israel stands before God as if a common criminal for his personal sins as well as the sins of the people. Satan the accuser seizes on the filthy garments that Joshua is wearing a symbolic representation of his sin. The true believer does not come to judgement unrepresented. The Angel of the Lord removes the filthy garments and replaces them with pure vestments topped by a clean turban. In this action God has forgiven and removed all sin from him. Satan has no response.

The story of redemption in Zechariah is a foretelling of the power of Christ to stand with us before in Heaven and remove all our sin through the grace of his sacrifice. It is said in the book of Revelation that we will be adorned in heavenly clothes. Regardless of poverty or wealth on earth, all in heaven will be appropriately clothed in the righteousness of God.

**Prayer**

Lord thank you for your atoning sacrifice on the cross that enables the believer to stand in the presence of the Holy Lord confident in eternal life. Amen





## Wednesday— Week 1—March 9, 2022; Ashley Smith; Warrenton UMC

### **Job 1: 1- , 13-22**

*There was once a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil. 2 There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. 3 He had seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred donkeys, and very many servants; so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east. 4 His sons used to go and hold feasts in one another's houses in turn; and they would send and invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. 5 And when the feast days had run their course, Job would send and sanctify them, and he would rise early in the morning and offer burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, "It may be that my children have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts." This is what Job always did One day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in the eldest brother's house, 14 a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were feeding beside them, 15 and the Sabeans fell on them and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." 16 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them; I alone have escaped to tell you." 17 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three columns, made a raid on the camels and carried them off, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; I alone have escaped to tell you." 18 While he was still speaking, another came and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house, 19 and suddenly a great wind came across the desert, struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; I alone have escaped to tell you." 20 Then Job arose, tore his robe, shaved his head, and fell on the ground and worshiped. 21 He said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord." 22 In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrongdoing.*

### **Devotion**

In today's world we have been given many blessings from God. By most of the world's standards, in America we are blessed with one of the highest standards of living in the world. A roof over our heads, transportation, access to good food, healthcare and clean water. And cellphones that fit in our hands that are more powerful than early computers that filled an entire room.

Yet, sometimes it feels like God does things or let things happen that test our faith. Wars, natural disasters, sickness, divorce, drug and alcohol abuse, loss of a job, death. Why does God do this?

Job was blessed by God with an abundance of livestock, wealth and many sons and daughters. In the story of Job, God lets Satan test the faith of Job by taking all of these things from him. Even after losing all of his livestock, servants, and his children, Job still fell to the ground to worship God!

The book of Job doesn't answer the question of why God lets bad things happen to good people. This is something we can't know or understand. But we can know that God loves us and will help us endure even that pain and suffering which it seems like we can't overcome. Even though we can't understand "Why?", we can learn to accept that life is unfair and difficult. And from there, build our lives back stronger and more faithful. Just like Job.

### **Prayer**

Dear Lord, Help me to know that you love and support me, even though I don't understand why I am going through pain and suffering. You give and you take away, and may the name of the Lord be praised. Amen.



**Psalms 27 A song of David.**

*27 LORD, you are my Light and my Savior, so why should I be afraid of anyone?*

*The LORD is where my life is safe, so I will be afraid of no one!*

*2 Evil people might attack me. They might try to destroy my body.*

*Yes, my enemies might attack me and try to destroy me, but they will stumble and fall.*

*3 Even if an army surrounds me, I will not be afraid. Even if people attack me in war, I will trust in the Lord.*

*4 I ask only one thing from the LORD. This is what I want most:*

*Let me live in the LORD's house all my life, enjoying the LORD's beauty  
and spending time in his palace.<sup>[a]</sup>*

*5 He will protect me when I am in danger. He will hide me in his tent.<sup>[b]</sup>*

*He will take me up to his place of safety.*

*6 If he will help me defeat the enemies around me,  
I will offer sacrifices in his tent with shouts of joy.  
I will sing and play songs to honor the LORD.*

*7 LORD, hear my voice. Be kind and answer me.*

*8 My heart told me to come to you, LORD, so I am coming to ask for your help.*

*9 Don't turn away from me. Don't be angry with your servant.*

*You are the only one who can help me. My God, don't leave me all alone. You are my Savior.*

*10 Even if my mother and father leave me, the LORD will take me in.*

*11 I have enemies, LORD, so teach me your ways. Show me the right way to live.*

*12 My enemies have attacked me. They have told lies about me and have tried to hurt me.*

*13 But I really believe that I will see the LORD's goodness before I die.*

*14 Wait for the LORD's help. Be strong and brave, and wait for the LORD's help.*

**Devotion**

What's for you is for you. If it be the will of God, your prayers will be answered. I am a living testimony of the goodness of the Lord. A few years ago, our dog, Sadie, died, I immediately started checking out the SPCA Website. I found a cut dog named Izzy. I showed her photo to my husband, he didn't like her. One day when I was in the grocery store, I picked up a conversation with a lady in the line with me. We talked about dogs. I told her that we had lost our dog named, Sadie. She said, "Oh my God, that's my dogs name too". We exchanged numbers and that was it. A few weeks later this woman calls me and she's hysterical over the phone saying "come get her she almost got hit by a car." She calmed down long enough to make arrangements to come to our house that weekend. So, the weekend arrives and she brings Sadie to us. I'm thinking this is just an introduction. Nope, she brings everything that the dog had; bed, food, toys, water and food pans and even dog food. Well, my husband couldn't say no because he felt bad for the ladies' children. So, we got her. One day, I was going over Sadie's papers so we could take her to our vet. I saw all paperwork for Sadie and then there was more documents that had the same information as Sadie; but under the name of Izzy; the same dog from the SPCA. It was a confirmation to me that God is still in control. He does listen to our prayers. He will answer our prayers in His time, not our time. We must wait on the Lord, be of good cheer, because Jesus has already overcome the world. We must spend quality time in daily devotion with the Lord. And be a willing servant for the Lord.

**PRAYER**

*Lord, I thank you for loving me so much that you gave up your only begotten Son as a living sacrifice, to take upon the sins of the world while being nailed to a Roman Cross. Jesus died so that we would be free from the sting of death and have an everlasting life. Lord create in me a clean heart so that I can live a life of obedience to you word and to your will. I pray that all people of this universe will come to understand that there is only one true God and it is you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.*



## **Friday – Week 1 — March 11, 2022: Jae Valentin; Warrenton UMC**

### **Psalm 27**

- <sup>1</sup> *The LORD is my light and my salvation— whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life— of whom shall I be afraid?*
- <sup>2</sup> *When the wicked advance against me to devour me, it is my enemies and my foes who will stumble and fall.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear; though war break out against me, even then I will be confident.*
- <sup>4</sup> *One thing I ask from the LORD, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the LORD and to seek him in his temple.*
- <sup>5</sup> *For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent and set me high upon a rock.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Then my head will be exalted above the enemies who surround me; at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy; I will sing and make music to the LORD.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Hear my voice when I call, LORD; be merciful to me and answer me.*
- <sup>8</sup> *My heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek.*
- <sup>9</sup> *Do not hide your face from me, do not turn your servant away in anger; you have been my helper.*  
*Do not reject me or forsake me, God my Savior.*
- <sup>10</sup> *Though my father and mother forsake me, the LORD will receive me.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Teach me your way, LORD; lead me in a straight path because of my oppressors.*
- <sup>12</sup> *Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes, for false witnesses rise up against me, spouting malicious accusations.*
- <sup>13</sup> *I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the LORD in the land of the living.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.*

### **Devotion**

Have you ever had a storm come up out of nowhere that you were completely unprepared for--- without an umbrella nor appropriate clothing? Sometimes in our lives, storms come and take us by surprise. They are not the kind that require rain gear, but they are the kind that will bring us to our knees. These storms might look like the betrayal of a friend, a crisis at home, or the scary diagnosis for a loved one. What do we do in these difficult times? We are to keep our eyes and hearts fixed on the Lord, remembering God and all his faithfulness. These are the moments that God invites us to search within and find our joy, shelter, and peace in Him. There is a God offering us unlimited and unmerited grace and he meets us in our moments of darkness and difficulty. He is worth running to. He is worth waiting for. He brings rest when there is no rest to be found. We were not made to make our way through this world on our own and we don't have to. David knew these truths about God: He is a God who knows us and sees us and He is not oblivious to our pain and struggles. David trusted that when he cried out to God for help, the help would come! He found comfort while he was hiding from his enemies. Let us find comfort in our Lord today as we rest in the shadow of his wings.

### **Prayer**

O Lord my God, thank you that you know my every need. You have promised that you will give strength to us when we are weary. Please help me to draw on your strength as I feel weak, to receive your healing when I feel pain, and to know your comfort in the midst of my trials. You are the God of endurance and encouragement. Help me to live in perfect harmony with you and glorify you with my thoughts, words and deeds. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.



