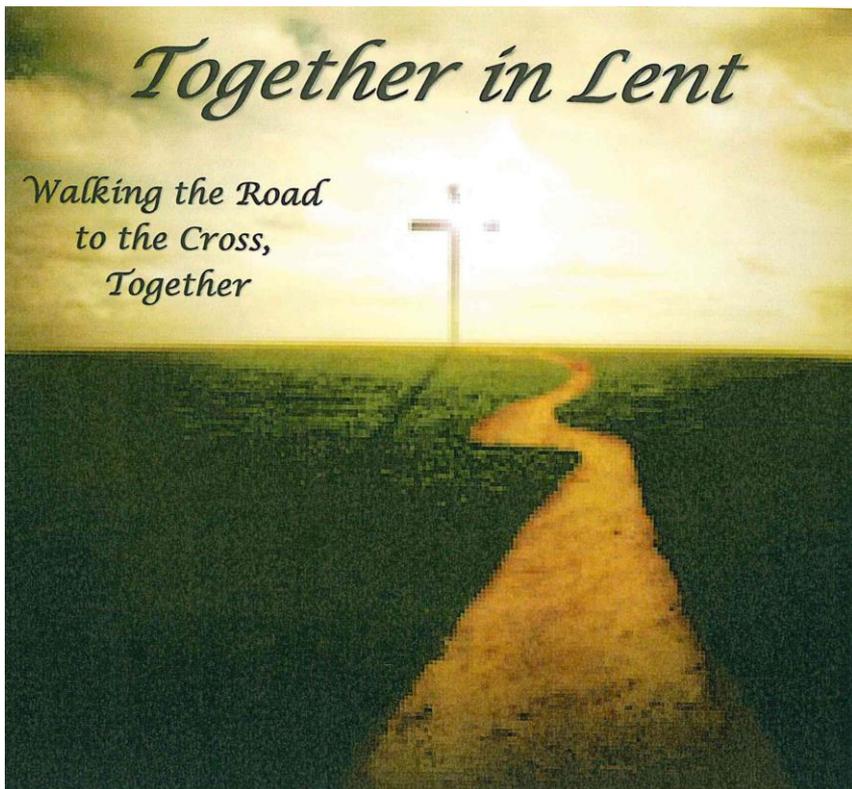


# *Together in Lent*

*Walking the Road  
to the Cross,  
Together*



Lenten Devotional  
Booklet

2018

*First Presbyterian Church ~  
Keeping Christ Central  
Omaha, NE  
fpcomaha.org*



*First Presbyterian Church  
A Heart for Christ in the  
Heart of the City*

**As we prepare our hearts for Holy Week and Easter, there are a number of opportunities to be aware of within the community of First Presbyterian Church. We hope you will not only want to be a part of it, but that you will encourage friends and family to join you.**

<b>Ash Wednesday</b> Meal Ash Wednesday Service	February 14 5:45 – 6:15 pm 6:30 pm	Dining Room Sanctuary
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<b>Wednesday Night Downtown</b> Meal Worship and Communion	Feb 21 – Mar 28 5:45 – 6:15 pm 6:30 pm	Dining Room Sanctuary
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<b>Palm Sunday</b> Celebrating the Triumphal Entry of our Lord	March 25 10:30 am	Sanctuary
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<b>Maundy Thursday</b> <i>Living Last Supper</i> Communion Worship Service	March 29 6:30 pm	Sanctuary
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<b>Good Friday</b> Candlelight Service “The Seven Last words of Christ”	March 30 6:30 pm	Sanctuary
<hr style="border: 2px solid black;"/>		
<b>Easter Morning</b> Celebrating the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ: “He Lives!”	April 1 10:30 am	Sanctuary

**For more information on any of these call the Church office at 402-345-5383 or visit the website at [www.fpcomaha.org](http://www.fpcomaha.org)**



1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: *Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.*

Prayer is an important part of our spiritual journey, and many prayers are more fervent during this period of Lent. Jesus was our ultimate role model in this as He went to His Father in prayer throughout His brief life on earth. These devotions end with a prayer to help us make that connection each day with God. Our prayer is that each of you deepens your relationship with our Lord and Savior, whose tremendous sacrifice of love is the basis of this Lenten season.

The first devotion in this booklet is for Ash Wednesday, February 10, and the 47-day Lenten season ends on Easter Sunday, March 27. All of these devotions have been written by the worshiping congregation of First Presbyterian Church. We thank each of them for sharing their spiritual writing gift.

Philippians 4:6-7: *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

On the day you read each person's contribution & the associated prayer, please pray also for the devotion writers who made contributions to this booklet.

**February 14 Ash Wednesday**  
**Alone. In the Garden.**

**Scripture:** *They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.* Mark 14:32-35

**Reflection:** Here the story changes...here the emotion heightens...here the tension increases...here in the garden is the last place Jesus is with his disciples...and yet he is alone as the faithful sleep, unaware of how their life would change in the next few hours.

It seems so poetic that Jesus goes for this last time of prayer to the garden called Gethsemane. This grove is located at the base of the Mount of Olives, and overlooks the valley to the gates of Jerusalem, with the temple just beyond the gates. So, all the while he is praying he can see the road that lies ahead.

But here among the olive trees that grow so twisted and gnarled, their appearance is so harsh some of the trees are almost grotesque, that it is here for the moment and he prays with such anguish. His insides twisting and turning as he prays for another way for this situation to end. His sorrow is so great that in Luke's gospel we are told his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.

Here in Gethsemane is the turning point, Gethsemane means oil press. It is here, in the place where olives are pressed with such a tremendous pressure that every drop of oil is gleaned from a single olive, that Jesus feels the pressure. And it is here after his heartfelt plea, Jesus resigns to the fact that this is God's will. Everything he has said and done his whole life has lead up to this moment and all that follows is the fulfillment of God's amazing love.

*He was looked down on and passed over,  
a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand.  
One look at him and people turned away.  
We looked down on him, thought he was scum.  
But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—  
our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us.*

*We thought he brought it on himself,  
that God was punishing him for his own failures.  
But it was our sins that did that to him,  
that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins!  
He took the punishment, and that made us whole.  
Through his bruises we get healed.*

*Isaiah 53 - The Message*

**Prayer:** Jesus, thank you for loving us so much that you were willing to endure such agony and pain. Overwhelm us daily with your love. Enable us to live lives worthy of your sacrifice so that we can share your love with others. Amen.

Contributed by Pastor Jennifer Blake



## February 15 The First Thursday in Lent **Scars**

**Scripture:** *...and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.* Matthew 6:12

**Reflection:** Life is full of things that leave us scared. Sometimes the scars are physical. Sometimes they are mental. Often they are both.

I have two 3-inch scars on my stomach from an incident as a child. I was about 5 years old. My sister and I were at my grandpa's farm and my memory has it that there were kittens in a hay wagon and a grown cat. My sister urged me to pick-up the grown one. Little did I know it was the tomcat and didn't like being held. Its claws ripped into my tender skin.

Next thing I know, I'm all tears as grandma tended my wound. All I wanted was my mom. I cried so much I got my way and was taken home.

The memories surrounding this event are vague and none of the details can be truly verified (I could be making most of it up). But for most of my life I've associated this event with a grandma who was mean to me, even though I can't really remember the meanness.

Then as an adult, my grandma let me know that it wouldn't have been her because by that time her and my grandpa were divorced and he had remarried. The grandma of my memory would have been my step-grandma.

You see, there has been a lot of trauma in my family. At a young age, my mom broke contact with her family and I spent most of my life out of relationship with the people on mom's side.

There are so many scars from the sin that has come down the generations. Sometimes it is difficult to understand how God is working in it all. It doesn't help when you stumble on tough verses like Exodus 34:7(ERV), "He shows his faithful love to thousands of people. He forgives people for the wrong things they do, but he does not forget to punish guilty people. Not only will he punish the guilty people, but their children, their grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren will also suffer for the bad things these people do."

Thankfully, after reading the book "God has a Name", I have a healthy understanding of this verse. God's not punishing me for things that my ancestors have done, however, their sin created circumstances in my family that prevented each person from becoming the best version of themselves they could be.

The best news in it all is that God offers us a way to recover from the sin that has infected us. He sent Jesus as a cure. When we accept the gift of Jesus, God's forgiveness of sins, several things happen in our life. First, we are healed by the assurance that the sins we *are* responsible for have been wiped off our record--the chain that ties us to our old selves is broken and we enter a new life where Christ works through us and conforms us more and more to his image, he helps us become our best version.

Which leads us to the opening scripture, "and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us", and the epiphany that inspired my reflection.

My step-grandma recently passed away and I attended her funeral with my mom's two brothers and her sister. At the funeral, I learned more about grandma Dori than I knew about her all my life. I learned that she was a believer in Jesus and that she was loved by many. In that moment I began to heal the mental scar that long persisted with the physical scar from those cat scratches. I offered Dori my forgiveness and began to thank my grandparents for bringing me up in the ways of God; for instilling in me the virtues of loving God and loving others.

If Heaven is a place where all bad things are undone, as people of God's Kingdom, it suits us to already begin that process as much as we can. Advice for that comes to us in a very familiar prayer, forgiving the sins of others just as God has forgiven our own sins.

**Prayer:** Loving Father of Heaven, your ways are the most amazing and can't be matched. Thank you for providing us what we need and giving us a way to bring heaven to earth. Just as you came to earth as Jesus and walked the path of sacrificial love to the point of giving up your life to show your sincere love for us, help us continue bringing expressions of You into the world so that your living presence can be experienced by all as we give evidence of Your unfailing love.

Contributed by David McBride

**February 16 The First Friday in Lent**  
**The Courage of Dismas**



**Reflection:** It was always difficult to understand Dismas, the thief who was told he would be with Jesus in paradise, even when I used to portray him during Holy Week. But a careful reading of the scriptures tells us that of all of the people surrounding Jesus at that terrible time he was the only ONE who stood up and told the crowd, we are all guilty, BUT this man is INNOCENT.

Imagine you were on a playground and have just been beaten by the class bully, you've got a black-eye and your lip is bleeding. Your clothes are torn and your eyes are swelling shut. You can't even think of facing your parents.

Then one student steps up and says, STOP IT! HE DIDN'T DO anything TO BE TREATED this way.

It is a girl who leaves the group of jeering kids and stands with him. The girl walks up to the bully and looks him in the eye. "Come on, hit me, from what I've seen you're the kind that would hit a girl."

If you were the one beaten up, as I was often – what would it mean to you if one person stood up for you. Listen to what it meant to Jesus.

"Today YOU will be with ME in Paradise." That was a very big GIFT. ARE YOU GOING TO STAND WITH HIM?

Contributed by RH Fanders

## February 17 The First Saturday in Lent On the Edge of the Night

**Scripture:** *Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute.* Proverbs 31:8

*Then the king will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who have been blessed by my Father! Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, because I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed me. I was naked, and you clothed me. I was sick, and you took care of me. I was in prison, and you visited me.'* "Then the righteous will say to him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you something to eat, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you as a stranger and welcome you, or see you naked and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison, and visit you?' The king will answer them, 'I tell all of you with certainty, since you did it for one of the least important of these brothers of mine, you did it for me.'

Mathew 25: 34 – 40



**Reflection:** Last weekend I took down the Christmas tree. The task always makes me a little melancholy. Dismantling the tree usually occurs the first weekend of the new year and symbolizes the end of the holiday season for us. Christmas is done, the new year has been rung in, John and Sean, both having holiday birthdays, are one year older. Feeling a little low, I yelled at Alexa and told her to turn off the pop music nonsense that was blaring and play David Bowie songs. Sean, offended that "his" music had

been replace with his aging mother's, rolled his now 14-year-old eyes and complained:

"Why did you turn off my music? And why do you like David Bowie so much?"

"First, I'm the mother and I get to listen to what I want to, when I want to, because, well, I'm the mother. Second, David Bowie happens to be the epitome of cool."

"My singers are cool too."

"Not as cool as Bowie."

“How do you know? Who made *him* the coolest?”

“Everyone knows he’s the coolest. There’s a room somewhere with this coolness chart, it’s just a huge picture of Bowie, and all the pop-tarts on the radio today just wish they had the chance to measure up to Bowie.”

“What about Bruno Mars?”

“Not nearly as cool; wouldn’t come up to Bowie’s shins, let alone his knee caps.”

“What about Justin Bieber?”

“Are you kidding? I don’t think they would even let him into the room with the chart!”

“But you said Despacito was a good song to dance to!”

“Okay, Bieber might get to go into the room because of that one song, but they probably won’t let him close to the chart.”

“What about Charlie Puth?”

“Charlie Poof?”

“No Puth.”

“Poop?”

“No, PUTH!”

“Well, I’m pretty sure anyone with the last name “Poof” hasn’t got a chance of being cool.”

“You got to admit Maroon 5 is cool.”

“Who’s Maroon 5? What does he sing?”

“It’s not a HE, it’s a THEM!”

“Macaroon 5 – *THEY* sound like a plate of pastries – not cool at all.”

“Not Macaroon! Maroon!”

“Maroon, like the color of dirty beet juice? Okay, got it. Do they all dress in maroon colored suits – that might look sharp. Better yet, they could all dress in beet costumes, like the Fruit of the Loom guys – might not be cool, but it would be really funny!”

“MOTHER! You’re making me think you’re crazy!”

“You only *think* I’m crazy? I grew up in in the 70s.”

“MOTHERRRRR!”

