

WHEN GOD MEETS US HERE

A LENTEN DEVOTION

Written by the faith community of
First Presbyterian Church - Raleigh, NC.

Lent 2026



FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH *of Raleigh*

A WORD FROM OUR SENIOR PASTOR

The church season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues for six weeks, ending with Easter. If you want to know what Lent is, the answer is in the meaning of Ash Wednesday.

On Ash Wednesday, we place ashes on the foreheads of the faithful and say, "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return." It is the reminder of the frailty of our human bodies that calls us to develop our souls more deeply.

The act of then wearing the cross on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday reminds us and those who encounter us that we are followers of Christ. It is a testimony that we try to follow in the way of Christ; that we live our lives differently because of Christ.

The cross on our foreheads is also a sign of penitence. It is a sign that we have remorse for the sin in our lives and in the world.

The weeks following Ash Wednesday, then, are a time of prayer and discernment when we reflect on our lives and seek to turn from sin and turn again toward God. It is time to intentionally focus on growing our faith, with the hope that, come Easter morning, we will be ready to celebrate the resurrection with new and joyous hearts of faith.

I hope this Lenten devotional will help you in your reflection and repentance. And I look forward to sharing the Good News of resurrection with you on Easter.

In faith, hope, and love,
The Rev. Dr. Tara W. Bulger



Wednesday, February 18, 2026 | Ash Wednesday

“A Heart of Repentance” by Becky Brown

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent, a season of humility, reflection, and renewal. Joel's words remind me that God desires more of us than outward rituals; He longs for a transformed heart and connection. God is the lamp, and we are the bulb. For His light to shine through us, we must stay firmly connected to the source. Without that connection, we cannot illuminate the world around us.

In biblical times, tearing garments was a sign of grief, but today God calls us to tear open our hearts instead. True repentance is about surrender. It's about letting go of pride, distractions, and anything that keeps us from His presence, so His light can shine through us.

Lent is a time to pause and ask:

- Where have I drifted from God's presence?
- What distracts me from staying connected to God?
- What habits or attitudes need to be laid down?
- How can I make space for Him to work in me during these 40 days?
- Repentance is an invitation to restoration. God's mercy is waiting when we turn back to Him fully.

Ask yourself: What areas of my life need renewal? How can we renew our minds?

Prayer: Lord, create in me a clean heart. Help me turn from distractions and draw closer to You as we enter this season of Lent. Amen.

Scripture: Joel 2:12-13 (NRSV)

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

Thursday, February 19, 2026

by Ian McCaslin

Jesus' prayer on the night of the Last Supper leading into Good Friday reminds us that "the hour has come" and of the difficult time soon at hand. And yet, he moves ahead into reference to eternal life, life that springs from our relationship with the eternal God. The prayer says that eternal life means knowing the one true God and Jesus Christ, whom God has sent.

Four times a variation of the word "glory" is referenced in this Scripture. We are reminded Jesus glorified God on earth by performing the work God gave him to do. He taught us all to honor God through obedience to God's commands. Jesus provides encouragement to his disciples that God was with Him, and that he was following the will of God – as we now know, even to the Cross.

That night, in the Upper Room, Jesus provides the disciples a measure of comfort for the dark time ahead. The Son will glorify the Father. We know that through his Resurrection and Ascension Jesus returned to the heavenly glory that God prepared for him. We his followers are assured that we too will join him in the Father's presence to share in this glory and love.

Scripture: John 17:1-8 NRSV

"After Jesus had spoken these words, he looked up to heaven and said, "Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son so that the Son may glorify you, 2 since you have given him authority over all people, [a] to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. 3 And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. 4 I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. 5 So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed. 6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the world. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word. 7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you, 8 for the words that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you, and they have believed that you sent me."

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being both our refuge and strength, that we may put our faith in you in all things, that we find courage to do your will, and that we bring honor to your name. Amen.

Friday, February 20, 2026

by Violet Eckard

This is spoken by Jesus as a prayer to his disciples prior to his death. He knows he will not be in the world for much longer, so he asks God to protect his disciples in the world and from evil. He says later that he will die on the cross for the benefit of the people and of the world. Because of this, we have been made holy and empowered to live our lives, carrying out the work of Jesus in the world now.