**Psalm 27: 1-14 NLV**

*27 The Lord is my light and the One Who saves me. Whom should I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life. Of whom should I be afraid? 2 When sinful men, and all who hated me, came against me to destroy my flesh, they tripped and fell. 3 Even if an army gathers against me, my heart will not be afraid. Even if war rises against me, I will be sure of You. 4 One thing I have asked from the Lord, that I will look for: that I may live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to look upon the beauty of the Lord, and to worship in His holy house. 5 For in the day of trouble He will keep me safe in His holy tent. In the secret place of His tent He will hide me. He will set me high upon a rock. 6 Then my head will be lifted up above all those around me who hate me. I will give gifts in His holy tent with a loud voice of joy. I will sing. Yes, I will sing praises to the Lord. 7 O Lord, listen to my cry. Show loving-kindness to me and answer me. 8 You have said, "Look for My face." My heart said to You, "O Lord, Your face will I look for." 9 Do not hide Your face from me. Do not turn Your servant away in anger. You have been my Helper. Do not turn away from me or leave me alone, O God Who saves me! 10 For my father and my mother have left me. But the Lord will take care of me. 11 Teach me Your way, O Lord. Lead me in a straight path, because of those who fight against me. 12 Do not give me over to the desire of those who hate me. For people who tell lies about me rise against me, and breathe a desire to hurt me. 13 I would have been without hope if I had not believed that I would see the loving-kindness of the Lord in the land of the living. 14 Wait for the Lord. Be strong. Let your heart be strong. Yes, wait for the Lord.*

**Psalm 118:26-29 KJV**

*26 Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord: we have blessed you out of the house of the Lord. 27 God is the Lord, which hath shewed us light: bind the sacrifice with cords, even unto the horns of the altar. 28 Thou art my God, and I will praise thee: thou art my God, I will exalt thee. 29 O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever.*

**Devotion**

Life is and can be quite a voyage. As we pass through this life, many obstacles could and should bring us to a lovely, and "peculiar" place of greater spiritual discovery. When our backs seem to be against the wall, friends turn and walk away, loved ones betray us and life is filled with uncertainties, our heavenly Father will NEVER, ever leave us.

Worry not, God can and will rescue us. When the storms of life are raging out of control, We MUST keep holding on!

**Prayer**

Dear sovereign Father, thank you for being omnipresent and omniscient. Thank you for keeping a shield of protection around our minds, bodies, and our spirits. We're not deserving of your Grace, yet appreciative for all you've done. Master, teach us to be a greater reflection of who you are so that others will see YOUR LIGHT shining through us! Lord, guide our thoughts, and all of our ways. Help us to trust YOU completely with assurance of your unconditional love and acceptance.

Please forgive our moments of doubt and unbelief. Father, allow us to progress forward



**Matthew 23:37**

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*

**Devotion**

I can never hear this passage without thinking of theologian and pastor, Barbara Brown Taylor's honest and beautiful assessment of Jesus's choice of metaphors.

She writes, "Given the number of animals available, it is curious that Jesus chooses a hen. Where is the biblical precedent for that? What about the mighty eagle of Exodus, or Hosea's stealthy leopard? What about the proud lion of Judah, mowing down his enemies with a roar? Compared to any of those, a mother hen does not inspire much confidence. No wonder some of the chicks decided to go with the fox.

The mother hen has no fangs, no claws, no rippling muscles. All she has is her willingness to shield her babies with her own body. If the fox wants them, he will have to kill her first.

Which he does, as it turns out. He slides up on her one night in the yard while all the babies are asleep. When her cry wakens them, they scatter. She dies the next day where both foxes and chickens can see her -- wings spread, breast exposed -- without a single chick beneath her feathers. It breaks her heart, but it does not change a thing. If you mean what you say, then this is how you stand."

She is right, it is a peculiar and perfectly beautiful image of where and to whom this journey is taking us. We are heading toward that exposed breast, those open wings. We walk carrying the wholeness of our lives toward that hen that offers all that she has, a ferocious love that desires nothing more than us, to protect us, to envelop us, to save us. We walk toward Jesus who "stretched out (his) arms of love on the hard wood of the cross that everyone might come within the reach of your saving embrace." (Book of Common Prayer pg. 101).

**Prayer**

Lord Jesus, the image of your outstretched arms overwhelms and saves us. Prepare us to look, give thanks, and receive the fullness of Your Grace. Amen





## **Romans 4: 1-12**

*1-3 So how do we fit what we know of Abraham, our first father in the faith, into this new way of looking at things? If Abraham, by what he did for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken credit for it. But the story we're given is a God-story, not an Abraham-story. What we read in Scripture is, "Abraham entered into what God was doing for him, and that was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own."*

*4-5 If you're a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don't call your wages a gift. But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it's something only God can do, and you trust him to do it—you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked—well, that trusting-him-to-do-it is what gets you set right with God, by God. Sheer gift.*

*6-9 David confirms this way of looking at it, saying that the one who trusts God to do the putting-everything-right without insisting on having a say in it is one fortunate man:*

*Fortunate those whose crimes are whisked away, whose sins are wiped clean from the slate. Fortunate the person against whom the Lord does not keep score.*

*Do you think for a minute that this blessing is only pronounced over those of us who keep our religious ways and are circumcised? Or do you think it possible that the blessing could be given to those who never even heard of our ways, who were never brought up in the disciplines of God? We all agree, don't we, that it was by embracing what God did for him that Abraham was declared fit before God?*

*10-11 Now think: Was that declaration made before or after he was marked by the covenant rite of circumcision? That's right, before he was marked. That means that he underwent circumcision as evidence and confirmation of what God had done long before to bring him into this acceptable standing with himself, an act of God he had embraced with his whole life.*

*12 And it means further that Abraham is father of all people who embrace what God does for them while they are still on the "outs" with God, as yet unidentified as God's, in an "uncircumcised" condition. It is precisely these people in this condition who are called "set right by God and with God"! Abraham is also, of course, father of those who have undergone the religious rite of circumcision not just because of the ritual but because they were willing to live in the risky faith-embrace of God's action for them, the way Abraham lived long before he was marked by circumcision.*

## **Devotion**

I love acronyms and never would have gotten through nursing school without them. When I read Romans 4: 1-12, F.R.O.G. comes to mind: **Fully Rely On God**. Abraham and David fully relied on God and trusted God throughout their lives. David's life had many triumphs and screw ups. David truly loved God and David trusted and relied on the grace of God. David trusted God to put everything right. We, as imperfect people, going to perfection as Wesley likes to put it, are "fortunate that God does not keep score" and God wipes away our sins. Each day we get up and try again with a clean slate. Now continue on (verse 10-12) and imagine you were reading this message from Paul in 56 AD (very early days of the church) and Paul says God is the God of all people, circumcised or uncircumcised, perfect and imperfect. Circumcision was an important ritual talked about in Genesis but Paul reminds us that Abraham was not circumcised until he was his 90's. No ritual or act makes you more chosen or right with God than anyone else. The thing that makes to right with God is to fully rely on him, trust him and give HIM credit.

## **Prayer**

*Dear God,*

*All we have to do each day is rely on YOUR strength, truth and ability, give YOU credit for all we do. Your grace extends to us and everyone single person we meet. We are far from perfect but you love us anyway.—Amen*



## **1 Corinthians 10:1-13**

*For I do not want you to be ignorant of the fact, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud and that they all passed through the sea. <sup>2</sup> They were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. <sup>3</sup> They all ate the same spiritual food <sup>4</sup> and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. <sup>7</sup> Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” <sup>9</sup> We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. <sup>9</sup> We should not test Christ, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. <sup>10</sup> And do not grumble, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel.*

*<sup>11</sup> These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. <sup>12</sup> So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! <sup>13</sup> No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.*

## **DEVOTION**

How has God been faithful to you? Have you been provided with heat in the cold? Have you escaped a serious injury or death and known that God has intervened? Have you heard a kind word from a stranger on a difficult day? These are all blessings from God designed to support you and keep you safe for His purposes.

In I Corinthians 10: 1-13, Paul reminds the church at Corinth of the blessings that the Israelites received from God. He reminds them that God was angry at the Israelites for their lack of faith and failure to resist temptation. Those lacking faith and those who succumbed to temptation were punished by God. Paul tells the Corinthians that these events should serve as a warning to their church.

God provides all that we need and blesses us each day. Each of us is faced with temptation, and at that time we need to remember the faithful love and support that our Lord provides. With God’s help we can all resist evil. He has promised that none of us will be tempted beyond what we are able to bear, and He will always provide a way out so that the temptation can be endured.

**Prayer** *Lord, as we focus on the period of Lent, help us to remember all of the blessings that you have provided for us, especially the ultimate blessing – Your Son, a sacrifice for our sins. Amen.*



**Luke 12:22-31**-(Verse 25 and focus of this devotion): **“I do not know where you come from...”**

**Devotion: So, where do you come from?**

This is a seemingly simple question derived from a “Kingdom of God parable” in Luke’s gospel that Jesus uses on **His final journey** into Jerusalem. Jesus addresses this parable and question to a very diverse group of people- some are gentiles, some are fellow Jews, some are self-righteous religious leaders, some are outcasts in Israel, and all are sinners of all shapes and sizes. It is question **we all** have likely been asked many times in our “faith and life journey” as well.

I wonder if we really remember “where we come from?” and “where we are going?” regardless of who we are?

Regardless how you answer these questions, God knows who you are, and where you come from! And in spite being broken and lost on your journey at times- you are precious to God- as you are God’s beloved and you are God’s very own children! And there is not a single moment in your life that God has not been right beside you on your journey, and more importantly- God has already decided “where you are going! – that’s why Jesus made the final journey from Galilee to the cross in Jerusalem “so that” we might be **given the gifts** of the Kingdom of God: always **forgiven**, always **loved**, forever **redeemed**, and given the **promise** that our journey will end being with Jesus, and all the Saints, in God’s Heavenly Kingdom forever!