Having vanquished all coolness contenders, I went back to packing up ornaments and listening to “my” music just in time to hear the start of one of my favorite Bowie songs – “Under Pressure”. David Bowie’s music is, admittedly, not everyone’s cup of tea, but he was a masterful lyricist. Technically, “Under Pressure” is a collaboration between Bowie and the rock group Queen; however, Bowie is credited with writing much of the lyrics. The song was often performed as a duet with the question posed:

*“Why can’t we give love one more chance?” The answer is haunting:*

*“Because love’s such an old-fashioned word  
And love dares you to care for  
The people on the edge of the night  
And love dares you to change our way of  
Caring about ourselves  
This is our last dance  
This is our last dance  
This is ourselves, under pressure.”*

Under Pressure was written in 1981, not by particularly religious persons, but inspired all the same. Sadly, thirty-some years later, the lyrics are just as relevant – we haven’t succeeded in changing the way we care about ourselves, and the people on the edge of the night are still out there. Whenever I listen to this song, I’m forced to examine my conscience and ask myself how well do I dare to care? Too often I am not very daring at all. The people on the edge of the night are not those that I would naturally be drawn to. They may be unkept, ill mannered, unsophisticated, uneducated. They may be persons who don’t share my interests or political views. Whatever the case may be, If I am a follower of Jesus, I’m called to care for those who have trouble caring for themselves. This requires not a change in anyone else, but a change in myself.

Our church does a great job reaching out to people in need, people who may feel the pressures of poverty, hunger, alienation or exclusion from society. We help serve lunches to midtown residents, we stock a pantry, we minister to persons reentering society with Crossroads Connection, we help support a refugee family, to name a few of our ministries. This Lenten season, my goal is not to see what I can easily give up, but to reflect on what I can do to care for those persons “on the edge of the night”.

**Prayer:** God, thank you for the gifts you have given me. Inspire me to reach beyond what is comfortable. Give me courage to approach those who need my help. Help me discern how I can best use my talents and resources. Instead of my plans, give me grace to see your will, and follow where you lead. Amen.

Contributed by Karen Kroupa

**February 18 The First Sunday in Lent**  
**Praying for Those We Love**

**Scripture:** *Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.* Mark 11: 24

**Reflection:** "I Said a Prayer for You Today"

I said a prayer for you today  
And I know He must've heard~  
I felt the answer in my heart  
Although He spoke not a word.  
I didn't ask for wealth or fame  
(I knew you wouldn't mind)  
I asked Him to send treasures  
of a far more lasting kind!  
I asked that He be near you  
At the start of each new day  
To grant you health and blessings  
And friends to share your way!  
I asked for happiness for you  
In all things great and small~  
But it was for His loving care  
I prayed most of all!  
~Author unknown

**Prayer:** Our dear living Lord, we all have those in our lives who we wish knew you better. Today we pray for those who need you most and know you least. We ask your comfort for them today.

May we be helpful in leading them to know you and your love very personally. Amen



## **February 19 The First Monday in Lent**

**Reflection:** I want to share this excerpt from Sarah Young's book 40 Days With Jesus - Celebrating His Presence. It is written as if Jesus is speaking to us personally and is designed to help deepen our personal relationship with God.

“My kingdom cannot be shaken! This present world seems to be shaking more and more, leaving you off balance much of the time. As you worship Me, however, your perspective changes and you regain your balance. To worship Me acceptably with reverence and awe, **Thankfulness** is essential. I designed you to be THANKFUL on a daily, moment-by-moment basis. You need to resist the temptation to grumble when things don't go as you would like.

My unshakable kingdom is for all people who love Me, who know me as Savior. This everlasting kingdom consists of things that no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived. I have prepared infinite, wondrous delights for those who love Me. Moreover, at the end of the age I will come back and take you to be with Me so that you may be where I am. Let these precious promises ignite your THANKFULNESS, till you are aglow with My Living Presence - shining brightly in this dark world.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help us to be thankful in all circumstances always seeking and recognizing the positive things that you have done and are doing in our lives. Open our eyes to see and our hearts to recognize how much you love us and care for us.” Amen

Contributed by Tom and Sandi Helligso

Give  
thanks

## **February 20 The First Tuesday in Lent** **First World Problems – Why Me Lord?**



**Scripture:** *When someone has been given much, much will be required in return; and when someone has been entrusted with much, even more will be required.* Luke 12: 48

*If you open your heart to the hungry, and provide abundantly for those who are afflicted, your light will shine in the darkness, and your gloom will be like the noon. The Lord will guide you continually and provide for you.* Isaiah 58: 1-12

**Reflection:** I've got a few complaints today. My finger joints hurt when I first wake up in the morning. I'm developing a roll around my waistline. My fast food doesn't arrive quickly enough. I have a little too much work to do for my job. My kids live too far away. I miss my mom who died at 82 years of age. Really? Those are the problems in my life? Can I really be complaining about these things? In the scheme of things, these would be what people call First World Problems – they wouldn't even register as a problem to most people in the world.

During the past year we have been able to travel to a lot of cool and far-away places in the US and around the world. I've learned a lot from all this travel. One thing I guess I've known (but not really known) all along, is that I live a very fortunate life, not just compared to some people, but compared to most people. I'm not a black child living in the settlements of South Africa with no running water and limited access to education. I'm not a toothless sugar plantation worker in Jamaica, relying on seasonal work and going hungry in the meantime. I'm not a migrant worker in Mexico who lives far from my family so that I can send money home so they won't go hungry. I'm not an orphan in a war-torn country who will never know my parents. I'm not a Syrian refugee waiting to

find out if I'll be sent back to a country where my family and I will likely be killed. I didn't have to worry about whether my kids would be killed by stray bullets as they walked to school in an inner-city neighborhood. I haven't had to put my life on hold for cancer treatments. I have to seriously ask "Why is that"? Why do I have such good fortune, or "blessings", when so many others in the world have so much less? Why me Lord?

Yes, I studied hard. Yes, I am honest and trustworthy and work hard. Yes, I faithfully trust my days to the Lord. There are many people who can say the same things and yet have none of the good fortune I have. I know I'm not more loved or favored by God, and the mere ability to study and work and know the Lord are blessings all by themselves. Why me Lord? Why did you bless me in these ways?

I know that all good things come from the Lord for the purpose of improving the world. In a time when it seems there are many who are focused on improving things for ourselves, it begins to feel normal to keep these blessings to myself. But I read in the scripture from Micah 6:8, "*O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.*"

When I think of all the Lord has given me on this earth, I know God is trusting me to share my great blessings with others who have so much less. Out of the abundance God has given me, I can share so much. Am I doing enough? Am I looking hard enough? What more should I be seeing? I pray this Lenten season to see with the eyes Christ sees with, and to show the mercy I have been shown.

**Prayer:** (from worship bulletin 1/28/18) Dear Lord, we have been given so much, and are promised all that we need, but we often feel we need more. Even when abundantly blessed, we take our excess and store it, when we should be sharing with those who have less. You provide us with good and useful things, which we often use for less than Your glory. You create us in Your own image, and instead of being more like You, we turn our backs on others. Help us to appreciate Your blessings, to bless others through these gifts, and to be the image of You to all we meet.

Amen

Contributed by Lori Snyder-Sloan

**February 21 The Second Wednesday in Lent**  
**While You're Here...**

**Scripture:** *I give thanks to you, O Lord my God, with my whole heart, and I will glorify your name forever.* Psalm 86:12

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?* 1 Corinthians 3:16

*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.* 1 Corinthians 10:31

*And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* Colossians 3:17

**Reflection:** Our dog Ziggy is a calculating little thing. A mercenary at the core of his fuzzy little heart, one can almost see the gears in his poodle brain grinding out various strategies of how to get what he wants. He is trained, knows many commands (both verbal as well as some hand signals), but seldom obeys without first sizing you up to see if you have something in your hand. He wants very much to be the Alpha of our pack. If he were a larger, more formidable dog this might be alarming; but topping the scale at 12 pounds, I just find it amusing.

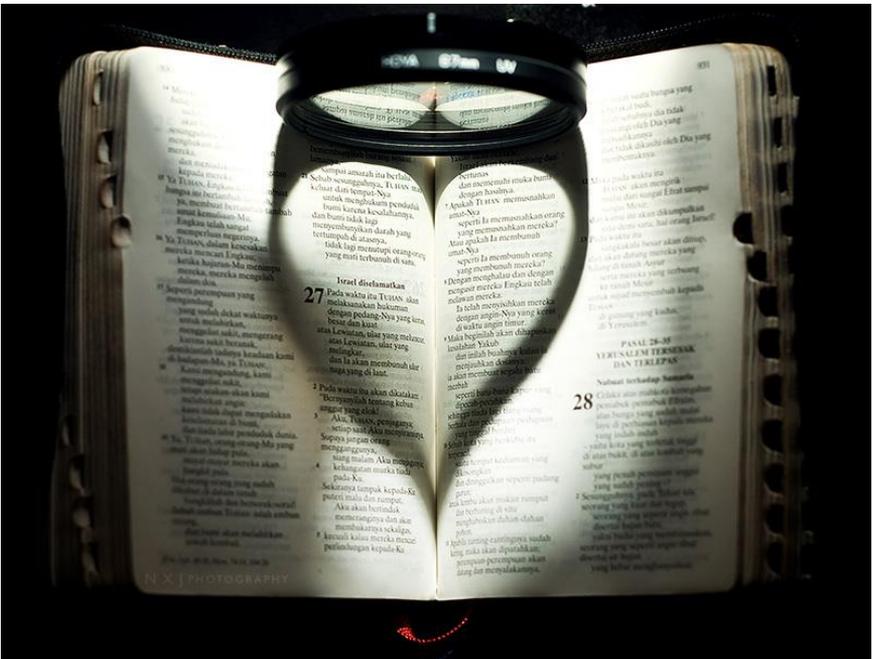
One of the funniest things Ziggy does is throw a fit at about 4:30 every day just before Sean arrives home. Like most dogs, he has an alarmingly accurate sense of time. Every day, Zig stands at the door, tail wagging furiously, prancing from foot to foot, barking and whining in anticipation. Then when Sean comes through the door, Ziggy suddenly stops, walks nonchalantly up to him, gives him a quick sniff and walks off; aloof coolness oozing out of him. Wouldn't want Sean to get the wrong idea, like he was important. "Oh, yeah, it's you. Since you're here, how 'bout making a lap, getting me a treat, or maybe a walk?"

Some years, this is how I approach Lent and Easter. Excitement builds and builds; Easter comes, then: "Oh, yeah, it's you. Since you're here, how 'bout ending world hunger, abolishing discrimination and maybe solving global warming?" I find myself walking away, knowing exactly what I should be doing, but weighing: what's in it for me?

1 Corinthians 10:31 and Colossians 3:17 both tell me that whatever I do, I am to do it for the glory of God. There may be unexpected "treats" that come my way (a new friend, discovering

an unexpected talent, opened opportunities), but my motivation should be to glorify God. To me, glorifying God means reflecting what God has done for me back to the world: stewardship of the earth, volunteering my time and talents, participating in worship services. This year, during Lent and beyond, my prayer is to reflect God's love for me. To glorify God in words and deeds, doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

**Prayer:** Lord, you alone are glorious! Forgive me when I forget your love, when I walk away to attend to something else, when I take for granted that you will walk through the door of my life again tomorrow. Thank you for all your gifts. Help me remember that I am your face to the world. Give me wisdom and courage to reflect your love in all that I do. Amen      Contributed by Karen Kroupa



**February 22 The Second Thursday in Lent**  
**Orion's Belt**

**Reflection:** *And God said, "Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth." And it was so. God made ... the stars. God set them in the expanse of the sky to give light on the earth, to govern the day and the night and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that it was good.*

Genesis 1:14-18

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.*

Psalm 19:1

**Reflection:** I grew up in New Mexico and we spent summer vacations camping. Sometimes at night we would sleep outside so we could enjoy the stars. Back in the 1970s, in the high deserts in the middle of nowhere, you could see a zillion stars. One constellation we could always find is Orion's Belt, three stars together in a straight line. Far fewer stars show in Omaha at night, but Orion's Belt is clearly visible.

Orion's Belt looks like three stars together in a straight line, but two of the three are actually multiple stars:

\*Alnitak is on the left/bottom. It is 817 light years from earth and is three stars that together shine 100,000 times brighter than our sun.

\*Alnilam is the middle star and is 1340 light years from earth, has a radius 30 times that of our sun, and is 375,000 times brighter.

\*Mintaka is 915 light years from earth and is composed of two stars that orbit each other every six days. Together they are 20 times more massive and 90,000 times brighter than our sun.

One light year (the distance light travels in one earth year) is 6 trillion miles, and so Alnilam, is 523 light years--

3,138,000,000,000,000 miles--further away from earth than Alnitak, which is already 4,902,000,000,000,000 miles away.

It is beyond comprehension that stars so huge, so different, and thousands of trillions of miles away from one another appear on earth as three similar stars, side-by-side in a straight line. Our awesome God can do anything!