As a youth at First Presbyterian, I try to be involved with every service trip and opportunity possible. My first service trip was to Scotland, where we spent the first few days sightseeing and taking in the new scenery. Even though it was fun, I felt like something was missing. The next few days, we spent time in a rural part of the country gardening, packaging food, and spending time with the community. This is when I felt closest to God and felt his hand guiding me to carry his service into the world.

During the season of Lent, we are called to reflect:

- Is there an area of your life that may be caught up in the world? How can you let go of that?
- Where might you be called to serve God?
- How can we set ourselves apart as Presbyterians in this world?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me to step up to the call to serve You in this world. Lead us to be the hands and feet of You, spreading the work and the world of the Lord. Amen.

Scripture: John 17: 9-19

“I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the world, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours. All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them. And now I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the world so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves. I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. They do not belong to the world, just as I do not belong to the world. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.”

Saturday, February 21, 2026

by Scott Sommerfeld

Psalm 43 is attributed to the sons of Korah, who were Levite (Priestly) Musicians. There are three sections to Psalm 43. In the first, the Psalmist cries out (vindicate me) from an ungodly nation, and for deliverance “from those who are deceitful and wicked” (NIV) [other translations read “from the deceitful and unjust man”]. The psalmist then questions why God hasn’t fixed the problem. In the second, the Psalmist seems to bargain with God. IF you will send out your light and truth (as if God turns them off and on), THEN I will worship with joy, and upon the lyre I shall praise you (remember the sons of Korah were musicians). In the third the Psalmist confesses to a soul in distress and despair (over the situation), followed by a realization that hope in God, will again lead to praising God. Do we relate ... and behave similarly?

- Our present situation with an ungodly nation/world and its leaders
- Our frustration that God hasn’t fixed the problem
- Our If/Then bargain as if God hasn’t sent out His light and truth already
- Our despair and deep hurting within our souls
- A call to hope, praise, and worship

Ask yourself: What is preventing God’s light and truth from leading me now? What do I need to renew my hope in God; and also my praise and worship?

Prayer: God, we cry out to you with souls that are frustrated and in despair with the state of our nation and the world. We confess that we tend to bargain with you ... if you ... then I will. We acknowledge that your light and truth are always here. Help us to find hope in your steadfast love and give you thanks and praise. Amen.

Scripture:

Psalm 43 NRSV

“Vindicate me, O God,
and defend my cause
against an ungodly people;
from those who are
deceitful and unjust,
deliver me! ² For you
are the God in whom I
take refuge; why have you
cast me off? Why must I
walk about mournfully
because of the
oppression of the enemy?
³ O send out your light
and your truth; let them
lead me; let them bring
me to your holy hill
and to your dwelling.
⁴ Then I will go to the altar
of God, to God my
exceeding joy, and I will
praise you with the harp,
O God, my God. ⁵ Why
are you cast down, O my
soul, and why are you
disquieted within me?
Hope in God, for I shall
again praise him, my help
and my God.”

Sunday, February 22, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

I was in 8th or 9th grade and coming to the realization that math class was going to be a struggle for high school Beth. Most test days began with one of those age-appropriate bargaining prayers, “If I can just make a B on this test, I promise I’ll be a more faithful Christian.” Haven’t we all prayed this way before? I chuckle now at the idea that God needed to trade a good math grade for my faithfulness.

In our passage, Daniel is using this prayer of penitence, or regret, to express the sins of a whole community. There even seems to be some ritual to his prayer: fasting, sackcloth, ashes. Do you have a ritual when you pray? Have you ever prayed on behalf of someone else?

When we’re young, prayer seems pretty simple, almost like a red phone straight to God. And often, our prayers are pretty self-centered (well, at least mine were!). As we mature, we begin to see prayer differently: prayer to listen for God’s voice, prayer as an invitation to change, prayer as a connection for a community that needs to work together, even prayer simply to lament.

Questions to consider:

- How has the way you pray changed as you’ve matured?
- Do you ever pray just to listen for God’s whisper?
- When has prayer moved you to action?

Prayer: Everpresent God, hear us when we pray, even our selfish, immature prayers. Move us, change us, push us. Give us space to listen, space to hear you. Amen.

Scripture: Daniel 9:3-10

“³ Then I turned to the Lord God to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying,
“Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast love with those who love you^[a] and keep your^[b] commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land. ⁷ “Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them because of the treachery that they have committed against you. ⁸ Open shame, O Lord, falls on us, our kings, our princes, and our ancestors because we have sinned against you. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, but we have rebelled against him ¹⁰ and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.”