**Prayer**

Holy God, thank you for your journey to the cross that enables our journey to your eternal heavenly Kingdom! Amen



**Daniel 3:19-30**

*<sup>19</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar was furious with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and his attitude toward them changed. He ordered the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual <sup>20</sup> and commanded some of the strongest soldiers in his army to tie up Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego and throw them into the blazing furnace.*

*<sup>21</sup> So these men, wearing their robes, trousers, turbans, and other clothes, were bound, and thrown into the blazing furnace. <sup>22</sup> The king's command was so urgent and the furnace so hot that the flames of the fire killed the soldiers who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, <sup>23</sup> and these three men, firmly tied, fell into the blazing furnace.*

*<sup>24</sup> Then King Nebuchadnezzar leaped to his feet in amazement and asked his advisers, "Weren't there three men that we tied up and threw into the fire?" They replied, "Certainly, Your Majesty." <sup>25</sup> He said, "Look! I see four men walking around in the fire, unbound and unharmed, and the fourth looks like a son of the gods."*

*<sup>26</sup> Nebuchadnezzar then approached the opening of the blazing furnace and shouted, "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, servants of the Most High God, come out! Come here!" So, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego came out of the fire, <sup>27</sup> and the satraps, prefects, governors, and royal advisers crowded around them. They saw that the fire had not harmed their bodies, nor was a hair of their heads singed; their robes were not scorched, and there was no smell of fire on them.*

*<sup>28</sup> Then Nebuchadnezzar said, "Praise be to the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who has sent his angel and rescued his servants! They trusted in him and defied the king's command and were willing to give up their lives rather than serve or worship any god except their own God.*

*<sup>29</sup> Therefore I decree that the people of any nation or language who say anything against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego be cut into pieces and their houses be turned into piles of rubble, for no other god can save in this way."*

*<sup>30</sup> Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.*

**Devotion**

In the fiery furnace of life, we are inundated daily with news of economic instability, political unrest, and social injustice. The fires in life leave us feeling anxious, depressed, and hopeless. The enemy capitalizes on these feelings by telling us that we are alone, and God has abandoned us, instilling fear, and spiritual insecurity. We must reflect on the three Hebrew men who were thrown in the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar. They had faith and confidence that God was able to deliver them "unburnt" and "unhurt" from the fire. They were not alone. God sent them an intercessor, Jesus Christ to walk with them through the flames. The Father knew we needed a Savior, Immanuel, to intercede on our behalf. God so loved the world he sent his only son so that we have eternal life and salvation. God is with us through Jesus. He will never forsake or abandon us in our times of need. God's grace and mercy is sufficient to get us through life's trials and tribulations.

**Prayer**

Lord, we do not have to live in fear, because we have faith that you are with us through Jesus who bore the cross so we would have grace and mercy. Amen



**Psalms 63, 1-8**

*A psalm of David. When he was in the Desert of Judah.*

- <sup>1</sup> *You, God, are my God,  
earnestly I seek you;  
I thirst for you,  
my whole being longs for you,  
in a dry and parched land  
where there is no water.*
- <sup>2</sup> *I have seen you in the sanctuary  
and beheld your power and your glory.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Because your love is better than life,  
my lips will glorify you.*
- <sup>4</sup> *I will praise you as long as I live,  
and in your name I will lift up my hands.*
- <sup>5</sup> *I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods;  
with singing lips my mouth will praise you.*
- <sup>6</sup> *On my bed I remember you;  
I think of you through the watches of the night.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Because you are my help,  
I sing in the shadow of your wings.*
- <sup>8</sup> *I cling to you;  
your right hand upholds me.*

**Devotion**

Lent is a time we examine our faith at a deeper level. It is a journey, and we are on it together. It is an opportunity. Today's reading is from Psalms. The Psalms were songs, and used often in rituals. This book is a window to an ancient faith ceremony. This particular Psalm, is called the morning song. It was sung for hundreds of years at first service. I was critical of myself when I first read this chapter. Do I really praise God's name, morning to night? Do I really thirst with my whole being? We often see self-help headlines on to improve. The consistent guidance is to start your day right, by exercising and healthy eating. Mediating on the word of God should be included. Finding the time and motivation is difficult. This Psalm is a short, and time tested, self-help to start the day. Reread this song in the morning. These words begin by setting your day's priority, that we should pursue God. The middle of the reading affirms that this pursuit will bring love and fulfillment. The end of the reading reassures, that God holds us in the palm of his hand. This Lent season, as we journey to the cross together, let us strive to start each day with these words. It is a compass that points in the direction of Christ. The steps lead to our purpose.

**Prayer**

Heavenly Father, we praise and trust, that if we follow your lead, our lives will be a blessing. Please help us to walk in the footsteps of your way, today. In Christ name we name, Amen.





**Psalm 63                    A Psalm of David, when he was in the Wilderness of Judah.**

*1 O God, you are my God, I seek you,  
my soul thirsts for you;  
my flesh faints for you,  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.*

*2 So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,  
beholding your power and glory.*

*3 Because your steadfast love is better than life,  
my lips will praise you.*

*4 So I will bless you as long as I live;  
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.*

*5 My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast,  
and my mouth praises you with joyful lips*

*6 when I think of you on my bed,  
and meditate on you in the watches of the night;*

*7 for you have been my help,  
and in the shadow of your wings I sing for joy.*

*8 My soul clings to you;  
your right hand upholds me.*

**Devotion**

Have you ever hurt for companionship? Maybe your spouse or significant other, or even your kids, are away on a trip, and you are left at home. Maybe you are a widow or widower and rarely feel the touch of another human. Maybe your immune system is compromised and for two years have not been able to leave your home freely. Whatever the case, loneliness is real and prevalent these days, and it can be painful.

When I read this Psalm I get a sense that the Psalmist feels that same kind of pain in their yearning for God. At the same time they see how God has been faithful and present. Ultimately, they put all their trust in the Creator.

The same God is with you and me, and God yearns and hungers for us to yearn for God's presence with the same tenacity. Lent is a time to reflect on our yearnings, as well as how much God longs to walk with us.

Pause and think about where you are on a "yearning scale" with God. Then take a moment to think about how God has brought you through and provided what you have needed. Maybe you can take that yearning and that praise and turn it into your own prayer and song to God, just as the Psalmist did.

**Prayer**

Faithful God, remind us that we are never alone, then instill in us a longing and a song that Expresses our love for You, and Your love for us. Amen



**Luke 13:1-9**

*Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” <sup>6</sup> Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it but did not find any. <sup>7</sup> So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ <sup>8</sup> “‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. <sup>9</sup> If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down.’”*

**Devotion**

My Mom grew up in Germany, and the Germans have a little phrase they love to say, and that is “God is punishing you!” Usually, they say this when someone teases another person and then gets hurt. Let’s say I was teasing my sister about her outfit, and then while laughing, carelessly hit my shin hard on the coffee table. My Mom would then say, “See! God is punishing you!” Now usually it would be pretty funny when she would say this, and we’d all get a good laugh out of it. But the problem with that phrase is when it goes beyond being funny and instead becomes an actual belief that God really does punish us for our sins.

But in our reading today, Jesus assures us that God simply doesn’t act this way. He gives two examples. The first is an incident where Pilate killed a number of Jews (perhaps Zealots) who were in the act of making sacrifice at the temple. The second was a construction accident where eighteen workers were killed while building a tower in Siloam. Jesus explains that God doesn’t punish people for their sins. If that were the case, then these unlucky victims would have had to have been the worst sinners in Israel, which obviously was not the case.

In telling these stories, Jesus explains how God’s justice works. God does not punish us for our sins while we are still living. But He *will* punish us if we never come to faith and therefore die in our sins. Jesus’ advice? Repent!

In the next parable, Jesus tells a story about a vineyard owner and his caretaker who are arguing about a fig tree that wasn’t producing fruit. The owner asks the caretaker to cut the tree down, but the caretaker asks for another year to turn it around: another year to give it a chance to change its ways and bear good fruit. In the same way, we are like that bad tree, we sin, and the Bible tells that the wage for that sin is death. But luckily, we have a God of grace, a God of second chances. He won’t punish for our sin, and He won’t cut us down, rather, He pleads with us to repent, change our ways and come to faith in Him. For some people, this process may take their whole lives. But as long as we are living, it’s never too late. Because while we are alive, we still have the opportunity to turn from our sin and follow Him.

**Prayer**

Lord, we thank you for your love and your forgiveness. We know that you aren’t a God of wrath, but instead you are the God of second chances. We pray for everyone in this world who does not yet have a saving relationship with you. Change their hearts and turn them towards you Son. For it is in His name that we pray. Amen.



## **Romans 2: 1-11**

*Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. 2 You say, "We know that God's judgment on those who do such things is in accordance with truth." 3 Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God? 4 Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience? Do you not realize that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But by your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath, when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. 6 For he will repay according to each one's deeds: 7 to those who by patiently doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; 8 while for those who are self-seeking and who obey not the truth but wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. 9 There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, 10 but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.*

## **Devotion**

Ever look at someone or hear about someone's circumstances and instantly form your own opinion or judge them? Ever say, "Oh, that'd never be me or I'd never do that?"

"Bad things happen to good people, or good things happen to bad people!"

This walk on earth is not easy. Some would go as far as saying it's almost "Hell on Earth." We have to walk through Hell to get to brighter days.