**Prayer:** *Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work with us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever! Amen. Ephesians 3:20-21*

Contributed by Amy Rodie

## **February 23 The Second Thursday in Lent** **Ordinary People in Extraordinary Circumstances**

**Scripture:** *Elijah then said to Ahab, "Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of a heavy rain." So Ahab went up to eat and drink, while Elijah went up to the top of Carmel, crouched down to the earth, and put his head between his knees. He said to his servant, "Go up and look out to sea." He went up and looked, but reported, "There is nothing." Seven times he said, "Go look again!" And the seventh time the youth reported, "There is a cloud as small as a man's hand rising from the sea." Elijah said, "Go and say to Ahab, 'Harness up and go down the mountain before the rain stops you.'" All at once the sky grew dark with clouds and wind, and a heavy rain fell. Ahab mounted his chariot and headed for Jezreel. But the hand of the LORD was on Elijah. He girded up his clothing and ran before Ahab as far as the approaches to Jezreel.* 1 Kings 18:41-6

**Reflection:** Between Thanksgiving and Christmas last year, I was preparing a six-part discussion of several Twilight Zone episodes, which I hope to present later this year. If this materializes, I'll try to let anyone who is interested know when and where.

A cornerstone of the Twilight Zone, its abiding premise, was placing ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances, as the MeTV promo will tell you. This allowed Rod Sterling, as a writer, to occasionally pose the kind of questions CBS Standards and Practices, that is, the network censors, would never allow in a drama, situation comedy, or variety show.

Rod Sterling was born into a Jewish family on Christmas day, 1924, and grew up in Binghamton, New York. That the creator of the Twilight Zone was Jewish should surprise no one, since the Old Testament, from the death of Abel to the birth of Keren-Hapuch, is spilling over with ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances. And this allows God to pose questions our Sunday School teachers would never let us discuss.

As you may recall, all we know about Elijah is that he came from Tishbe, although James, in his epistle, says Elijah was "just like us". Ahab was the son of Omri, who had been commander of the Israeli army when Zimri, commander of the king's chariots, assassinated King Elah, and declared himself King of Israel. The army, loyal to its commander, wanted Omri to be king. Zimri, as it happened, reigned for seven days; when he died, another army

officer assumed the contested throne, but was also defeated. although not in seven short days.

Midway through Omri's twelve-year reign, he moved his capitol to a city called Samaria, which is why the northern kingdom came to be known as Samaria, and the people living there, even in Christ's time, were known as Samaritans.

Ahab became king when his father passed away. He wasn't from any royal line, he was just the son of a career military man who'd gotten a lucky break and played his cards well. Ahab had sense enough to seek an end to the intermittent warring which had plagued the two kingdoms, and sought to do this through an alliance with Phoenicia, the Mediterranean's foremost naval power, effectively backing Judah into a corner. With their coast exposed to a Samaritan ally, they would dare not move their army inland to strike at the northern kingdom.

He secured this supremely important alliance by marrying a Phoenician princess. Her name? Well, close behind Mary, Esther, and Eve, hers is probably a name immediately recognized as that of a woman in the Bible. Yes, Ahab married Jezebel.

The good news? His plan worked. Although the two kingdoms remained divided, fighting between them ceased, and the ensuing spirit of brotherhood and co-operation made the position of both kingdoms substantially more secure, and the daily life of every Israelite less troubled.

The bad news? Jezebel brought with her another pagan pantheon, and idolatry in Samaria grew exponentially. God, as you might easily guess, was not at all pleased. Out of nowhere, more-or-less, Elijah comes forward to tell Ahab there will be no rain until further notice.

On the heels of drought comes famine; God sends Elijah to Zarephath, outside of Israel entirely, for three years before sending him back to Ahab. And the first thing Ahab says upon seeing Elijah is, if I may paraphrase a little, "Are you back, you old trouble-maker?"

Now in fairness to Ahab, Elijah hadn't spelled it out for him, and Jezebel was having prophets of God put to death, so it seems reasonable to assume that nobody who *knew* why it wasn't raining wanted to explain it to Ahab. It was perfectly normal for him to think Elijah was the whole problem in a nutshell, and this is exactly the point. Like Elijah, he's an ordinary person in an extraordinary circumstance. Never occurs to him that the real cause of his nation's problem is his own foreign policy, his own desire to secure the borders. Never occurs to him that wanting to make

Samaria great again might somehow impoverish his people. This is distressingly normal, isn't it?

Put simply, Elijah calls for a summit conference on Mount Carmel. It's time for Israel to decide. Who is lord over Israel? Is it Yahweh, the great I AM? Or is Baal, the Phoenician lord of the popular buzz, of economic stability and military hardware, now lord over the children of Abraham, the family of Jacob, the kingdom of David? Who has gone up to heaven and come down again—who has cupped the wind in the hollow of the hand? Who has bound up the waters in a cloak—who has established all the ends of the earth? What is that person's name, or the name of his son?" (Proverbs 30:4)

You remember how the conference concludes? Yes, God, the *real* God, the *only* true God, sends fire. And the prophets Jezebel sent are put to death. Is Ahab moved by any of this? No, he's still right there, if not awestruck, then just confused. Elijah tells him to go, and he goes. Then Elijah gets down, head between his knees, as if he's feeling ill, and I'm sure he is.

Rod Sterling was a combat veteran, and the experience was, as it is for everyone who goes through it, traumatic. With nightmares, panic, and emotional difficulties. I mention this now because there's a detail here your Sunday School teacher may have glossed over. The execution of Jezebel's prophets. Elijah wasn't merely following orders, he was issuing them. The first prophet of God to raise a person from the dead was now doing something else entirely, *and it must have been harrowing for him*. This brings us to a question I cannot gloss over, much as I'd like to.

Was it necessary?

First, I want to step back and look forward, in order to make something completely clear. With Christ's sacrifice on the cross, there is no more spilling of blood. Taking another human life is never the business of a Christian. In military service or situations of defending innocent third parties, upon examination of conscience, a Christian might justifiably resort to an ultimate violence, but this is never a normal option, never an acceptable part of everyday life for a Christian. It cannot be.

The footnotes of the New American Bible explain that Baal was known as "the cloud rider". Before a cloud approached from the horizon, it was imperative that no prophet of the cloud rider was left alive to claim *he* had summoned it.

The distance from Mount Carmel to Jezreel, along a modern road, is roughly twenty-four miles, so Elijah was pretty much running a marathon, and with what he'd been through, the

restlessness, the willingness to do that is very understandable, although it was God who gave him the strength to stay ahead of Ahab's chariot the whole time.

**Prayer:** Lord, almighty God, Father of your beloved and blessed Son Jesus Christ, through whom we have come to the knowledge of yourself, God of angels, of powers, of all creation, of all the saints who live in your sight, I bless you for judging me worthy of this day, this hour, so that I may share the cup of Christ, your anointed one, and so rise again to eternal life through the power of the Holy Spirit. God of truth, stranger to falsehood, I praise you for all things, I bless you, I glorify you through the eternal priest of heaven, Jesus Christ, your beloved Son. Through him be glory to you, together with him and the Holy Spirit, now and forever. Amen.

Contributed by Stacy Stephens



**February 24 The Second Saturday in Lent**  
**United or Divided**

**Scripture:** *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all loneliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

Ephesians 4: 1-3

**Reflection:** My Dad, Dan Schmidt, kept a diary from the birth of his father, Jacob Richard Schmidt, 1857, to his own last days in 1978. It was full of family news; neighbors in Council Bluffs and Neligh; World Series scores; weather...you name it, it's in there.

When we settled my Mother's things in 1953, I was assigned "Custodian of the diary." One would presume it was a great book! No, Dad used any scrap of paper that was clean and recorded his thoughts and facts in his hand-written Spenserian script.

For the last couple years I have been dismantling Dad's diary. I sorted out Neligh news for the New Antelope County Museum; accumulated the articles about the Neligh Mill; separated all the clippings about Dr. Harry Boyne, our childhood neighbor, and sent them to the Creighton Dental College named for him; and sent family birth and death facts to my Mormon granddaughter who is serious about our genealogy.

But, every now and then, there'll be a short little gem, which made an impression on Dad:

"For fifty years we have heard too much about the things which divided us. Let us now make a great effort to remember the things which united us. With these links we can begin to forge a new and better understanding in the future." ~Queen Elizabeth II, during her recent tour of West Germany. (Printed in the Nonpareil, 7/29/65)

As true today as it was then...

**Prayer:** Dear Heavenly Father, help us in all aspects of our lives to forge unity rather than division.

Contributed by Mary Mahoney

**February 25 The Second Sunday in Lent**  
**Willing to do Your Will**

**Scripture:** *Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.* John 5:24

**Reflection:** It is important to remember the past and, as a consequence, to gain some perspective as to where we are fifty years on and appreciate those that sacrificed.

The following song commemorates four assassinated American leaders: Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Robert F. Kennedy. "Abraham, Martin, and John" (1968, words and music by Richard Holler)

Anybody here seen my old friend Abraham?  
Can you tell me where he's gone?  
He freed a lotta people, but it seems the good they die young.  
You know I just looked around and he's gone.  
Anybody here seen my old friend John?  
Can you tell me where he's gone?  
He freed a lotta people, but it seems the good they die young.  
You know I just looked around and he's gone.  
Anybody here seen my old friend Martin?  
Can you tell me where he's gone?  
He freed a lotta people, but it seems the good they die young.  
You know I just looked around and he's gone.  
Didn't you love the things that they stood for?  
Didn't they try to find some good for you and me?  
And we'll be free  
Someday soon, it's gonna be one day.  
Anybody here seen my old friend Bobby?  
Can you tell me where he's gone?  
I thought I saw him walkin' up over the hill  
With Abraham, Martin and John.

**Prayer:** O God, make us willing to do your will, come what may. Increase the number of persons of good will and moral sensitivity. Give us renewed confidence in nonviolence and the way of love as taught by Christ. Amen. (Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)

Contributed by Greg Caddy

**February 26 The Second Monday in Lent**  
**The Bracelet**

**Scripture:** *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*  
Philippians 4:13

**Reflection:** You may wonder what a bracelet has to do with Lent. It's not the bracelet itself that is so important, but it is the words on the bracelet. As many of you know, last September I broke an ankle again. I was in Old Mill Rehab Center and fortunately had my church family visit me.

The first Sunday I was there, before surgery on the ankle, I had several visitors, two of them being David McBride and Don Brewer. Don brought me a book he had checked out of the church library for me titled *The Power of Positive Thinking* with instructions that I was to return the book to church, which would get me back to church. The book is back in the library!

My leg was wrapped in a splint cast, and David could see that I had a long road ahead of me. He took this bracelet off his wrist and gave to me. David is one who knows his Bible extremely well, and through working together on Marketing and Outreach, he always knows the right Bible verse to come up with. He did it again with this bracelet.

On it the words are as follows: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me – Philippians 4:13." I have taken it off my wrist only three times – once before surgery and then two other times to show people. This has been a difficult four months, but it is Christ who is giving me the strength to get through this, and I'm not done yet as I don't have my regular independent walking pace or going up the stairs with one foot on a stair. I don't know what He has planned for me, but I do know I will get my strength from Him. Thank you, David, again for this bracelet.

So what does this have to do with Lent and Jesus? It's the Good Friday story. It's because Jesus had to rely on God as He suffered on the cross asking "My God, My God, why have you abandoned me?" He needed the strength from Christ as he suffered until the skies turned dark, the earth shook, buildings fell, and He took His last breath as the mortal man named Jesus.

There is no comparison between Jesus and myself other than we both needed strength and that we all need God's strength as we travel through each day.

**Prayer:** Thank you God, for giving us Jesus, and for the strength we are given through You. We ask that You be with us at all times. Thank you, Jesus, Amen. Contributed by Joyce Prohaska

## **February 27 The Second Tuesday in Lent** **Everlasting Arms!**

**Scripture:** *Underneath are the everlasting arms.*

Deuteronomy 33:27

**Reflection:** The “Christian Century” magazine (January 17, 2018) reported the following story: “Lutheran chaplain, Patrick McLaughlin, served in the Iraq war. His toughest job was caring for children who were brought to the combat hospital, which served combatants and civilians alike. When children were dying and there was nothing more the doctors could do besides administer morphine, McLaughlin would take the children into his arms and rock them until they died. At first, he did this standing. Then he asked the military engineers to make rocking chairs. He would hold and rock the children until they breathed their last breath.”

A touching story indeed, but also a true story about the very nature of God Himself. At the beginning of life, during life, at the end of life, He holds us in His care and concern. When everything else has been done, He is the One who still holds us, and cares for us to the very end—and then even beyond. That ancient and distant Hebrew writer of Deuteronomy also must have sensed this and wrote centuries ago: “Underneath are the everlasting arms.” (Deut.: 33:27) How true!

This is what the Season of Lent is reminding us today! Let us look at the cross and the One on the cross whose arms are still stretched out—arms reaching out to guide us, to comfort us, to quiet us, and to help carry us into Eternity. “Underneath are the everlasting arms.”

**Prayer:** Ever loving Father: Let the life of Jesus inspire us, comfort and uphold us, until we share together the light of your glory and the peace of your eternal presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.      Contributed by The Rev. William Osick

**February 28 The Third Wednesday in Lent**  
**Love like Jesus**

**Scripture:** *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.*  
John 3: 16

**Reflection:** A familiar verse for many of us. One we might have hung onto for our basis of theology. Although it is more foundational for me now I had one from early church days that still has a place in my heart. One of those with “comfort words” I pull out for reassurance, “*Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so*”. Words from a familiar childhood song still resonate with me.

I think about that little song often as I reflect on the years past and what is yet to come. As parents we had three sons, who along with my husband loved them long before they were born. A love deep and unconditional. As many parents we thought they were perfect and after the first one was born we doubted we could love another the same way.

But three years later number two came and four years after that number three came into our lives. We were amazed at the depth of our love was the same for each. As our life continued, daughter-in-law’s and grandchildren have been added, all of which find the same place in our heart.

All of which placed new meaning on God’s capacity to love and the sacrifice he gave for our eternal life. John 13:34-35 “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*”.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, through good times and times of challenge, I am grateful that you still love me. That from a simple childhood song I could build a relationship with you that offers me forgiveness, blessings and promises of days of joy. As I wander through life let me be an example of love and a continual disciple working to hear and do those things you call me to do. Amen

Contributed by Bonnie Brown

## **March 1 The Third Thursday in Lent** **Make Mine a Golden Calf Please**

**Scripture:** *And he took the calf the people had made and burned it in the fire; then he ground it to powder, scattered it on the water and made the Israelites drink it.* Exodus 30:20

**Reflection:** I'm not a drinker but the names of mixed drinks can be interesting. Bloody Mary, where did that come from? Maybe you've asked for a Dirty Martini, Tequila Sunrise, Screwdriver, Sea Breeze or a Moscow Mule. Maybe you've had one or more of these but do you know about the first mixed drink described in the Bible which I call the Golden Calf? Do you know the story of this Lenten drink?

Moses comes down from Mt Sinai with the Ten Commandments only to discover the people worshipping a golden calf. Not good. Moses throws down the tablets and gets a new set from God. The punishment for idol worship in the Old Testament is death and several thousand calf-worshipping unrepentant ringleaders are indeed killed for their actions. But what of the rest, what is the fate for these calf-worshipping followers?

Interestingly Moses melts down the golden calf and grinds the gold into a powder which he mixes with water and makes the people drink it. This strange punishment of drinking unclean, tainted water is in fact the Biblical punishment for unfaithfulness. This punishment is described again in Numbers 5 for an unfaithful marriage partner.

God and Moses see unfaithfulness, a loss of integrity as the sin to be dealt with for most of the people. Can't we all admit to deserving our own Golden Calf mixed drink? In fact, I contend we can all be Golden Calf-aholics at times, constantly unfaithful to God and His Law. We have our own idols of pride, material goods, lusts and sins too many to mention here. We have all said at one time or another, 'I'll have another' or worse yet, 'make mine a double.'

Thankfully during Lent we remember our unfaithfulness and are called to the New Testament life-giving drink of Jesus, the Living Water. Our communion cup of the blood of Jesus is a work of grace to forgive our sins, not punishment for them. These are the life-giving rounds of drinks Jesus paid for everyone, on the house, free of charge. Some will stick with the Golden Calf they are already drinking. Me, I'll have what He's having, what He is offering. I hope you will too.

Contributed by Keith Petersen

## March 2 The Third Friday in Lent Sharing in their Pain

**Scripture:** *You are familiar with the generosity of our Master, Jesus Christ. Rich as he was, he gave it all away for us--in one stroke he became poor and we became rich.* II Corinthians 8:9

**Reflection:** I have recently returned from a wonderful conference on worship which was attended by more than 1500 Christians from more than 43 countries. Even more would have been there if their visas had not been denied.

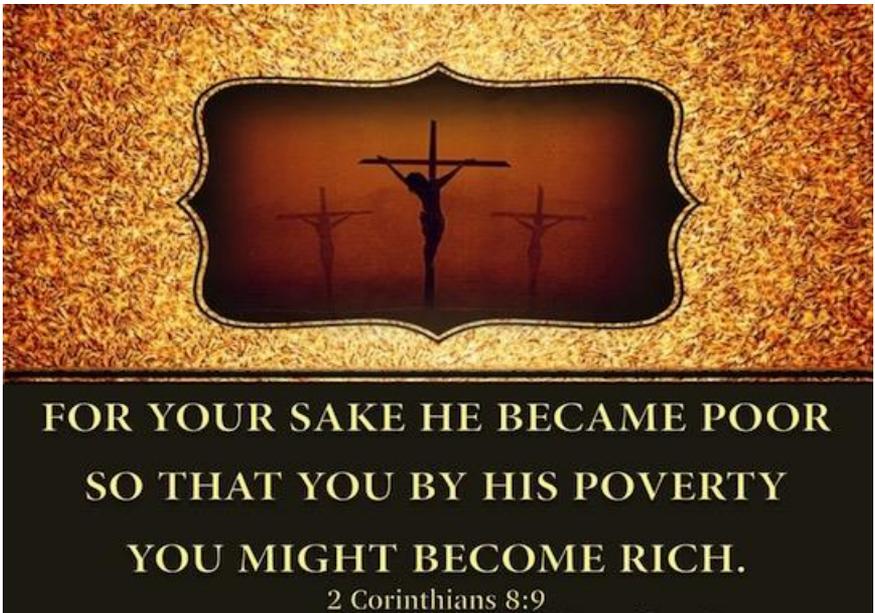
What a foretaste of heaven it was to hear praise and prayer offered up to God in many languages and by believers of all ages!

I attended several sessions on the persecution and hardship endured by Christians around the world and was particularly moved by the sharing together of the Immigrant/Refugee Apostles' Creed:

I believe in Almighty God,  
who guided the people in exile and in exodus,  
the God of Joseph in Egypt and Daniel in Babylon,  
the God of foreigners and immigrants.  
I believe in Jesus Christ, a displaced Galilean,  
who was born away from his people and his home,  
who fled his country with his parents when his life was in  
danger.  
When he returned to his own country he suffered under the  
oppression of Pontius Pilate,  
the servant of a foreign power.  
Jesus was persecuted, beaten, tortured, and unjustly  
condemned to death.  
But on the third day Jesus rose from the dead,  
not as a scorned foreigner but to offer us citizenship in  
God's kingdom.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the eternal immigrant from God's kingdom among us,  
who speaks all languages, lives in all countries,  
and reunites all races.  
I believe that the Church is the secure home  
for foreigners and for all believers.  
I believe that the communion of saints begins  
when we embrace all God's people in all their diversity.  
I believe in forgiveness, which makes us all equal before  
God, and in reconciliation, which heals our brokenness.  
I believe that in the Resurrection

God will unite us as one people  
in which all are distinct and all are alike at the same time.  
I believe in life eternal, in which no one will be foreigner  
but all will be citizens of the kingdom  
where God reigns forever and ever. AMEN.

**Prayer:** (Hebrews 13:3) Lord, help us to stay on good terms with each other, held together by love. May we be ready with a meal or a bed when it's needed, remembering that some have extended hospitality to angels without ever knowing it! Teach us to regard prisoners as if we were in prison with them. May we look on victims of abuse as if what happened to them had happened to us. Let us remember that this world is not our home. Thank you for your promise to never let us down, never walk off and leave us, but to always be with us. AMEN      Contributed by Joyce Reimer



## March 3 The Third Saturday in Lent He is Here

**Scripture:** *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.* Romans 1:20

**Reflection:** I have been in Houston for several weeks now. Keith and I have been all over town, enjoying the sights and weather of Houston. We have visited several churches (mega and small), we have been able to work side-by-side and I am always okay as long as I am with him! As much as I love and adore the family who has taken us into their home; as much as I love and appreciate the time to be with Keith; as thankful as I am that he has the opportunity to be at MD Anderson Hospital, I miss home. I miss my Omaha family, my friends, and my work home. I miss my puppy dog and my neighbors and my house.



I am thankful for technology. With one simple app I can see my kids and grandkids face to face. The last time we face-timed, my youngest grandson, Gavin carried the phone around his house so we could see everything from what will be served for lunch to the game they were playing. With another app, I can activate the security cameras in the house and see my son Jake, playing with our pup, Caly. Jake sends videos of her playing in the snow and on play dates with my sister's dog. With our "Ring" doorbell system, I can see my son, Dan, coming home for lunch in the afternoon. I can talk to my dad and in-laws, text, call and email my brothers and sisters and friends. Even with all of that, even knowing they are here for me, there are still times I want to be there!

As I read how Jesus prepared for His looming death and eventual resurrection, I feel for the disciples. Jesus tries to warn them, tries to make sure they understand that one day soon, He won't be with them as He has been. While He doesn't have to remind them to get the newspaper and the mail, lock the doors, let the dog out and water the plants, He does have to teach them to take over for Him. He must make sure they realize that it won't be easy, but their faith will carry them through.

The Disciples didn't have an app to connect them to Jesus, but He made a promise to them, and to us, in Matthew 28: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

That promise has been a huge help to me here in Houston, whether during times of home sickness or times of cancer sickness. That promise, combined with the Roman's passage above has given me strength and hope. When I miss home, I turn to my phone and its various apps; when I feel alone I turn to the amazing and seemingly unending examples of Jesus being here, right now. Every image of nature, every gentle breeze, every smile, every offer of prayers by complete strangers, every day and in every way, Jesus surrounds me, He surrounds us.

As He walks toward the cross this Lent, be certain that His road does not lead towards death and loneliness, it leads to life and joy and hope for us all.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help to remember that no matter where we are, You are with us. You are our strength and hope in good times and bad. You are here, no matter where here is!

Contributed by Sherri Petersen

### **March 4 The Third Sunday in Lent** **Dying, with Nothing to Say**

**Scripture:** *Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."* Luke 23: 43

**Reflection:** I recently read an article called "Dying, with Nothing to Say", printed in the New York Times on March 19, 2016. In the article, the author wrote about the desire people have for "one last conversation" with people who pass from this world to the next. According to the article, many people have a few things lingering at the time of death, questions, confession, absolution, admissions or wrongs, forgiveness, etc. His point was that a single conversation is rarely successful in changing a lifetime of unresolved issues in our relationships.

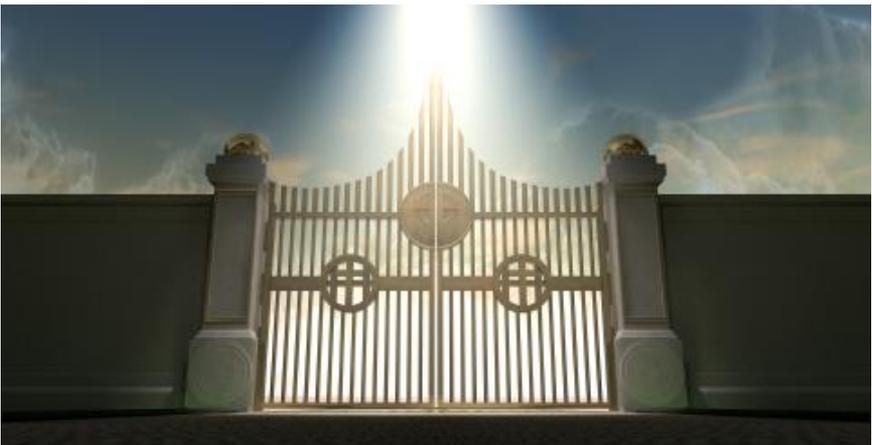
As a nurse, I have been with several people in the final moments of their life. But the most meaningful final moments I've experienced are those my family and I had with my mom. Two years ago, on the day before Mother's Day, our family gathered together to discuss my mom's diagnosis of leukemia and the treatment options offered. Since this diagnosis came on top of advanced dementia, everyone was leaning toward the kindest option, that of comfort care, which would quickly lead to passing into heaven. My mom was there with us, sitting in the rocking chair she always loved. I took her hands in mine and looked into her eyes and said, "What do you think about Heaven?" Her

response was, “I think I’ll go.” I told her we were sure she would go, but what did she think about going soon? Her beautiful response was, “I’m ready.” Just two days later, on her final day she looked at me and said, “I think I’m dying.” No agony, no fear, no pleading. Just a statement. A woman of compelling faith all her life, she was at peace, though she was suffering physically. At this stage of her dementia, when my mom said very few words, she could find just the right words to give the simple statement of faith from her heart. She knew where she was going, and she was ready.

My mom is my role model for faith; that when my time comes, I have lived my life with such faith that I have nothing else to say – no issues to resolve with Jesus, with my family, with my life’s calling. To me, this is the essential message of Easter. The life of Jesus makes this faith possible. Jesus the Creator, who gave me life and gives my life purpose; Jesus the Emanuel, whose birth we celebrated just a couple of months ago; Jesus the Savior, whose death we celebrate later this season; and Jesus our Lord who broke through death to promise eternal life with Him for all who believe. After a life of faith and service, of trust during scary and confusing times, our faith doesn’t have to be complicated. We just need to say, “I think I’ll go. I’m ready.”, and then be at peace in the reassurance that a place has already been prepared for us by a God who loved us enough to live and die for us.

**Prayer:** Jesus, our Lord, you lived like we do. You suffered like we do. You died like we all will. Your final words were, “Into your hands I commend my spirit.”, and because of that, we can also say the same thing in confidence. Amen

Contributed by Lori Snyder-Sloan



## **March 5 The Third Monday in Lent** **Modern Day Miracles**

**Scripture:** *He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified and on the third day be raised again. Then they remembered his words.*

Luke 24:6-8

**Reflection:** Jesus had told the disciples several times that he would suffer death and be raised to life again, but they appeared to have no idea what he was talking about. I would have been confused if I had been told Jesus would rise from the dead. There are many types of miracles in the Bible that are very different from what we see today. Yet, many of the miracles we see today, we take for granted. I believe the birth of a baby is one of our greatest miracles. Most of us can think of a family member or a friend who has been saved by a medical procedure, and sometimes, just paying it forward can be a miracle to a family that is struggling.