It's not our job to judge people or their situation. It's our job to keep an open heart and mind to lead others in the correct direction. Pray for them.

Words hurt! I learned a long time ago, never speak when you're angry. You may mean what you're sayings, however there is probably a more constructive way to say it once you calmed down. Just breathe! Know your tongue could be as harsh as the wrath of God. Our time is limited on earth. The power of prayer is beyond amazing. Calming does not even begin to describe the feelings behind prayer.

Walk in Christ, talk in Christ, live in Christ, and most of all, love in Christ!

This is how Jesus lived his life and walked the earth just as we do. How are you walking Earth to Your Holy Week?

## **Prayer**

God, it is so easy for us to judge other, forgetting the grace you have shown for us. Help us remember that you call us to love, not judge others. In Your name we pray. Amen



**Psalm 39 For the director of music. For Jeduthun. A psalm of David.**

*1 I said, "I will watch my ways and keep my tongue from sin; I will put a muzzle on my mouth while in the presence of the wicked." 2 So I remained utterly silent, not even saying anything good. But my anguish increased; 3 my heart grew hot within me. While I meditated, the fire burned; then I spoke with my tongue: 4 "Show me, Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is. 5 You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Everyone is but a breath, even those who seem secure. 6 "Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be. 7 "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. 8 Save me from all my transgressions; do not make me the scorn of fools. 9 I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for you are the one who has done this. 10 Remove your scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of your hand. 11 When you rebuke and discipline anyone for their sin, you consume their wealth like a moth— surely everyone is but a breath. 12 "Hear my prayer, Lord, listen to my cry for help; do not be deaf to my weeping. I dwell with you as a foreigner, a stranger, as all my ancestors were. 13 Look away from me, that I may enjoy life again before I depart and am no more."*

**Devotion**

Having been an airline pilot for the last 35 years, I know what it's like to be a traveler. And although that time has gone by in the "blink of an eye", I can slow down and recount the many wondrous things I've seen from the sky. Equally so, I have been in the thick of the complaining of schedule disruptions, weather, ATC delays, and cancellations that become others "Airline stories". King David realized that his complaining was fruitless as well and that his lifespan was but a moment to God. The history books are full of people who's lives have been encapsulated in a few sentences yet span a multitude of years. We are God's guests in this life, travelers passing through the earth, just as all of our loved ones before us have. Fill your days with happiness and joy. Set aside the complaining for the wondrous, for our time here is but a breath.

**Prayer**

Oh Lord, help us not to get embroiled in the pettiness of everyday life. Help us to seek the wonder each day in the world that we travel. Amen.



## **Luke 13:18-19**

*Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.”*

## **Devotion**

The kingdom of God, a tree? As Jesus walked and taught he often used the obvious and familiar to make His point.

We can learn a lot from a tree. Glance out your window. Let your eyes slowly move across the fading landscape of barren trees. You’ll notice the intertwining branches, thick to pencil thin and curly to razor sharp. Those limbs, whether a dogwood or an old oak, find life by reaching toward the sky. We too, stretch toward heaven embracing Christ during this season of Lent.

The deadness of winter is now being lifted. Changing from cold weather to a warm spring is a huge leap. The journey to the cross can be like that, even treacherous at times. The “I” of life gets in the way, blinding us to the substance of deep and enduring confession and forgiveness.

A landscape like this is a huge reminder of the cycle of life created for us. Like that tree, we come from the edge of death to the rising of new life. This is our time to respond and discover again our way to the cross. This year embrace Lent with the knowledge and the certainty that Jesus, by walking the path He walked, paid for our fresh start. We come alive once more. It’s called Resurrection.

Resurrection happens in so many ways; in the soil that nurtures the trees; in our hearts that embrace those we love and even some we don’t; in our minds where change happens that often surprises us; and in the Spirit of love present all around us.

## **Prayer**

Oh Father, Lent is once more at my doorstep. Let my heart be open to your guidance. Like those tree branches in my back yard, help me this day to reach up to the Son. Amen.





## **Psalm 32**

*<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

*<sup>2</sup> Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.*

*<sup>3</sup> When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

*<sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.*

*[b]*

*<sup>5</sup> Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

*<sup>6</sup> Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.*

*<sup>7</sup> You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.*

*<sup>8</sup> I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.*

*<sup>9</sup> 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.*

*<sup>10</sup> Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.*

*<sup>11</sup> Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!*

## **Devotion**

We are promised that God is always present with us, always forgiving, yearning for us to come to Him. This promise is for all of God's children – whether our sins are great or small. Even though God knows our every move and what is in our hearts, we are instructed to speak to Him, to have an honest relationship that allows us to confess our sins. Forgiveness is ours through grace. Acknowledging our sin before God restores a right relationship with Him. When David kept silent, he suffered separation from God. He groaned the day long.

It is interesting that it is because we are children of God that we are allowed to suffer guilt. This discomfort urges us to find relief through confession and the grace of forgiveness.

I first thought about Agape love when I was a teenager. Never ending, unlimited love is like infinity, difficult to imagine. I was certain of my parents love for me, no matter what. That was the best example of perfect love that I knew. But imagine how much greater it is that God doesn't frown, or tap his foot, or put his hands on his hips when hearing our wrongdoing. His arms are wide open. He doesn't even impose a waiting period on forgiveness - "Well, we'll see if you're sorry." I think He is trying to make it easy for us.

## **Prayer**

Let us claim the promise of forgiveness and shout for joy that God wants an honest relationship with us. Amen.



## **Psalm 32**

*<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.*

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*And you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

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*<sup>10</sup> Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.*

*<sup>11</sup> Rejoice in the Lord and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!*

## **Devotion**

I've never been asked to write a devotion before, so it's very apt, that I've chosen this scripture out of three selections. It is on forgiveness – and I feel like I should ask for forgiveness here and now because writing is outside my comfort zone and leads me to feelings of anxiety. But, it is precisely for that fact that I said "yes" to Pastor Tate when he asked me to participate in this activity. When was the last time you pushed yourself outside your comfort zone? When you did, did you lean on God for strength and wisdom?

This Psalm spoke to me on many different levels:

- The "silent" (verse 3) that weighs heavily on a person's shoulders translated to me that "secrets" we hold in our hearts cause us pain. Have you had to ask for forgiveness lately? It's hard but made easier with God's help – did you ask him for help?
- The "while you may be found" (verse 6) translated to me that the LORD can be found *wherever you seek him, not just on Sunday mornings – but oftentimes in nature so it encouraged me to go and take a walk. With Spring right around the corner, have you had a chance to go and enjoy the sunlight when it makes an appearance? And, when you do take that moment, how do you see God at work?*
- The "do not be like the horse or the mule" (verse 9) reminded me not to be stubborn, but to be open-minded and open-hearted to listen and learn. In this contentious day and age, how have you been at listening to others? Do you have a prayer that you can quickly turn to when you're feeling pushed back against the wall?
- And, finally, "Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!" reminds me to check in on my moral compass and live a life of wholesomeness and love to guide my way. What does it mean to you to live a righteous life?

## **Prayer**

Dear LORD, give us the strength to **acknowledge** our past sins, **brave** the present, so that we can **change** the future! Amen.



**Luke 15: 1-10— The Parables of the Lost Sheep and Lost Coin**

*15 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. <sup>2</sup> But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.”*

*<sup>3</sup> Then Jesus told them this parable: <sup>4</sup> “Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn’t he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? <sup>5</sup> And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders <sup>6</sup> and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ <sup>7</sup> I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent.*

*<sup>8</sup> “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins<sup>[a]</sup> and loses one. Doesn’t she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? <sup>9</sup> And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.’ <sup>10</sup> In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

**Devotion**

I grew up in northern New Jersey with two older sisters and a younger brother. My brother and I are very close in age and played with the same group of friends. Since I was the eldest, the number one son as my dad would say, it was my job to look after Arty and protect him. I was very quick out of the gate, but Arty was a bit slower, stuttering, crying often, and struggling with simple observational tasks such as tying his shoes. For these reasons, and because he was the youngest of four, my brother got a lot of attention and coddling. Much was expected of me, and on occasion I was disciplined for Arty’s missteps and accidents. While not a lost sinner or prodigal son, it could be said that my brother was a weak and/or lost sheep who needed extra assistance and attention. Eventually he grew out of these early trials and matured into a confident, intelligent, and successful young man with a razor-sharp wit. We both played sports in high school, but Arty was a standout on the basketball team, and I couldn’t help feeling jealous and somehow betrayed. It took me some time to realize that I was instrumental in my brother’s development, and that my father was proud of me and being complimentary when he said that he didn’t have to worry about me because I could take care of myself.

As our Lord Jesus teaches us in these gospel passages, it is our responsibility as Christians to look after the lost sheep of the world.

**Prayer**

Dear Lord, please provide us with opportunities to help those less fortunate and those lost sheep who require additional assistance and attention to make their way in this difficult, challenging, and complex world.



## **2 Corinthians 5:16–21 (ESV)**

*<sup>16</sup> From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. <sup>18</sup> All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; <sup>19</sup> that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. <sup>21</sup> For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

### **Devotion**

After assuring his readers that those in Christ have something far better in store and have been given the Holy Spirit to encourage us while we await glory, he then speaks of how the work of Christ has reconciled us to God. Meanwhile, our transformation has begun right here on earth. Christ was rejected in His ministry here on earth. He suffered and ultimately give His life to give us this assurance. His road to the cross was excruciatingly painful and difficult. But the reward, spectacularly exhibited in His resurrection is new life, a glorified body. In Him, we also receive a new life, a new heart, Paul even calls us “new creatures.” No matter or current pain, grief or suffering, this is a truth we have in Him. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee of that truth.