It is easy to get discouraged when we hear of the very sad news that is happening in our world today. But, we need to remember these actions of evil doers is not God's doing. Jesus died for our sins, and if we are true believers, we will be saved. Isn't that a miracle in itself?

**Prayer:** Dear God, as we prepare to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, help us to stay on track with our Christian deeds and beliefs. Thank you for the many miracles that have blessed our lives. Amen.

Contributed by Jeanene Gustafson



## March 6 The Third Tuesday in Lent Are We Today's Romans?

**Scripture:** *Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father. . . For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in.*

Matthew 25:34-35

**Reflection:** Several of us recently served a Crossroads Connection meal. If you are unfamiliar with this program, it is designed to serve and encourage men and women on work release in their efforts to create a productive and crime-free life. Each Sunday night there is a worship service at Underwood Hills Church followed by a meal. The attendees may invite family and friends to join them. The recidivism rate for those in the program is lower than for other ex-offenders. You can learn more about the program at [www.crossroadsconnectionne.org](http://www.crossroadsconnectionne.org).

After everyone had been served, I sat down to eat at a table with four men. I was tired after shopping, preparing, transporting, and serving food. I was thinking I didn't want to do this again. I'm



too old, blah blah. . . One of the men had a full plate of the main course in front of him, but was shoveling in ice cream as fast as he could. "I haven't had ice cream in a year," he said. I smiled at his delight, but felt sad for his predicament. Another told me he had been shot

three times and he had "jail PTSD." I hadn't heard of that before, but it made sense. What does one say to that? He was antsy and soon left the table.

I asked a third man what meals he liked at Crossroads, hoping to get some ideas. "This one's the best," he said. Probably every home cooked meal is "the best." We've learned they like chopped onions, ranch dressing, ice cream, and real milk—things they apparently don't get at "the Center." They are **big** eaters. If we are expecting 60, we cook for 80 so they can have as many helpings as they want. We enjoy their enthusiasm for a good meal, and they are always grateful.

The fourth man I talked to longer after the others left. Carlos is working to learn about business so he can make a life for himself and his daughter. He talked for a while, and I asked him if he was a writer. “How did you know?” he asked. “I taught English for 30 years, and I just know.” He said he wanted to write to help young men avoid the mistakes he’s made. He knew young men are unlikely to read which I could confirm with my experiences with teens.

I mentioned some of the books I’ve read lately are written by people of color, and I had no relation to their—or Carlos’—lives because of my place of privilege in our society. He thanked me. “At least you’re interested,” he said. “Keep writing,” I said. “You have a message that’s needed.” With that the conversation ended.

Later I thought of Jesus’ place in his society and how lonely he must have felt at times. He was not of the privileged classes. It’s easy to scorn the Romans and the Pharisees for their callousness, their disbelief, and their sense of entitlement. But are we comparable to the Romans in today’s society? How would we—how do we—treat Jesus today? I believe the Holy Spirit gave me this experience to tell me to quit whining and do what I can to lighten others’ loads. Even if it’s just serving ice cream to men and women who say they want to change their lives. Or listening to a man without judgement as he explains his experiences. Offering a small word of encouragement. Acknowledging what others experience.

We are not without our challenges, but generally we are people of privilege. But with conversation, thought, study, and prayer, we don’t have to be today’s Romans.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord of Mercy, You know what it is to be despised, to be an outcast. Nudge us to recognize when something is not as it should be and to work for your Kingdom. In Your Name, Amen.

Contributed by Kathy Stockham

**March 7 The Fourth Wednesday in Lent**  
**A Collaboration of Love**

**Scripture:** *Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

*God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.*

*Dear friends, since God loved us that much, we surely ought to love each other. No one has ever seen God. But if we love each other, God lives in us, and his love is brought to full expression in us.*

*And God has given us his Spirit as proof that we live in him and he in us. Furthermore, we have seen with our own eyes and now testify that the Father sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.*

1 John 4:7-14

**Reflection:** This beautiful passage embodies the Trinitarian God. It's all about relationship: A God of Love who wants a healthy relationship with us so dearly He sent his only Son to redeem us; to restore us from our life of sin. God grafts us into his family and gives us his Spirit so that we become capable of loving like He does. With God's power in us, we extend our arms to the lost, to the sick, and to the lonely. Instead of condemning, we offer ourselves in a God-like sacrificial love where we turn from our fallen, selfish nature, and instead seek the best in others. Rather than separating ourselves from our enemies, we choose to treat them as neighbors and bear their faults with our fruits; with long-suffering, patient love. We seek the best in them and foster it, even if it means surrendering our self-interests. We seek unity to build up the body of Christ in perfect health where all members contribute to the health of the whole.

This is what God did for us in order to restore the health of His creation, He came into our presence even though we were still sinners and He loved us... He loved us to death.

**Prayer:** Dear Triune God, Father of Love, in union with the Son of Love, leading with the Spirit of Love, thank you for giving us the perfect example of Godly relationship. As we take your hand and turn control over to You, always remind us that this dance with You is not for our salvation alone, but that You intend our

relationship to be a force that brings others to the heavenly ball by showing them the steps that lead to your Eternal Way.

Collaborated in Christian Love, Inspired by Don Brewer, Written by David McBride, Illustrated by Fredy Rincon



## March 8 The Fourth Thursday in Lent Living Under the Law

**Scripture:** *Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.*

Matthew 5: 17-18

**Reflection:** As the 2018 began, Pastor Jenni handed out a card with a Daily Bible Reading plan to allow someone to read through the Bible in a Year. I know myself well enough that I wanted to get the more difficult readings done, so I have been reading extra each day, primarily to work through the Book of Leviticus. I just finished reading Chapter 27, the final chapter of Leviticus. Here are a few things I have noticed:

- Leviticus isn't as bad and as scary as we make it out to be.
- There are a lot of repeated phrases concerning how and what to sacrifice.
- Thank God Jesus came, and we are not living under Levitical law!

Jesus said, *"I have come not to abolish the law, but to fulfill it."* This means is that the laws of Leviticus are still important in terms of being the people of God. We are to live according to a set of holiness laws, setting us apart as God's people. The payment for failure of living the laws in the Old Testament was through sacrifices and burnt offerings. That was the law: you do or don't do something, and a penalty must be paid. Law and penalty always went hand in hand... and they still do.

In the Old Testament, when a penalty needed to be paid, it was often in the form of some grain, a bird, or an animal like a bull, goat, or lamb. The animal would be sacrificed in a certain manner, that always involved shedding blood. Shed blood was always the price for sin

Under Jesus' sacrifice for us, He shed His blood for us, so that we don't have to. How perfect that the Lamb of God, became the sacrificial lamb for humanity!

We still live under the law, and a penalty is still paid under the law, it's just that the form of payment has changed. Thank God that price has now been paid for us!

**Prayer:** Risen Lord, thank you for sacrificing yourself for us, that a blood payment could be made for our sins. We did not deserve this gift, but we are so grateful for what you did for us. Help us to cherish and remember your sacrifice and seek to live our lives faithful to you. Amen                      Contributed by Pastor Jon Sloan

### **March 9 The Fourth Friday in Lent** **Pray Specifically**

**Scripture:** *Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.*                      Philippians 4:6

**Reflection:** About 25 years ago, my friend was distraught over her college age son. He was doing poorly in college, didn't have any direction and did not know what he wanted to do for the rest of his life. My friend's prayer was consistent; "please God, let Justin find his way in life".

One year later, Justin was getting married, had a baby on the way, and started doing well in school with a definite goal in mind. My friend said to me with a chuckle, "Next time, I am going to be more specific with my prayers."

We cannot always expect our prayers to be answered like we "want" them to be. That is what my friend was saying when she said that she needed to be more specific. It took us a few years to realize that her prayer was answered, just not like she had thought it would be.

I was reminded of this just yesterday when I was with this same friend. We were talking about a young man who we both know and who we both have prayed for. This young man has had a very hard year, with many challenges and difficulties to overcome. Our prayers were for "God to help him meet his challenges and to lift his heart." Surprisingly, he was afforded an opportunity to go on a wonderful trip, all expenses paid. He did go and on his return, found that his spirit was lifted with renewed energy and determination to move on with life. My friend said, "that is God at work, it is just what this young man needed at this time." Prayers were answered, just not what either of us had expected".

I now realize the importance of being specific in my prayers and that those prayers are always answered. And that, because our prayers are not always answered as we expect, praying specifically helps us to be more attentive to how God is answering our prayers. It helps us to more clearly see God's answer.

**Prayer:** Dear God, let us remember that you want us to be specific in our prayers and that you always listen to our prayers and always answer our prayers. Remind us that we don't always know the right answers to prayers. Help us to be open, aware and accepting that your answers are the right answers.

Contributed by Trudy Darling

### **March 10 The Fourth Saturday in Lent** **Easter Peace**

**Scripture:** *My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.* John 10:27-29

**Reflection:** Early each spring a vender sets up three displays of metal yard ornaments on the corner by our home. Every night on my way home I see Victorian plant stands, life-size people bending over to tend their gardens and cowboys casually leaning against the fence. There are also larger-than-life peacocks, giraffes, and cows. My favorite is the flock of sheep. As the summer progresses the three areas get smaller and smaller. Then the three areas are reduced to one and suddenly the display is gone. I always get excited when the display is set up as I know spring is around the corner. As the selection of ornaments get smaller I feel a small bereavement as I know summer is coming to an end.

Inexplicably, when I see the merchant set up each year, I immediately think of the baby we lost. For many years it brought a period of mourning. Now, and for several years, instead of grief I think of happy things when I drive by the beautiful statuary. I wonder if our baby was a boy or a girl? I wonder if at ages 62 and 70 we would have been effectively nurturing an 18-year-old by this time. As I drive past the corner and see something a child would love, I think of our baby hanging out with the Symens girls and the McCune boys (and peanut).

When I heard about Iona's twin, my first thought was of our baby warmly greeting Iona's twin. I think of all our babies waiting in heaven together until God's perfect timing reunites us. Waiting, and yet, perfectly happy in the glorious light of Christ. I have the Easter story to thank for my present sense of peace about the loss of our only child.

Christ's death on the cross and resurrection assures us that no one is lost from us forever. I am not certain how people go on with their lives after the loss of someone important to them without the knowledge that we are not separated forever. I am thankful I am reminded of the story each spring and that Easter gives me the peace to move forward with my life. Alleluia.

And now it is now time for the last harbinger of spring—My annual discussions with Jim about placing a flock of metal sheep in our back yard.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, I thank you that neither death nor life, neither the present nor the future, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus and therefore we can be assured that we are not separated from each other. Amen (Romans 8:39)

Contributed by Mary L. Wilson



**March 11 The Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**Forgive us our Weakness**

**Scripture:** *Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, if my brother keeps on sinning against me, how many times do I have to forgive him? Seven times?" "No not seven times," answered Jesus, "but seventy times seven.."* Matthew 26: 27-29

**Reflection:** Several weeks ago, my husband and I watched the movie "Silence". It was about two Portuguese Catholic priests who were traveling to Japan in the seventeenth century to find out what had happened to a mentor of theirs and to spread the Catholic faith. At that time, it was very dangerous to be a Christian in Japan. If caught they were required to apostatize (denounce their faith by stepping on an image of Christ) or they would suffer an agonizing death.

Their guide Kichijiro was an alcoholic fisherman and an "apostate" Christian. He was from a Christian family that had been found out and required to deny their faith by stepping on an image of Christ. Every one of his family refused and were tortured to death, while he stepped on the image and went free.

He meets the priests and agrees to guide them. The first thing he asks of Father Rodrigues is that he be allowed to confess so that he could be forgiven for his apostacy. During the course of the movie he repeatedly denies his faith and is anguished that he is such a weak man, and each time he asks for confession to be forgiven. Each time Father Rodrigues agrees but with increasing difficulty. How can this man who denies his faith and even betrays the priest be allowed to be forgiven time after time?

Near the end of the movie, a group of 5 Japanese Christians are being tortured to death in a courtyard where Father Rodrigues must watch their suffering. He is told that they have already apostatized but are being tortured nonetheless because the officials want his apostacy. The voice of Christ comes to him giving him permission to step on the face of Christ. He does it to save the five from further torture.

Do you think he too repented and was forgiven?

This is how it is for us. We are weak, and each time we are truly repentant and ask forgiveness we are forgiven. As we are forgiven, we must also forgive others.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, We are so thankful that you are a loving God. We know that we stumble and that every day we sin. We ask for your forgiveness and we pray that we can be forgiving to others, as you are to us. Amen                      Contributed by Ann Henningsen

**March 12 The Fourth Monday in Lent**  
**The Glory of God**

**Scripture:** *Then Jesus said, "Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?"*                      John 11:40

**Reflection:** I have a nearly 50-year old Christmas cactus I was given by my Grandma Johnson. For those of you who are not familiar with a Christmas cactus, it only blooms twice every year: Advent and Lent. The beautiful blooms on the normally bare cactus are a wonderful reminder of the glory of God. Lent is also a reminder that spring is just around the corner. Soon flowers will break through the soil, trees will regrow their leaves, and the songs of birds will fill the sky. Spring for me is an easy time to see the glory of God all around us and is celebrated by the day God gave his only son so that we may have eternal life.