But, why? Why have we been given this mind-altering, life-changing gift? Is it for a better life here on earth? An improved self-image? Do we now get to paint a smiley face on every trial and loss? No! We have been given the gift of eternal joy and peace so that we can be entrusted with the “message of reconciliation” and become “an “ambassador of Christ” sharing that same truth with everyone we encounter.

He is so incredibly faithful to us. May we strive to be as faithful to Him.

### **Prayer**

Lord, grant us this day the strength, discipline, and perseverance to be true messengers of your love, grace and mercy. Help us to understand our salvation is not about us, but about You and Your transforming sacrifice. May we, by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit be diligent to implore everyone you place in our paths, on behalf of Christ, to be reconciled to God. Amen.



**Psalm 53:1**

*Fools say in their hearts, "There is no God."*

**Revelation 19:1**

*After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah!"*

*Salvation and glory and power to our God,*

**Devotion**

The word "fool" in Hebrew describes the practical atheist. According Miriam- Webster an atheist is "a person who does not believe in the existence of a god or any gods". Essentially a nonbeliever. One who believes they can navigate this world on their own. God made us to serve him. So, when the fool denies that God exists, he is ignoring all of the evidence that God has given us in creation. Every day we look around and can see the wonders of God in the workings and beauty of what we call "nature".

My heart breaks for those who cannot see the wonder of our God and the redeeming salvation that is available for those of us who are believers and rejoice in the resurrection of His son, Jesus. My heart breaks as they will not be a participant in the final "Hallelujah!" as described in Revelation 19:1.

**Prayer:**

Father, thank you for loving me. Thank you for providing a way for me to be reconciled to you. Give me a pure heart and a burning desire to be yours in every way. In Jesus's name. Amen





## **Psalm 53**

- <sup>1</sup> The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; there is no one who does good.*
- <sup>2</sup> God looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.*
- <sup>3</sup> Everyone has turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.*
- <sup>4</sup> Do all these evildoers know nothing? They devour my people as though eating bread; they never call on God.*
- <sup>5</sup> But there they are, overwhelmed with dread, where there was nothing to dread. God scattered the bones of those who attacked you; you put them to shame, for God despised them.*
- <sup>6</sup> Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When God restores his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!*

## **Devotion**

In her book The Myth of Closure: Ambiguous Loss in a Time of Pandemic and Change, Dr. Pauline Boss offers “both/and” thinking as an exercise in mental flexibility that can help us weather times of uncertainty. The idea is that when we have two ideas that directly conflict, instead of seeking to resolve the ideas into one neat package, we can instead choose to hold both, conflicting ideas indefinitely. I have found this strategy to be very helpful. Here are some opposite ideas I have been holding: The pandemic has taken my freedom and freed me to re-evaluate how I spend my time. I have been lonely at home and gained the opportunity to work on new projects. I grieve how church used to be and look forward to a new vision. I feel frightened by the division in our country and feel grateful that a long-overdue racial reckoning may happen. I can disagree with my neighbor and treat them with loving-kindness. I long for normal and I long for change.

In Psalm 53, David expresses anger at what he sees as the lack of goodness in the world and looks forward to God’s deliverance. I imagine David using “both/and” thinking: We can acknowledge that people do bad things and we can look for the helpers. Our hearts can be heavy with regret and we can accept God’s grace. We can lose all hope and be the bearers of hope.

## **Prayer**

Dear God, this Lenten season, help me both hold the pain of the crucifixion and live in the joy of the resurrection. Amen.



**Luke 9:10-17**

*10 When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, 11 but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.*

*12 Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, "Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here."*

*13 He replied, "You give them something to eat."*

*They answered, "We have only five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all this crowd." 14 (About five thousand men were there.)*

*But he said to his disciples, "Have them sit down in groups of about fifty each." 15 The disciples did so, and everyone sat down. 16 Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke them. Then he gave them to the disciples to distribute to the people. 17 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over.*

**Devotion**

Have you ever been at a place in your life when you had nothing left to give? When you felt so beaten down and depleted, you thought you would never come back from it? A place so low that you thought you couldn't possibly get any lower? Friends, God was there with you in that low place, He was in that deep valley with you, walking next to you, His hand on your back, guiding you forward on His path. He made a way for you when there wasn't one, when you couldn't see a single step beyond your own two feet and when you felt there was absolutely no hope. He is the God of hope, the God of miracles, the God of love, the God who left the ninety-nine to go after YOU! He is the God who fed the five thousand with just a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish. He is the God who filled the empty oil jars of the poor widow so that she could pay her debts. He is the God who sacrificed everything, even His own Son, to be with you. And that is the same God who is right beside you now. When you feel that you have nothing left, whether spiritually, financially, or emotionally, remember that you are not alone, that God is with you and He has more for you than you could ever imagine. You need only give Him your hand and start walking.

**Prayer**

Lord, as we walk through times of desolation and despair, help us to remember that You are there with us, guiding us, loving us and helping us through, that You are the God of miracles and we need only trust that You will bring us out of the valley of shadows and into your beautiful light. Thank you Lord for caring so much about us, for being there with us when we need You and for never leaving or forsaking us.



## **Psalm 126 A song of ascents**

*1 When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dreamed.*

*2 Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy.*

*Then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them."*

*3 The Lord has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy.*

*4 Restore our fortunes, [Lord, like streams in the Negev.*

*5 Those who sow with tears will reap with songs of joy.*

*6 Those who go out weeping carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them.*

## **Devotion**

Have you ever experienced a moment of great joy, a sense of wonderment, a grateful heart and then realized that at the same time you felt sadness and despair? I would venture to guess that many of us are currently in that paradox of feelings. We look around and start to get excited about returning to a sense of normalcy after the Pandemic and the isolation of the past 2 years but at the same time, feeling a bit lost, wondering how to regain or rebuild what we once had? Is our community of friends as strong as it was before we stayed home and communicated via Zoom? Do we have the same strong relationships we had with family, young or old, as we did before visits were curtailed? Can we hug and embrace the ones we haven't seen in many months the same as we did before?

God is telling us Yes, we can do all of that.

*The LORD has done great things for them...and we are filled with Joy*

We may feel unsure of our feelings, unclear on the path we are forging; but what we do know and can always count on is that God will guide us into the direction of happiness even if it feels a bit unsettled. With his support, we will turn those fears of what comes next into Hope and Excitement for the future and all that come next in this journey of Life.

## **Prayer**

God, remind us that you are always with us, guiding us in the journey of Life. Amen



## **Philippians 2:25-3:1**

*25 Still, I think it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus—my brother and co-worker and fellow soldier, your messenger and minister to my need; 26 for he has been longing for[b] all of you, and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 He was indeed so ill that he nearly died. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, so that I would not have one sorrow after another. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, in order that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 Welcome him then in the Lord with all joy, and honor such people, 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for those services that you could not give me.*

*3 Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard.*

### **Devotion**

We hear in these verses, a description of a man that is significant to the church in Philippi, yet this is the only place in scripture he is mentioned. We read that Paul immediately describes Epaphroditus as: “brother, co-worker, soldier, and messenger”. Associating those names with him, Paul is affirming Epaphroditus’ faith in Jesus-as he served and sacrificed for the work of Christ. We live in such a world that honors those who are intelligent, popular, and powerful-but is that who we as a church should honor? Paul specifies that we should honor those who give their lives for the sake of Christ. Who, like Epaphroditus, served as a soldier for the cross and furthered the mission of Jesus by his kingdom building lifestyle. Perhaps we can live into that call this Lenten Season, remembering we can help to serve one another, as brothers and sisters in Christ, with an eagerness to spread the love and hope in all we do, in all we say, and how we act.

### **Prayer**

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for the ways you call us to serve and for the ways you continue to lead us in helping others on our faith journey. Bless us with what we need to be the soldiers for the cross, leading others to your endless love and grace. Amen.



## Psalm 126

<sup>1</sup> *When the LORD restored the fortunes of Zion,  
we were like those who dreamed.*

<sup>2</sup> *Our mouths were filled with laughter,  
our tongues with songs of joy.*

*Then it was said among the nations,  
“The LORD has done great things for them.”*

<sup>3</sup> *The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we are filled with joy.*

<sup>4</sup> *Restore our fortunes, LORD,  
like streams in the Negev.*

<sup>5</sup> *Those who sow with tears  
will reap with songs of joy.*

<sup>6</sup> *Those who go out weeping,  
carrying seed to sow,  
will return with songs of joy,  
carrying sheaves with them.*

## Devotion

What a wonder and a joy it would be to live in this city of God! I close my eyes and picture it! A city of sunshine and warmth, of kindness, caring and sharing with others, of people who are filled with gratitude for what the Lord gave to them. A place where all people experience such great joy and happiness and are exuberant for the Lord who brought them out a difficult place. We are presented with so many struggles in our lives and must walk thru the desert. We can be restored as long as we put our trust in the Lord and sing his praises to all, and we, too, can live in this joyous place. Let's all be there together!

## Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

We sing praises to you! You are there to dry our tears and lift us up! May we always remember to sing and dance and shout in the joy of Your great name! It is in Your Holy name we pray. Amen





## **Fifth Sunday in Lent—April 3, 2022 — Rev Sean Gundry; Buckhall UMC**

### **Philippians 3:4b-14**

*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup> Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death, <sup>11</sup> if somehow I may attain the resurrection from the dead. <sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained this or have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. <sup>13</sup> Beloved, I do not consider that I have made it my own; but this one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, <sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.*

### **Body of Devotion**

In the decade I spent coaching high school basketball, my absolute favorite time of year was the final weeks of the season as we prepared for the playoffs. It was time to pull out all the classic coaching clichés – “it’s a brand-new season!” “We’re 0-0” “One game at time!”

But the truth is that it was the best time of year for exactly those reasons. You had a choice: just coast into the playoffs, with one eye on the off-season, or you could turn it up a notch, lean into the pressure, and push through to see how far you can go.

We’ve been hard at work in Lent, whether it’s things we’ve added to our spiritual disciplines, or it’s the hard work of giving things up to make more space for God. It’s been a long journey, but it’s not over yet. Let’s not coast to the end and lose sight of the goal. It’s not easy, especially when you can see the end, to keep pushing on, but in today’s reading the Apostle Paul reminds us that we need to forget what is behind us, not hold on to the past, and strain forward and press on towards the ultimate goal that God has set out for us.

### **Prayer**

Holy and loving God, we thank you for the gift that is endurance. We thank you for the strength that comes only from you. As the calendar draws closer to Holy Week and Easter, give us the ability to rise to the challenge you have laid before us. May the closing days of our Lenten journey bring us ever closer to you, and may your Spirit embolden and strengthen us to strive towards the goal. We pray all these things through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.



## **Psalm 20**

*May the Lord answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. 2 May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. 3 May he remember all your sacrifices and accept your burnt offerings. 4 May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. 5 May we shout for joy over your victory and lift up our banners in the name of our God. May the Lord grant all your requests. 6 Now this I know: The Lord gives victory to his anointed. He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary with the victorious power of his right hand. 7 Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. 8 They are brought to their knees and fall, but we rise up and stand firm. 9 Lord, give victory to the king! Answer us when we call!*

## **Devotion**

It seems that each day since the Lord has called me into HIS marvelous light, my distress grows. My distress is the concern for my brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus and their well-being in this world as well as my concern for those who are unsaved. I pray fervently that they too will have the blinders fall away and be able to see Jesus. The way God covers me allows me to stand as a prayer warrior because the Lord gives me strength. ***Psalm 20:2 Send thee help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion.*** All of my strength comes from the Lord who made it all. It's that strength that brings me a peace that surpasses understanding even in the midst of distress. I know that the Lord is with me each day. That just fills my heart with gladness and joy.

That's the joy that fills my soul and allows me to rejoice. I rejoice knowing the promise of salvation is for all of us; who believe in Jesus, me and my brothers and sisters in Christ. I may be concerned because of how the world tries to attack and persecute us in our belief but I know that the Lord saves His anointed and we are His anointed. Rejoice.

While we rejoice let's remember to put all of our trust in God. Yes, man might make some things that look sturdy and reliable; fast cars, big houses, strong tanks and powerful missiles might serve us as a living defense but they don't last. Only God's love, wisdom, power and strength lasts and it's ours; we who love the Lord, to cover us. Always trust in the Lord come what may. We might have some battles, we might have some pain, we might suffer some losses but when it's all said and done, we will stand in victory with Jesus. Jesus the over-comer. The King of Kings and the Prince of Princes. He hears us when we call and He will never leave us nor forsake us. Oh what a blessing to be reminded of.

## **Prayer**

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. It's now and once more again Father that we come, as humbly as we know how, to your throne of grace and mercy. As the day approaches, we give thanks to your Lord. We give thanks that you listen to our prayers, that you provide our needs and bless with the desires of our hearts. We give you the glory in being our protection in times of trouble, never failing us and always defending us. We praise your name for being such a good Father. We put all of our trust in you Lord. We pray to you Lord thanking you for hearing our repentance and putting away our sins, blotting them out and keeping our names in the book of Life. Lord we thank you for our salvation. Thank you for picking us up out of the miry clay. Thank you for always being our guide. Thank you for always listening to our pleas, even when all we can do is moan from the distress of this life. Thank you Lord, you are our redeemer and it's in you and on your name that we trust. We love you Lord and we give you all the honor and praise that is due. In your name and the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ, we pray. Amen



**1 John 2:18-28 New International Version**

*<sup>18</sup> Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*

*<sup>20</sup> But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>21</sup> I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. <sup>22</sup> Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. <sup>23</sup> No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

*<sup>24</sup> As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. <sup>25</sup> And this is what he promised us—eternal life.*

*<sup>26</sup> I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. <sup>27</sup> As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.*

*<sup>28</sup> And now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming.*

**Devotion**

John is the only writer to mention “antichrist” in the Bible. John defines antichrist as “he who denies the Father and the Son” (1 John 2:22), does not confess Jesus (1 John 4:3), and does not confess Jesus as coming in the flesh (2 John 1:7). Is John speaking of the person who is a false Christ or is it one who opposes Christ. Apparently, Biblical scholars differ on this based on the definition of some Greek terms. I think it doesn’t matter. The point is .... What is it separating us from Christ?

We can get hung up in definitions and commentary about the scripture, but in our lives, isn’t the antichrist anyone of anything that tries to keep us away from the living Christ? This can be a lot of things we encounter daily. Activities, sports, hobbies, work, or a thousand other things we assume is more important than Christ. Now, don’t get me wrong. All of those above mentioned things can be good and I believe God wants us to enjoy life. But if anything gets in the way of our relationship with Christ, isn’t that the antichrist?

I doubt any of us will join a cult or group that doesn’t believe in God or wants to actively separate us from our belief in Christ. But, in our everyday lives the antichrist is all around us. We have to be aware and not let something consume us that separates us from God.

**Prayer**

Let us pray as John stated in verse 28 “And now dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming”, Amen



## Wednesday— Week 5—Ben Rollins; Warrenton UMC

### **Psalm 20: 1-9      For the director of music. A psalm of David.**

*<sup>1</sup> May the LORD answer you when you are in distress;  
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.*

*<sup>2</sup> May he send you help from the sanctuary  
and grant you support from Zion.*

*<sup>3</sup> May he remember all your sacrifices  
and accept your burnt offerings.<sup>[b]</sup>*

*<sup>4</sup> May he give you the desire of your heart  
and make all your plans succeed.*

*<sup>5</sup> May we shout for joy over your victory  
and lift up our banners in the name of our God.*

*May the LORD grant all your requests.*

*<sup>6</sup> Now this I know:*

*The LORD gives victory to his anointed.  
He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary  
with the victorious power of his right hand.*

*<sup>7</sup> Some trust in chariots and some in horses,  
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.*

*<sup>8</sup> They are brought to their knees and fall,  
but we rise up and stand firm.*

*<sup>9</sup> LORD, give victory to the king!  
Answer us when we call!*

### **Devotion**

Have you ever been prayed over during a time of need or trouble? Have you felt comfort and peace through that prayer? The beginning of this scripture is a prayer over the Kings of Israel in their time of need. We can look at this a little different and replace the subject with Christ. He is bearing the weight of our sins and burdens and carrying them to the cross. In the beginning of this Psalm (verses 1-4), we pray for Him, and that God will support Him on this journey. In verses 5-6 we continue with praise to God because our Faith tells us God will be there every step of the way. In verse 6 the Psalmist states that God will be there to save Him. We can interpret this through Christ's resurrection He is saved.

For the remainder of the Psalm, it is declared that God takes care of the faithful. When we are faced with our own troubles it is important that we remember to rely on God. In verses 7-8 the Psalmist discusses how easy it is for us to turn to other solutions before we turn to Him. When we rely on God, we can face our troubles with confidence in knowing that He is with us.

In the final verse we ask for God to hear our prayers. Pray to God with sincerity and seek His desires. Too often our prayers are led by our selfish desires. Remember that God does not always answer prayer in the way we want but in the way that we need.

### **Prayer**

Heavenly Father, hear my prayer! Thank you for the many blessings that You have given me in my life. Thank you for being with me every step of my journey through this life. God be with us all through our times of need and help us to see your way before our own. In Jesus' name, Amen.



### **Psalm 31:14**

*But I **trust** in you, O, Lord; I say, “You are my God.”*

### **Isaiah 53:11**

*Out of his anguish he shall see light;  
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.  
The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.*

### **Hebrews 2:1**

*Therefore we must **pay greater attention to what we have heard**, so that we do not drift away from it.*

### **Devotion**

I write this devotion today while praying for the people of Ukraine who were attacked this week by Russia. In modern times we have witnessed many people losing faith and drifting away from their traditional beliefs. However, I think that now, more than ever, it is time to strengthen our resolve and believe in something greater than ourselves. Though COVID has kept us apart for more than two years we must continue to **trust** in the community of faith that helped to make us who we are. We must buckle down, “**pay greater attention to what we have heard**”, and **trust** in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

### **Prayer**

In a country which is predominantly Christian (>83%) I pray that they **trust** in the Lord and do not drift from their faith in Jesus Christ in tumultuous times.





**Isaiah 54:9-10 (New International Version)**

<sup>9</sup> *“To me this is like the days of Noah,  
when I swore that the waters of Noah would never again cover the earth.  
So now I have sworn not to be angry with you,  
never to rebuke you again.  
<sup>10</sup> Though the mountains be shaken  
and the hills be removed,  
yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken  
nor my covenant of peace be removed,”  
says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*

**Devotion**

The last two years of Covid 19 may have shaken your faith, I know at times it has shaken mine. This scripture reminds us that God promises are never broken. His love for us is without end and His peace that surpasses all understanding is always with us. As His daughters and sons let us shine with His compassion with those we meet each day, no matter their political views, religion, race, mask or no mask, vaccinated or not vaccinated.

**Prayer**

Dear Father God, fill us with your peace, your love and compassion so we might show this broken world how it can be healed by knowing You. Amen



## **Leviticus 23:1-8**

*23 The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Speak to the Israelites and say to them: ‘These are my appointed festivals, the appointed festivals of the Lord, which you are to proclaim as sacred assemblies. The Sabbath 3 “‘There are six days when you may work, but the seventh day is a day of sabbath rest, a day of sacred assembly. You are not to do any work; wherever you live, it is a sabbath to the Lord. The Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread 4 “‘These are the Lord’s appointed festivals, the sacred assemblies you are to proclaim at their appointed times: 5 The Lord’s Passover begins at twilight on the fourteenth day of the first month. 6 On the fifteenth day of that month the Lord’s Festival of Unleavened Bread begins; for seven days you must eat bread made without yeast. 7 On the first day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work. 8 For seven days present a food offering to the Lord. And on the seventh day hold a sacred assembly and do no regular work.’”*

## **Devotion**

Life these days can be nonstop 24/7. We can allow ourselves to get so involved with our daily schedules and “to do’s” that we don’t even realize how quickly the days and time is passing. Leviticus reminds us to make the time to stop and draw closer to God for appointed times of worship. When I was younger my family had a tradition of spending Sundays together as a family. After we got home from church, Mom and I would serve the big meal of the day that she had put into the oven before we left for church that morning. After spending time at the table eating, laughing, and talking as a family, Dad would say “let’s go for our Sunday drive.” The four of us would pile into the back of our station wagon with Mom and Dad in the front. Dad would drive us somewhere new each Sunday in the area surrounding our town. These afternoons spent laughing and sharing together were another time of worship for our family. Time away from the daily grind of work, school, and responsibilities. Time for the six of us to focus on God and the bountiful blessings he showered upon our family. For all He has given us we should equally give back to Him. God calls upon all of us even in the busiest of times to keep His sabbath holy. The day in which He rested from his labors and calls upon all of us to do the same.

## **Prayer**

Almighty God help us to step away from the constant hustle and bustle of daily life. Nudge us to make time for a sabbath. A time to worship with you who has richly blessed our lives with your love. Amen.



## **Palm/Passion Sunday — April 10, 2022 — Scott Christian; Grace Episcopal in the Plains**

### **Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

*1 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; \* his mercy endures for ever.*

*2 Let Israel now proclaim, \* "His mercy endures for ever."*

*19 Open for me the gates of righteousness; \* I will enter them; I will offer thanks to the LORD.*

*20 "This is the gate of the LORD; \* he who is righteous may enter."*

*21 I will give thanks to you, for you answered me \* and have become my salvation.*

*22 The same stone which the builders rejected \* has become the chief cornerstone.*

*23 This is the LORD's doing, \* and it is marvelous in our eyes.*

*24 On this day the LORD has acted; \* we will rejoice and be glad in it.*

*25 Hosannah, LORD, hosannah! \* LORD, send us now success.*

*26 Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord; \* we bless you from the house of the LORD.*

*27 God is the LORD; he has shined upon us; \* form a procession with branches up to the horns of the altar.*

*28 "You are my God, and I will thank you; \* you are my God, and I will exalt you."*

*29 Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; \* his mercy endures for ever.*

### **Devotion**

The *New Revised Standard Bible* titles this psalm, "A Song of Victory," and the *New Interpreter's Study Bible* titles it, "God's love endures forever." What genius to pair this on Palm Sunday with Luke's description of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

"...the whole multitude of disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power they had seen..." (Luke 19: 37).

Despite frequent rejection by their own families as well as persecution by the state, early Christians were said to have been noted especially for two things—their joy and their service to the poor. Centuries later Julian of Norwich wrote, "The greatest honor we can give Almighty God is to live gladly because of the knowledge of his love."

Churches that follow the Revised Common Lectionary have two sets of readings for this Sunday—"Palm Sunday" and the "The Passion." Some churches use both because they know that many people will not be in church again until Easter Sunday.

Churches that use only the Palm Sunday readings are able to focus our attention on the joy that we need to sustain us on our journey to the Cross. It's also an invitation and an expectation that we will participate in the upcoming powerful Holy Week services.

Whichever readings your church chooses, I encourage you to spend this day of your Lenten journey basking in the joy of God's love-- present from Creation and enveloping us now.

### **Prayer**

"As the hand is made for holding and the eye for seeing, you have fashioned me for joy, O God. Lead me to find that joy everywhere: in the violet's beauty, in the lark's melody, in the child's face, in a mother's love, in the purity of Jesus." (Ancient Gaelic prayer)



## **Psalm 36:5-11**

*5 Your love, Lord, reaches to the heavens, your faithfulness to the skies. 6 Your righteousness is like the highest mountains, your justice like the great deep. You, Lord, preserve both people and animals. 7 How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! People take refuge in the shadow of your wings. 8 They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. 9 For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light. 10 Continue your love to those who know you, your righteousness to the upright in heart. 11 May the foot of the proud not come against me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.*

## **Devotion**

Have you ever felt alone? Not that lonesome feeling when your best friend decided to go out without you. I mean, the really alone feeling deep down in your being when you feel like no one cares and you're totally on your own. Be comforted and know that God is always with you and loves all creatures of the earth, human and non-human alike. God's *unfailing love* is *priceless* and we can *take refuge in the shadow of his wings*. God is like a bird providing shelter for its young or like a host providing a *river of delights* to his guests. God is *the fountain of life*; in his *light we see light*.

## **Prayer**

Thank you God for your love that is beyond my ability to really understand. Thank you for the many reassurances that you give me, in these precious promises about your nature and character. Make your love so real in my heart that I will love others as you love me. Help me open my heart to your Spirit so you can mold me to be more like you every day. Thank you for sending Jesus to die on the cross and to rise into newness of life, so that I may be brought into fellowship with you. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.



## Tuesday of Holy Week—April 12, 2022—Ed Pratt; Warrenton UMC

### **Psalm 71:1-14**

*1 In you, O Lord, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame.  
2 In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me.  
3 Be to me a rock of refuge, a strong fortress, to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress.  
4 Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel.  
5 For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust, O Lord, from my youth.  
6 Upon you I have leaned from my birth; it was you who took me from my mother's womb. My praise is continually of you.  
7 I have been like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge.  
8 My mouth is filled with your praise, and with your glory all day long.  
9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength is spent.  
10 For my enemies speak concerning me, and those who watch for my life consult together.  
11 They say, "Pursue and seize that person whom God has forsaken, for there is no one to deliver."  
12 O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!  
13 Let my accusers be put to shame and consumed; let those who seek to hurt me be covered with scorn and disgrace.  
14 But I will hope continually, and will praise you yet more and more.*

### **Devotion**

I have heard statements like, "God will never give you more than you can handle." I take exception to this claim. I believe many obstacles are put have in our life paths that we cannot handle if not for God. He is our rock and fortress.

In 2010, my wife and I began ministering to families in Haiti with special needs children. One teenage girl had a severe back deformity caused by spinal tuberculosis when she was five. When we met Lancie at age 15, her mother, Gelaine carried Lancie to every travelling medical clinic that came through the town. Prior to our arrival, every doctor provided the same diagnosis, nothing can be done for Lancie. Through Susan's connections at the Children's Hospital in Washington, D.C., we brought Lancie to the United States for life-saving surgery.

We learned so much from this experience, highlighted by our observations of Gelaine. She relied on God as her rock to carry her through the trials. She watched Lancie lose the ability to walk and the ability to attend school. Gelaine relied on God as a refuge preparing for the possibility of the deformity collapsing Lancie's lungs causing her death. Gelaine demonstrated to us the importance of continually praising Him, even when your child is suffering.

The Lenten season is a time of reflection and repentance. As we reflect on Psalm 71, identify a time when you were "spent", and observe how the Lord carried you. Praise Him for delivering you, for rescuing you, and being your refuge.

### **Prayer**

Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel. For you, O Lord, are my hope, my trust. Thank you being a rock of refuge during dark times. Thank you for this time of reflection as we prepare for celebrating Christ's resurrection. In Jesus' name, Amen.