**Prayer:** Dear God, This Lenten season may we see the glory of God in all things, big or small. Whether it be the tiny bloom of a flower or the mighty gift of eternal life, may we see your glory forever and ever. Amen.                      Contributed by: Kayla Diggins



## March 13 The Fourth Tuesday in Lent

### **Do What You Can, with What You Have, Where You Are**

**Scripture:** *You wonder why the **Lord** pays no attention when you go without eating and act humble. But on those days that you give up eating you only think of yourselves and abuse your workers. You even get angry and ready to fight. No wonder **God** won't listen to your prayers! Do you think the **Lord** wants you to give up eating and to act as humble as a bent-over bush? Or to dress in sackcloth and sit in ashes? Is this really what he wants on a day of worship? I'll tell you what it really means to worship the **Lord**. Remove the chains of prisoners who are bound unjustly. Free those who are abused! Share your food with everyone who is hungry; share your home with the poor and homeless. Give clothes to those in need; don't turn away your relatives.*

Isaiah 58: 3-7

**Reflection:** *You wonder why the **Lord** pays no attention when you go without eating and act humble. But on those days that you give up eating you only think of yourselves and abuse your workers.*

Isaiah 58: 3

(**God** is saying through Isaiah that people should stop faking their religion by making yourself look good.)

*You even get angry and ready to fight. No wonder **God** won't listen to your prayers!*

Isaiah 58: 4

(Isaiah was most likely mocking people right here.)

*Do you think the **Lord** wants you to give up eating and to act as humble as a bent-over bush? Or to dress in sackcloth and sit in ashes? Is this really what he wants on a day of worship?*

Isaiah 58: 5

(Here Isaiah is just saying that you're worshiping **God** wrong.)

*I'll tell you what it really means to worship the **Lord**. Remove the chains of prisoners who are bound unjustly. Free those who are abused!*

Isaiah 58: 6

*Share your food with everyone who is hungry; share your home with the poor and homeless. Give clothes to those in need; don't turn away your relatives.*

Isaiah 58: 7

(Then Isaiah pretty much tells what you should do instead.)

"Do what you can, with what you have, where you are." Theodore Roosevelt.

Contributed by Iain Rincon

## March 14 The Fourth Wednesday in Lent Temptation

**Scripture:** *“And when he came to the place he said to them, “Pray that you may not enter into temptation.” And he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, and knelt down and prayed, “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done.” And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him.”* Luke 22: 40 - 43:

**Reflection:** During Lent, people have often chosen their favorite treat and “given it up” for lent. They often feel tempted to break this promise of the season. That got me thinking about temptation, especially after I found the passage in Luke.

In the Lord’s Prayer, we pray “and lead us not into temptation. Pope Francis recently created a storm when he suggests a better translation of that passage would be “Do not let us fall into temptation ...” He explained that Satan is what leads us into temptation and suggested we ask God “When Satan leads us into temptation, You please, Give me a hand.” We see in Luke that God sent Jesus an angel to strengthen Him.

Mark Twain explored this question in 1899, in his short story “*The Man Who Corrupted Hadleyburg*”. Hadleyburg was such an upright and moral town that “... throughout the formative years temptations were kept out of the way of the young people, so that their honesty could have every chance to harden and solidify, and become a part of their very bone.” Naturally, a stranger came to town and tempted the folk, who never having been tempted were readily led into sins. The end of the story has the town saved from sin and changing their motto from “Lead us not into temptation” to a new one reflecting the learning experience they had just undergone “Lead us into temptation.” “It is an honest town once more, and the man will have to rise early that catches it napping again.”

Perhaps the moral of my reflection is - it is best to ask for help escaping temptation we’ve fallen for, rather than asking not to be exposed to temptation.

**Prayer:** Father, help me avoid falling into sin and help me find my way out of any sin into which I might fall. Amen.

Contributed by Don Swanson

## March 15 The Fourth Thursday in Lent We Have a Story to Tell to the Nations

**Scripture:** *O sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!* Psalm 96: 1-3

**Reflection:** When I was eleven years old we went to a family reunion at my grandma and grandpa's farm. They invited us to church on Sunday. Their church was called Zion Reformed. It was an old church in Amherst, South Dakota. The church looked like a schoolhouse. I remember, we sang a song I had never heard before. It was called "We Have a Story to Tell to the Nations".

The song goes as follows:

Verse 1: *We have a story to tell to the nations/ That shall turn their hearts to the right/  
A story of truth and mercy/ A story of peace and light/ A story of peace and light.*

Chorus: *For the darkness shall turn to dawning/ And the dawning to noonday bright/  
And Christ's great kingdom shall come to earth/  
The kingdom of love and light.*

**Prayer:** Dear God, we are thankful for a new song to sing in church. Please bless the people at Zion Reformed Church.

Contributed by Lily Symens



**March 16 The Fourth Friday in Lent**  
**You Can Only Run So Far...**

**Scripture:** *Elijah was afraid and fled for his life, going to Beer-sheba of Judah. He left his servant there and went a day's journey into the wilderness, until he came to a solitary broom tree and sat beneath it. He prayed for death: "Enough, LORD! Take my life, for I am no better than my ancestors." He lay down and fell asleep under the solitary broom tree, but suddenly a messenger touched him and said, "Get up and eat!" He looked and there at his head was a hearth cake and a jug of water. After he ate and drank, he lay down again, but the angel of the LORD came back a second time, touched him, and said, "Get up and eat or the journey will be too much for you!" He got up, ate, and drank; then strengthened by that food, he walked forty days and forty nights to the mountain of God, Horeb. There he came to a cave, where he took shelter. But the word of the LORD came to him: Why are you here, Elijah? He answered: "I have been most zealous for the LORD, the God of hosts, but the Israelites have forsaken your covenant. They have destroyed your altars and murdered your prophets by the sword. I alone remain, and they seek to take my life."*

1st Kings 19:3-10 NAB

I pray that you might make it through those teardrops that now seem a part of you. And you know that you can't get away, and you know you can't hide it from yourself. Falling down, under par, can't get out, can only run so far. Lonely days, heavy heart, no escape, can only run so far...Eric Clapton

**Reflection:** Have you ever fled for your life? Although I don't like to talk about it, I have. And I wish I could say I was being persecuted for spreading the gospel, but it was something else entirely, I must admit. And people see my long legs, and assume I'm a fantastic runner, but I had measles while I was still an infant, and have never fully recovered. I'm weak, I'm frail, and I'm slow. And when I fled for my life, I could not outrun my pursuers. One of them knocked me down, the rest surrounded me, and they all began kicking. I hope you never find yourself in this situation, but if you do, try to keep your back to the ground and your arms around your head. You can walk to an emergency room with a fractured rib or broken arm, but not with a fractured skull or broken spine.

Those of you familiar with me may have detected symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. Yeah. I'm only mentioning this

now because I want you to know how well I understand Elijah's fear.

This moment was one of many in my life when I cried out and the Lord heard me. But I want to make clear this wasn't because I was good. I was not good. The Lord is good, and had plans for me, so out of nowhere someone suddenly said stop, and in just a few minutes I was up and on my way, considerably worse for the wear, but not about to stand around complaining.

Now this passage, in which Elijah is about to stand in the presence of God and live, is one with something so obvious, no one whom I have heard preach on it has ever missed it. As with the first question of the Bible (Genesis 3:9), "Where are you?" when God knew better than Adam did where he was and why he was hiding, God was fully aware of Elijah's situation and feelings. But Elijah, exhausted and preoccupied with his perfectly natural fears, misunderstands the question. God wasn't asking Elijah why he had run away; He was reminding Elijah that he was here on Earth to anoint Kings and prophets, and to spread an important message.

And God answers Elijah's prayer in that remarkable way he often does. He indeed takes Elijah's life, and yet preserves it. He has plans for Elijah. (See Matthew 17:3 and Revelation 11:6)

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, let us see you in the faces of everyone who suffers physical, emotional, or spiritual pain; in everyone who needs to hear your voice or know your love. Let us see you in the struggling families, the poor, the homeless, the hungry, the abandoned, the abused, the elderly, and the stranger among us. Amen.

Contributed by Stacy Stephens



**March 17 The Fourth Saturday in Lent**  
**The Day the Lord Has Made**

**Scripture:** *This is the day the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.* Psalm 118:24

**Reflection:** On my recent trip to Dubuque, I was enjoying the scenery, the fields, the hills and valleys and it brought to mind Psalm 118:24. We take each day for granted. We forget to marvel at the works of the Lord. We need to remember, or at least I need to remember, that each day was created for us...whether it be a sunny bright warm sunny spring day, a hot and humid 100-degree summer day, a stormy thundering night, tornadic winds, a calm serene ocean, an icy frigid day like the first part of 2018, flooded valleys and streets, sunny picnic perfect weather. We must remember that each day, no matter what the weather is, the day was made for us. We need to rejoice and find God in it.



**Prayer:** Thank you. Lord, for the days you have created be they a day we call beautiful or a day we think is not even fit for a (whatever). We need to be glad for it and rejoice in it, as it is one more day we have in his loving care. Amen

Contributed by Arline Oliver

**March 18 The Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**Eight Cactus Sprouts on a Windowsill**



**Scripture:** *He also said, "With what can we compare the kingdom of God, or what parable will we use for it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the ground, is the smallest of all the seeds on earth; yet when it is sown it grows up and becomes the greatest of all shrubs, and puts forth large branches, so that the birds of the air can make nests in its shade."*

Mark 4:30-32

**Reflection:** I received a cactus grow kit at Christmas. I planted the enclosed seeds immediately, reading that germination could take as long as three months. Despite too much water and too little sun, eight cacti -- in nearly as many varieties -- sprouted in a couple of weeks. Although a bit crowded now, they continue to grow.

I don't know how the size of a cactus seed compares to that of a mustard seed, though I can say the cactus seeds were very small. And if my cacti ever "put forth large branches," only very brave birds could make nests in the shade.

Still, the kingdom of God has taken root on my windowsill. That has provided comfort and warmth through these cold days and frigid nights.

**Prayer:** Let me see the kingdom of God in all the plants of His garden.

Contributed by Josh Nichol-Caddy

## March 19 The Fifth Monday in Lent **Broken Pieces of My Sin**

**Scripture:** *When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain.*  
Exodus 32:19:

**Reflection:** My newest favorite author is a Jewish Rabbi, Harold S. Kushner. I like his work because of his Old Testament and Talmud (old Rabbinical knowledge) story insights. In this Lenten time of remembering how we fall short of God's requirements and need forgiveness and a great Easter Savior, let me share one of those Kushner insights.

Maybe you remember the image of Moses coming down from Mt Sinai with the ten commandments from the the Cecile B. DeMille movie, 'The Ten Commandments'. If so, then you have a Charlton Heston image in your head of Moses throwing those law-filled slates to the ground and shattering them in anger at the Israelite's worship of a golden calf. What the movie doesn't show and maybe you don't know is what happened to those pieces- do you know?

If you answered they are placed in the Ark of the Covenant along with the replacement Ten Commandment slates, then you must be student of the Talmud. While the Bible is silent on this question, the Talmud is not. The question becomes, Why? Why are the pieces collected and put there?

Kushner offers this answer in his book 'Overcoming Life's Disappointments', 'Moses has learned a valuable lesson: we can and should set high standards for people, but at the same time we must be prepared to see them fall short of those high standards. For the rest of his life, Moses would keep the pieces of the original tablets in the Ark of the Covenant alongside the intact second set, to remind himself of that lesson.'

Sherri and I agree with other scholars who note the broken and unbroken tablets lie side by side in the ark which represents how our brokenness over sin and loss resides next to the joy and wholeness of life in our own hearts. We are at once both broken and whole people needing forgiveness and encouragement and providing love and encouragement. Whether the broken pieces were really put in the ark is of no matter to me. The lessons learned here stand either way.

Yes, we all fall short (Romans 6:9), me more than most, and I have my own personal responsibility for those broken pieces of Law. The good news is I have a Savior Jesus who saves me from the wages of my sin and provides me a clean unbroken slate of my own. Now under His saving grace, the Law becomes for me as Kushner writes, 'a summons to be more than we are'. And in this Lenten season, that is a calling, a piece of wisdom worth picking up and putting in my heart.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of forgiveness by the blood of your Son Jesus. Help us today to love and encourage those who struggle with brokenness in their hearts. Continue to summon us to be more than we are. In Jesus' name, Amen!

Contributed by Keith Petersen



## March 20 The Fifth Tuesday in Lent **Triumphant Win**

**Scripture:** *But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.* I Corinthians 15:57

**Reflection:** We all like to win at whatever we endeavor in. We want to win at games, the lottery, at sports, chess playing or possibly to win a competition to be the best baker. It's in our nature to strive to win. This time of year, we all talk about winning. It's Super Bowl time and we all root for the team we want to win. The television personalities really hype up which team will win. We place so much emphasis on winning. Wins can be considered either expected or an upset. This year the underdog won the Super Bowl. It's so temporary, after all in August the entire process starts all over again. We will have to wait and see which teams play and win the Super Bowl next year.

In the end our win is only temporary. We win, and it makes us feel good for only a short period of time. There will always be someone else to challenge us, maybe they are younger or better. Either way they may beat us next time. The Olympics demonstrate that over time the veteran athletes are beat or retire and are replaced by younger people. Eventually records fall due to new technology or just improved training.

In the end our records and goals will be replaced. We get satisfaction or gratification from winning and that gratification is short lived.

The only lasting Triumphant Win is that Jesus defeated death and rose from the dead. Jesus had the one and only Triumphant Win. Not only did he defeat death, but allowed us the best victory of all - eternal life. Believing in Jesus is a triumph over death, and the havoc that Satan has caused for all time. I am humbled, joyous and at peace with Jesus' victory over death. I am proud to be on the winning team, knowing full well that I had no part in the victory at all. How lucky we are to be loved so much by our one true God to allow us the ultimate win- in the victory dance of eternal life.