**Wednesday of Holy Week—April 13, 2022—Shore Robertson; Warrenton UMC**

**Isaiah 50: 4-9a**

*The Sovereign LORD has given me a well-instructed tongue,  
to know the word that sustains the weary.*

*He wakens me morning by morning,  
wakens my ear to listen like one being instructed.*

<sup>5</sup> *The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears;  
I have not been rebellious,  
I have not turned away.*

<sup>6</sup> *I offered my back to those who beat me,  
my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard;  
I did not hide my face  
from mocking and spitting.*

<sup>7</sup> *Because the Sovereign LORD helps me,  
I will not be disgraced.  
Therefore have I set my face like flint,  
and I know I will not be put to shame.*

<sup>8</sup> *He who vindicates me is near.  
Who then will bring charges against me?  
Let us face each other!*

*Who is my accuser?  
Let him confront me!*

<sup>9</sup> *It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me.  
Who will condemn me?*

**Devotion**

On a cold windy night, I went to my Church to attend what was in those days called a revival. In that church directly in front of the sanctuary was a beautiful stained glass window showing the Head of Jesus with a light bulb hung outside to cause it to shine brightly in the sanctuary for all to see. The wind that night caused the Head of Jesus to appear as if it was turning giving me the feeling that Jesus was looking directly at me and calling me to answer him. That night, I resolved to do that even though I was only about twelve years of age. Through the now many decades of my life, I have continued to strive to do just that. Yes, I have faltered and come up short, but I have always tried to remember that windy night when Jesus first called.

There is a wonderful old hymn, "Jesus Calls Us O'er The Tumult" (UMH #398). Verse 1 says,  
Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's wild, restless sea;  
day by day his voice invites me,  
saying "Christian, follow me!"

**Prayer**

Dear Lord, during this Lenten Season, we ask your help to follow your call each and every day of our life. Amen.



**Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19 (CEB)**

*<sup>1</sup> I love the Lord, because he hears my requests for mercy.*

*<sup>2</sup> I'll call out to him as long as I live, because he listens closely to me.*

*<sup>12</sup> What can I give back to the Lord for all the good things he has done for me?*

*<sup>13</sup> I'll lift up the cup of salvation. I'll call on the Lord's name.*

*<sup>14</sup> I'll keep the promises I made to the Lord in the presence of all God's people.*

*<sup>15</sup> The death of the Lord's faithful is a costly loss in his eyes.*

*<sup>16</sup> Oh yes, Lord, I am definitely your servant!*

*I am your servant and the son of your female servant—you've freed me from my chains.*

*<sup>17</sup> So I'll offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to you, and I'll call on the Lord's name.*

*<sup>18</sup> I'll keep the promises I made to the Lord in the presence of all God's people,*

*<sup>19</sup> in the courtyards of the Lord's house, which is the center of Jerusalem.*

*Praise the Lord!*

**Devotion**

Psalm 116 is a personal psalm of thanksgiving for the recovery of significant illness. It celebrates God's deliverance and loving care.

Today, when we remember Jesus' final supper with his disciples prior to his death and resurrection, I also remember and give thanks for God's continual deliverance and lovingly care. Just as the disciples gathered around the table to remember the powerful story of deliverance of their nation – from slavery in Egypt, through parted waters and forty years of wilderness wandering, to a promised land where they could grow and thrive – I remember that without God's loving care, without deliverance from the bonds of sin, I might still be enslaved by the sin and destruction that once had a stronghold on me. Or, I might be wandering in the desert, grateful that God has led me out of bondage, but not yet trusting in God to lead me in the way of a new life.

But thanks to God's abundant mercy and grace, I am being led by Jesus on a path of discipleship, and I join the psalmist in asking: "What can I give back to the Lord for all the good things he has done for me?" I know that even giving my life would not be enough payment for all that God has done for me. So, I'll remember that God gave Jesus into the world to show us all (even me) how much God loves us. I'll continue to read the Gospels and remember what Jesus taught us about living a forgiven and transformed life. I'll reflect on Jesus praying in the garden, his arrest and trial, his death on the cross, and I'll lift the cup of salvation that has been offered to us all. I'll call on Jesus, my Lord's name until the time that I too will walk in the garden with my Risen Savior. And I will ever Praise the Lord!

**Prayer**

Merciful and loving God, thank you for your abundant love for your children – all children. Help those of us who know you and the power of your deliverance  
to tell the stories of your mercy and love,  
to tell the stories of what Jesus the Christ offers to us,  
and to tell the stories of how you delivered us from sin and brokenness  
so that others may find freedom in you. Amen.



## **Good Friday—April 15, 2022—Rev. Carl Chapman: Warrenton UMC**

### **Hebrews 10:16-25 (NRSVue)**

*"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds," and he adds, "I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more." Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.*

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

### **Devotion**

It feels a little bit strange to share a passage that has to do with hope on Good Friday. To look for a silver lining on the occasion of Jesus' death while simultaneously recognizing our own complicity in it may even seem. In his trial and as he made his way toward the cross, people just like and representative of us begged for his death and allowed guilty people to go free, all the while remaining resolute that this course of action reflected justice. Certainly, coming out of this story of Christ is the bold reminder that nobody is innocent. The Passion is the story of all of us and our refusal to make Jesus Christ Lord over our lives.

This becomes true for us in our own rebellions against God's goodness where we have put our wants, and our whims in front of God's plan for this world. In these moments, we have said, even without words, that Jesus comes second. We've believed that we can save ourselves, that inexplicably we don't need or want the gift that God offered us.

This is where the good news full of hope comes in. Even as God sees our brokenness and sees our continued struggle against sin, and even as we have failed to be everything that we want to be, God loves us anyway. On Good Friday Jesus gives himself freely that we might know this kind of love that is not dependent upon our worth, but by God's goodness. Furthermore, this sacrifice was not only for his friends or his disciples. It was for the people shouting for his death. It was for the people saying that they did not need this type of savior. It was for each and every one of us that have struggled with sin.

Our passage from Hebrews celebrates that in his death and resurrection, God has made a new covenant with us. This is a covenant where God's goodness becomes a part of our being. God's law is written on our hearts insofar as God's law is love. God's law cannot be usurped by the powers of sin and darkness, for through Christ's blood, we have a new assurance by which our guilty consciences have been cleansed, our hearts have been healed and where we can truly live into a new life of repentance. Because of this suffering and death that Christ offered up for us, the powers of sin and death cease to rule over us. God's love rules and remains steadfast. This is good news that lets us know that even at the end of our journey to the cross, the real journey is just beginning. Hope is not dead as long as God still reigns.

### **Prayer**

God. Even when our love failed your love remained steadfast. When you cried out, "Forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing," you were talking about us too. Help us God to learn to follow you as faithfully as you lead us. Amen.



**.Matthew 27:57-66**

*When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.*

*So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.*

*The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.”*

*Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.” So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.*

**Devotion**

For the highly-trained Roman soldiers, it may have seemed absurd to spend time guarding a cemetery. But from his own perspective, Pilate was preventing religious extremists from breaking in and stealing the body, hoping to support the preposterous claim that their leader would rise from the dead. For a colonial administrator, it surely seemed sensible to devote some manpower to a defense of Roman authority, and to the fundamental idea that when the Empire kills a person, or an idea, or a movement, they stay dead.

Pilate thought the challenge to his power came from outside the tomb. That was his mistake. Perhaps he even smirked at Mary Magdalene as she sat there watching, thinking to himself that he had foiled her plan. Another mistake, because the plan was never hers at all. It was always God’s plan to overthrow the powers of domination and even death.

Ask yourself: Are we like Pilate, seeking to protect our own sense of greatness, rolling a metaphorical stone in front of any voice that challenges us, even enlisting other people in a campaign to protect our fragile ego?

Or are we willing to be like Mary Magdalene, and wait with patience and hope for God’s power to break into the world once more?

**Prayer**

O God, you hide yourself in darkness and reveal yourself in light. Help us to trust in the wisdom we cannot see, as well as in the glory that we can perceive in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



## **Easter Sunday—April 17, 2022—Rev. Tim Tate; Warrenton UMC**

### **Luke 24:1-5**

*24:1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb, taking the spices that they had prepared.*

*24:2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb,*

*24:3 but when they went in, they did not find the body.*

*24:4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men in dazzling clothes stood beside them.*

*24:5 The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. "*

### **Devotion**

When I was a child I had a stone collection. Wherever I went I would look for stones and rocks that caught my eye. My penchant was for smooth stones that I could put in my pocket and rub on. My father used to call them "Worry Stones," because when I was worried or upset, I'd put my hand in my pocket and begin rubbing a stone.

We have plenty of worries, don't we? We worry about relationships, politics, finances, health, the many "isms" that plague society...the list goes on. You know your worries, and each one has its effect. Worry affects us each differently, but one of the things worry can do to all of us is beat us down, distract, and even kill us.

And yet, today, we are reminded again that we don't have to worry! There is nothing that can separate us from God's great love in Jesus Christ, because He conquered death! He takes all the worries we can throw at Him and frees us to live in love, share life, and witness joy in the face of whatever we, or anyone else might face.

Today we pronounce again that, just as the stone was moved from the entrance to the tomb so long ago, so the stones that hold us back are removed! Through Christ's death and resurrection, we are given new life. We are given God's grace — unmerited love from our loving God! We are known. We are seen. Today, we experience the lengths to which God went to remind us that we are His and He is ours.

So we have journeyed together, folks from different congregations and background but all a part of God's greater family known as Church! A people, not just saved, but given the privilege to tell others that God loves them as well! A people blessed to be a blessing, infused with new life that has been given to us through the Resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

Happy Easter my friends! Lay our burdens down and boldly proclaim, "Christ is Risen! He is Risen indeed! Alleluia!

### **Prayer**

Resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ, as we have gone through Lent and now Easter, so might Lent and Easter go through us, that we might proclaim Your great love to all the world! In your glorious and Holy name we pray. Amen.