**Prayer:** Father God thank you for the love you shower on us even though we don't deserve it. We are prideful, boastful and self-serving, yet you still love us. Teach us that Jesus' victory over death is the only TRIUMPHANT WIN that has or ever will matter. Show us how to share that love in our daily lives so we can make our winning team larger. Amen

Contributed by Joy Heller

## March 21 The Fifth Wednesday in Lent

### **Scripture:**

*Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?*

*The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us." He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."*

Psalm 2: 1-9

**Reflection:** What do we ever stand to gain from divisiveness?

The only thing ever achieved from strife and warring over differences is scorched Earth and stronger divisions. At the end of every day, does not every human on earth rest their head to sleep? Does not every human eat food and drink water? Were we not all created equal? When we put down the newspaper, log off social media, and stop concerning ourselves with politics--perhaps we have more in common with our fellow man than we realize. All of us here are of the same species, under the rule of the same God. We cannot help the actions of others, but for ourselves we can make the decision to work at bridging the gap between ourselves and those who we do not consider allies. We have nothing to lose, and many new friends to gain

**Prayer:** Father, I pray to you this day for strength. It is hard to work through differences with others, but I believe you call me as a Christian to at least try. I promise Lord to love others through our differences, with the hope that we may bring more Peace to this dangerous and troubled world. Lord, please also bless the hearts of those with whom I have differences--for they need strength just as much as I. In Jesus name I pray, Amen

Contributed by Jared Kennedy

## March 22 The Fifth Thursday in Lent Never-Changing Love

**Scripture:** *Long ago you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you endure; they will all wear out like a garment. You change them like clothing, and they pass away; but you are the same, and your years have no end.*

Psalm 102: 25-27

**Reflection:** A few weeks ago Kmart on 50th and L streets closed. I grew up in the south part of town and that Kmart was the center of my world as a child. We shopped at that store for our clothes, housewares and school supplies. We would eat in the cafeteria while we waited for blue light specials. There was a Hinky Dinky grocery store next door, where we bought our groceries. As I left the store with the t shirt I bought, my last item from the Kmart of my childhood, I reflected on all the changes in my life the past few years. There were the happy times with my daughter's wedding and the birth of my first grandchild and sad times with divorce and the death of my mother. I began to think about how nothing is permanent. Even good things mean change. Is there anything that is constant?

The good news is yes...God...he never changes and his love for us will never end. He proved his love for us through the gift of Jesus. The forty days of Lent represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry. Jesus eventually paid the price for our sin through his death and resurrection, reconciling our relationship with God. Throughout time God and his love for us never changed.

**Prayer:** As we journey through Lent, spending time in prayer, worship and study, help us to focus on God's never changing love for us. Help us show God's never-ending love to all we meet, through our words and actions...Amen

Contributed by Leanne Johnson



## March 23 The Fifth Friday in Lent The Gift of Names

**Scripture:** Because he has affection for me, I will rescue him. I will protect him *because he knows my name.* Psalm 91:14  
*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel.* Isaiah 7:14  
*You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.* Matthew 1:21  
*You are Simon the son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which is translated Peter).* John 1:42

**Reflection:** A few weeks ago, in a video I showed to children in Sunday School, Jesus approached the fisherman, Simon, asked him to join his disciples, and told him his name would be changed to Peter. Simon said, "Ok," dropped everything and followed after Jesus. I was a bit amused by how simplistic the video's creators made the whole thing. As if changing a name was not a big deal. Much is written about names, the importance of names, the meaning of names, the significance of names, and of those in the Bible, that were changed by God or Jesus. In the Bible, God changes names of chosen individuals to signify that life is changing or will change for those persons, often bringing additional responsibilities to them.

In the past year, I have thought a lot about changing names and having multiple names as my youngest daughter, Lindsey, has finally reached the closing stages of a complicated adoption process for her two little girls. She has changed their names from those given to them by their birth mother. It was not difficult to do this with the younger one, as Lindsey got her shortly after birth and the child never knew her original name. However, she got the older girl as she turned one year old and had been her foster mother for two years by the time of the name changing. We knew her as Hailey for the first two years, but when the parental rights were terminated last year, Lindsey named her Elizabeth, to be called Lizzie, in honor of a remarkable childhood friend who died of a brain tumor when they were in sixth grade. This name also ties her to our family as it is her Aunt Heather's middle name. Of course, Lindsey explained all of this to Hailey and she liked the idea. The rest of us in the family were less sure. We were afraid it would be awkward or somehow adversely affect the child. It was hard to think of her with a different name. While the rest of us kind of stumbled into using it, Lizzie immediately assumed the

new name and was quick to remind us to use it. She has truly become Lizzie and left Hailey behind along with the sad and sordid life she experienced during her first year on earth. We are who we are. We seldom call ourselves by name and almost never choose our own names. A name is a tool with which others identify us. I grew up with a rather peculiar name situation in that my mother called me Merryellen (my legal given name), my father called me Colleen, and my Uncle Murt, who was my godfather, called me Mary Alice. I actually believed that I had three names until I was almost ten years old. I did not question it, but just answered to all three names. When I did question it, my father told me that *Colleen* was Irish for pretty girl and that is what he chose to call me. He said that Uncle Murt just liked the name Mary Alice and he loved me, so that is what he chose to call me. I have since learned that *Colleen* actually just means girl in Irish Gaelic, but I certainly valued my father's sentiment, and the fact that Uncle Murt had a special name just for me filled my heart. On top of that, my mother chose the unusual spelling of my name and delighted in explaining it as, "Merry like Christmas and all one word." It often made life a bit complicated, but it resulted from her desire to give me something special with my name.

Jesus was called by more than one name. At birth, he was named Jesus as instructed by the angel who informed Mary that she would give birth to a son. While he was called many descriptive names, he was also called Christ, Jesus Christ, and Immanuel. Isaiah predicted the birth of Jesus and said he would be called Immanuel and Joseph was also told this by an angel. Christ is a title, meaning *the chosen one*, but Jesus was also called Christ as a name in the *Bible*. Though *Christ* is really more a title than it is a name, the *Bible* uses it both ways. He is often referred to in the Bible as "Jesus Christ," as one would use a name. The point is that these names were given to him by God and others in their desire to give him love and the promise of responsibilities.

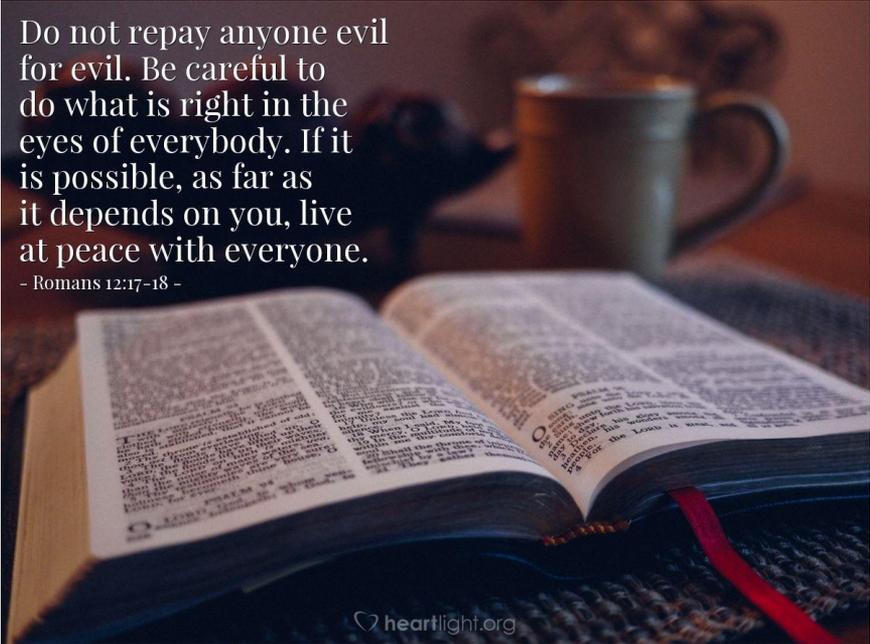
In most cases our names are given to us. Therefore, they are gifts. Gifts of love and hope for the persons to whom they are given. It might be worthwhile for all of us to consider the gifts of our names and contemplate how we have fulfilled the hopes that were intended for us when we received them. At Easter, we remember that Jesus died on the cross to fulfill the responsibility given to him by God with his names.



angry, bitter and filled with resentment. My son had texted me during those months and I refused to answer him.

Needless to say, these emotions began to fester and take a toll on me. I wouldn't discuss the matter with anyone because I didn't want to forgive my son and couldn't admit it. One morning God spoke to me through His Word. The most basic aspect of my faith is God's forgiveness of my sins through Jesus Christ. I was avoiding this because of my hurt and anger. I had to acknowledge that God forgave me and my horrendous past and I was to do the same with others; especially my son.

A year has passed, and I am free from the pain of unforgiveness. Oh I still get upset from time to time but it is nothing like it was. I understand that praying for forgiveness of someone isn't always something that is a one-time thing. It takes time and the power of God. I haven't seen my son in over a year now. It would be nice to tell him that I forgive him.



Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

- Romans 12:17-18 -

heartlight.org

**Prayer:** Heavenly Father I thank you for the lesson of forgiveness. I don't know where I would be if you hadn't died on the cross for my sins. Please help me to keep forgiveness close to my heart. It is freeing and liberating to let go of the garbage of resentment, anger and unforgiveness. During this season of Lent let all of us forgive our enemies and overcome evil with good. Amen

Contributed by Leanne Malecha White

## **March 25 Palm Sunday** **Making a Choice**

**Scripture:** *Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!”* Mark 11:9

**Reflection:** On this first day of the week of Passover, Pilate enters the city to the west. Simultaneously, Jesus enters to the east. Who do we follow? Do we follow Pilate and the status quo? Or do we follow Jesus and the kingdom of God? Jesus represents a new way—a deep and abiding faith in God and God’s goodness, justice, abundance, grace—and the willingness to give one’s life for such a mission. We know that Holy Week brings days of betrayal and trial, crucifixion and death. Will we continue to follow the powers of greed and violence? Or will we follow Jesus all the way to the cross? (Taken from *These Days, Daily Devotions for Living by Faith – Palm Sunday: March 25, 2018*)

**Prayer:** Loving God, help us follow Jesus, no matter where it might lead. Amen. Contributed by Judy Boswell

## **March 26 Monday of Holy Week** **A Thousand Ages in Thy Sight**

**Scripture:** *For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night. Thou dost sweep men away; they are like a dream, like grass which is renewed in the morning; in the morning it flourishes and is renewed; in the evening it fades and withers.* Psalm 90: 4-6  
*All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides forever. That word is the good news that was preached to you.”* 1 Peter 1: 24-25

**Reflection:** At a recent worship service our congregation sang the modern praise song “10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)” by Matt Redman. My favorite verse is:

*And on that day when my strength is failing / The end draws near and my time has come / Still my soul will sing your praise unending / ten thousand years and then forevermore.*

This reminds me of my favorite hymn, a very old one, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past” by William Croft and Isaac Watts, and my favorite verses:

*A thousand evenings in Thy sight are like an evening gone/  
Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.  
Time, like an ever-rolling stream, soon bears us all away/  
We fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day.*

On the surface, these verses together seem kind of depressing since they speak of dying and being forgotten. Sometimes I notice the names on memorial gifts at church: the old stained-glass windows, some pieces of furniture, even the engraved silver pieces that we use on Scottish Sunday, and it seems sad that no one at church remembers these people. There were people who were very active and well-known at church just thirty years ago when my husband and I joined, and now there are few who remember them. I think, however, that the message of the psalm and the songs is that everything on earth is temporary, even people, but God is forever. If we accept the gift of salvation given to us by Jesus, the cares of this world will pass away and we will live forever with him. Actually, that's not depressing at all; it's beautiful and peaceful as expressed in the last verse of my favorite:

*Our God, our help in ages past/  
Our hope for years to come,  
Be Thou our guard while life shall last/  
And our eternal home.*

**Prayer:** Dear God, you know that we take things seriously, here on earth. We fuss over politics and committees and meetings and local news and world news and our relationships and our families and big stuff and little stuff. Please help us to remember that all of this will pass away and that if we accept your gift of eternal life we will eventually come to peace. May we hold some of that peace in our hearts now, as you walk with us through this day. Amen.

Contributed by Julie Symens

## March 27 Tuesday of Holy Week

### Grace

**Scripture:** *Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.* Romans 8:26

**Reflection:** Being a parent, a teacher, a mentor, a master, is...challenging. Authority in any form is not easy; mostly because children, students, pets, people in general, tend to have minds of their own. They rarely cooperate fully with plans laid out for them. Here are a couple of examples:

As a young child, Sean would invariably put his shirts on backwards. He would walk out of his bed room, proudly having gotten dressed only to be told that his shirt was on backwards. I would send him back to turn the shirt around; and I would sigh. It happened more often than not. I would point out the tags in the back of the shirt. I would buy shirts with a logo or graphic on the front. I even tried folding shirts backwards, figuring there was something in how Sean unfolded and pulled the shirt on that caused it to end up backwards. The shirts still went on backwards. John and I would shake our heads and sigh.

In sub-zero weather, Ziggy will scratch at the door, wanting to go out. When it's really cold, I bundle Ziggy up in his doggy sweater and booties. I bundle myself up. Out we go so Zig can spend ten minutes staring down the street, waiting for something to bark at. No amount of cajoling or encouragement can make a poodle do what he's not inclined to do, so heaving heavy (and irritated) sighs, I take him back in; only to repeat the whole process in another hour. I could go on with other examples; Ziggy, Sean, and a host of people who know what they *ought* to do; but don't do it. I can also think of countless times when the kindest reaction I can muster is rolling my eyes as I exhale an audible sigh.

*...that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.* I am not one to memorize Bible verses. I remember phrases or stories, but usually don't know where they are located. The downside of this is, if I want to find a verse I'm thinking of, I have to wade through pages and pages of scripture to find it. The upside of this is, if I want to find a verse I'm thinking of, I have to wade through pages and pages of scripture to find it. I'll admit, it's not exactly efficient, but I probably read more of the Bible than I might if I could pinpoint verses with a photographic memory. If I have no idea where to start to look for something, Paul's letters are a good

place to start. If I don't find the verse I'm thinking of, I still read something inspiring.

Romans 8:26 is one of my favorite verses. I love the brief poetry of the verse as it is written in the New Oxford Annotated Bible: *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.* The verse lets me acknowledge my human imperfections, and feel comforted that I am still loved, despite those imperfections. It also speaks to the divine patience and grace extended to us. *Sighs too deep for words...*this phrase reminds me of a parent who desperately wants a child to understand something, figure out a problem, to do what they ought to do; not because they must do it, but because they want to.

God came to us fully human in Jesus, and understands our humanity. But instead of condemnation for not doing what we ought to do, the Spirit extends grace to us, interceding with sighs too deep for words.

**Prayer:** God, thank you for your love. Jesus, thank you for your sacrifice to pay for my sins. Holy Spirit, thank you for interceding for me. Even in one short verse, you set an example for living life. This Lenten season, help me reflect the love and understanding you show to us, back to everyone I meet. Amen.

Contributed by Karen Kroupa

### **March 28 Wednesday of Holy Week** **Ugly Easter Eggs**

**Scripture:** *Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.* 1 Thessalonians 5:18

**Reflection:** A few years ago, I joined my family at my parents' house on the Saturday evening before Easter to dye Easter eggs. It was getting pretty late, so some of us started preparing the dye, and the others went to the kitchen to start boiling the eggs. We opened the carton of eggs, and to our surprise, we found that the parent who had done the grocery shopping (I'll let you guess who J) had accidentally purchased brown eggs. Not ideal for our pretty, pastel egg dyes!

Now, at this point, it was too late to run back to the store, so we decided to go ahead and see what would happen. We boiled the brown eggs and tried to dye them as usual, but the results were pretty disastrous. All 12 eggs turned out to be varying shades of,

well, darker brown (with a few brownish-green exceptions). At that point, I suppose we could have scrapped the whole project and tried again the next day, but I'm so glad we didn't. That night actually turned out to be one of my all-time favorite holiday memories with my family—we laughed so hard at our ugly Easter eggs that we practically cried.

In the end, it didn't matter that our eggs weren't picture-perfect that year. What we initially saw as an unfortunate shopping error turned into an unforgettable experience. As it turns out, Easter egg hunts are much more challenging when all the eggs are camouflaged, and the resulting egg salad was still delicious! I often think back to that moment when situations don't turn out exactly as I plan. In those moments of unplanned confusion, instead of getting upset, I've found that it's healthier (though admittedly not always easier) to simply say, "Thanks, God, for this unexpected adventure. For this new challenge. For these ugly Easter eggs." Sometimes, just making the choice to be grateful instead of flustered can make all the difference.

**Prayer:** Dear Lord, help us remember that we cannot always be in control. Life is full of roadblocks, twists and turns, but when those obstacles appear, help us maintain grateful hearts so that we can handle difficult situations with grace. Amen.

Contributed by September Symens



## March 29 Maundy Thursday It's Going to Be Okay

**Scripture:** *For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.*

Ephesians 2:10

*Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

Matthew 6:34

**Reflection:** I heard this song, "It's Gonna Be Okay" by The Piano Guys, a couple years ago and found that it spoke to just about every part of my life: doubt, worry, fear, believing the lies of others, believing the lies I tell myself, letting others determine my worth, feeling like everything is falling apart.

Verse: Doubt is a broken record that plays inside my head I try to turn it down, but I can't quite drown it out I'm tortured everyday, these never ending worries, pulling on my sleeves

Chorus: So many times now I was supposed to tap out All the walls would fall down around me All anybody would tell me, is all that bad news, how it's gonna fall through But no matter what they say or what they say,

It's gonna be, gonna be, okay (a a a ay) It's gonna be, gonna be, okay (a a a ay) No matter what you've been through, here you are No matter if you think you're falling apart It's gonna be, gonna be okay

Verse: And there is a battle raging in your heart, but you must win It comes for all of us, saying we are not enough So fight for your life, the world's gonna try To sell you some lies

Chorus repeats

\*\*You really have to hear the song to get the full effect :)

Listening to "my jam", I am reminded that all of the things happening in my life are part of a bigger plan. And no matter what I think of myself, God sees me as important, worthy, and skilled. God sees the good in me and has a plan for me. It's not easy to remember; I often get trapped in my own self-doubt. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul makes it sound so simple. I find comfort in this simplicity; however, the forces at work around me trying to tear me down make it difficult. As the song says, "fight for your life". I have to remember to fight for my life and not allow these forces to dominate me. I need to realign my focus and rely on God's promises and seek comfort in His plans for me.

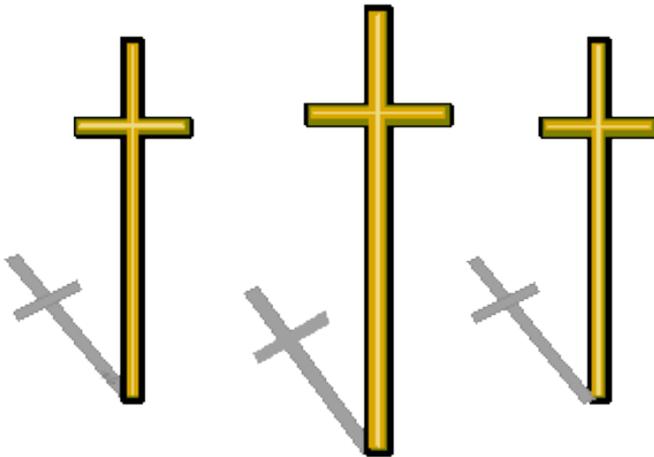
**Prayer:** Dear God, Thank you for helping me to find a way to remember you and your promises. Thank you for knowing and loving me, despite my faults and weaknesses. Help me to find comfort in you and in your message. Help me to learn to trust you more and to understand that you know your plans for me.

Contributed by Melissa McBride

**March 30 Good Friday**  
**Good Friday**

Our steps are slow, Our breathing ragged, Our burdens heavy.  
This walk to the cross, It is not easy, Yet Christ walked it for us.  
For the joy that was set before him, He despised the shame,  
He bore our blame, And shared our pain,  
Now let us build on the rock, That is Christ.  
Let us walk the way of the cross together,  
Moving forward without fear, Into God's eternal purposes,  
For Christ himself is with us, Every step of the way.  
Let us trust in God alone, And find the joy that Christ did,  
Obedience to our loving God.

*Copied from [godspace.wordpress.com](http://godspace.wordpress.com)*



**March 31 Saturday of Holy Week**  
**Silence**

**Scripture:** *Jesus knew that his mission was now finished, and to fulfill Scripture he said, "I am thirsty." A jar of sour wine was sitting there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put it on a hyssop branch, and held it up to his lips. When Jesus had tasted it, he said, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.*

John 19:28-30

**Reflection:** I wonder what it was like that Saturday? After the dramatic events of Thursday night in the garden. The late-night secret meetings, and Friday morning the sham of a trial as the crowd shouted, "Crucify him!" I wonder how difficult it must have been to watch the beatings that took place and hear the sound of the whip and his cries of pain. And finally, there he was on the cross, the mid-day sky turned as black as night, then silence. How could this have happened? Their charismatic leader was gone. All their hopes and dreams dashed in a moment. Dismay. Disbelief. His final words...it is finished! In the moments after Jesus death I imagine there was a gasp from the crowd as the stillness grew. Nothing but silence.

Silence is rare in life. Everywhere we go there is noise – from the music in the elevator, or doctor's office or Target. To the road noise, sirens, and horns as we drive around town. Or maybe even the TV or radio playing as background noise once we are home and go about our evening routines. On a daily basis we are surrounded by noise but how often do we seek true silence? Intentional quiet? Stillness? How often do we tune out the noise and seek silence?

I imagine that Saturday the quiet was overwhelming!

On this Saturday, as the world seems to pause in the moments between Jesus death and resurrection, may we seek silence. Today, may we pause and realize just what this day, where God was silent, is truly about...death has been silenced forever!

**Prayer:** Lord, we thank you for the silence of this day and the battle that you fought for us. Thank you for your sacrifice and for taking our sins upon yourself and granting us eternal life. Help us to embrace this day of silence, pause in the moment and walk boldly into the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Pastor Jenni

**April 1 Easter**  
**April Fool's Day – Easter Edition**

**Scripture:** *“Death has been swallowed up in victory.”...“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Corinthians 15: 54-57

**Reflection:** There is a tradition among some churches that the Sunday after Easter is called and celebrated as Holy Humor Sunday. On that day, you would hear jokes and laughter from the sanctuary as the church celebrates that greatest joke God ever played was on the devil, when he was fooled into believing he had won, only to find himself defeated through Christ's resurrection.

Today is my favorite day of the year for Easter to be observed. How appropriate that this year, Easter occurs on April Fool's Day, a day when we play and celebrate practical joking. If you think about what was happening on an eternal scale, the irony is rich.

Ever since the beginning of creation, Satan has been at work trying to separate humanity from God. Every sin described in the Bible, has Satan at work behind the scenes, or in some cases, very much visible as he schemed and worked against humanity.

Satan was nervous when Jesus was born and began working against Him. He tempted Him in the desert to attempt to dissuade His plan. He whispered in the ears of the religious authorities, he whispered in the ear of Herod and Pilate, and he whispered in the ear of Judas, and eventually Jesus was arrested, suffered, and crucified on the cross. Victory was in sight!

Then, when it looks like he would be victorious over God, separating humanity from God, it turns out, that from the very beginning of the story, God had been working a plan, and fulfilling his promises.

On one Sunday morning, the promise was fulfilled and God's plan revealed. Where Satan saw success, suddenly there was failure. Where Satan saw his plans coming together, suddenly his plans were destroyed. Where Satan saw victory, suddenly he is defeated in one fell swoop.

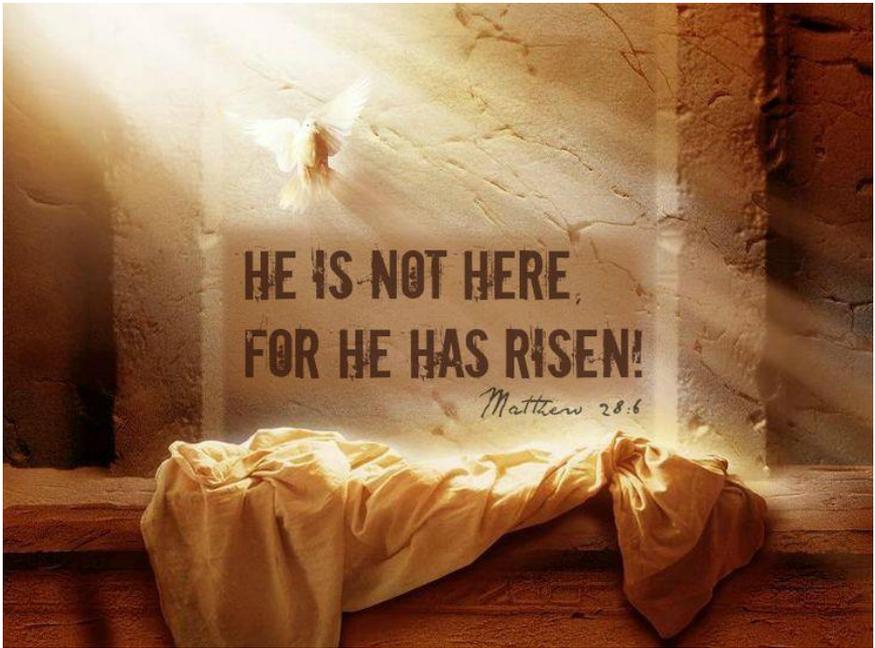
What a great day to celebrate Jesus' victory, this April Fool's Day! Come let us celebrate Jesus' defeat over sin and death, come let us celebrate the Lord.

He is risen.

He is risen indeed!

**Prayer:** Holy Lord, today you achieved the greatest reversal in human history, changing our story and our relationship with sin and death forever. Help us to remember, daily, what you did for us today, rising victorious from the grave, achieving victory over the cross, and beating sin once and for all. Strengthen us in our lives, that we may daily continue to have victory over sin and seek everlasting life through you. Amen.

Contributed by Pastor Jon Sloan



These devotions are a wonderful, personal gift from the congregation to the congregation and church friends during Advent and Lent.

If you would like to contribute to the Advent 2018 or Lent 2019 booklets, it is never too early.

Send your devotional to Lori Snyder-Sloan.

Thank you!