Monday, February 23, 2026

by Laurie Taylor Weicher

Our passage for today begins and ends in the wilderness. It begins with the oddball prophet, John the Baptist, quoting Isaiah and baptizing people in the Jordan. And it ends with Jesus being led into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan for 40 days and 40 nights. It's wilderness at the beginning and wilderness at the end. And I guess that's fitting. The wilderness is a place of desolation and solitude, a place often associated with struggle and a feeling of distance from God. Beginning the gospel in the wilderness lets all the readers and hearers know that Jesus understands the wilderness places of our lives. In fact, he went into the wilderness himself, to be tested yes, but then went on to experience the wilderness of pain and hurt all the way to the wilderness of the cross.

As people who know the whole story, we can trust that God is with us in the wilderness places of our lives. God is with us in times of struggle and chaos. God is with us in times of hardship and despair, seasons when God feels far away.

In the season of Lent, we are invited to name the wilderness places in our lives and in our world. We are called to ask for forgiveness and seek repentance. This is not always easy. But we do so trusting that God is with us, even in the wilderness.

Scripture: Mark 1:1-13

The Proclamation of John the Baptist

1 "The beginning of the good news^[a] of Jesus Christ.^[b] 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah,^[c] "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, ^[d] who will prepare your way, 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness:

'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,' " 4 so John the baptizer appeared^[e] in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And the whole Judean region and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him and were baptized by him in the River Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the strap of his sandals. 8 I have baptized you with^[f] water, but he will baptize you with^[g] the Holy Spirit."

The Baptism of Jesus

9 In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.

10 And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove upon him. 11 And a voice came from the heavens, "You are my Son, the Beloved;^[h] with you I am well pleased."

The Testing of Jesus

12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tested by Satan, and he was with the wild beasts, and the angels waited on him."

Tuesday, February 24, 2026
Attentiveness Before It Takes Root
by Lora Swindell

Genesis 37:12–24 tells the first part of the story in which Joseph’s brothers throw him into a cistern before selling him into slavery. Their violence does not begin suddenly. It begins much earlier with small, unexamined emotions that are allowed to grow. The brothers stop attending to who Joseph is and focus instead on what he represents: favor they did not receive, futures they fear losing, and reminders of old wounds. In doing so, they show us how jealousy works. It narrows our attention until we see others not as people, but as threats.

Jealousy grows when we believe blessing is a zero-sum game—when someone else’s good feels like our loss. Anger is rarely a sudden visitor. More often, it is the result of jealousy left unattended.

Joseph’s brothers do not wake up intending to harm him, but once jealousy is given space to grow, they arrive there quickly. What begins in the heart soon shapes words, relationships, and actions. Lent invites us into a different way. It is not only a season of repentance after sin, but a season of attentiveness before it takes root—before jealousy hardens into resentment, before it distorts our relationships, and before it tempts us to justify harm.

For reflection:

- What feelings do we dismiss as “harmless” because they have not yet become actions?
- Where do we label others instead of seeing them as siblings in God’s family?
- What would it look like to bring jealousy into the light—before it shapes our words, our relationships, or our trust in God’s generosity?

Prayer: God of abundant grace, search our hearts and show us the feelings we ignore and the resentments we excuse. Teach us to see one another as siblings, not rivals for your love. Turn our attention back to your generosity, and give us the courage to bring our jealousy into your light before it grows into harm. Create in us hearts that are attentive and humble. Amen.

Scripture: Genesis 37: 12-24 (NRSV)

¹² “Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” He answered, “Here I am.” ¹⁴ So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring word back to me.” So he sent him from the valley of Hebron. He came to Shechem, ¹⁵ and a man found him wandering in the fields; the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” ¹⁶ “I am seeking my brothers,” he said; “tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” ¹⁷ The man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan. ¹⁸ They saw him from a distance, and before he came near to them they conspired to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits; then we shall say that a wild animal has devoured him, and we shall see what will become of his dreams.” ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he delivered him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” ²² Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but lay no hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand and restore him to his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the ornamented robe^[a] that he wore, ²⁴ and they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.”

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

by Corinne Crews

For a week in January, I carried Psalm 5 around with me, occasionally reading it to see what jumped out to me.

One night, while cooking dinner, I toggled back and forth on my phone from a recipe on Substack to the psalm on my Bible app. The central verses (4-10) struck me. How could they not? It was as if I was reading the psalm alongside that day's headlines. Wickedness, lies, destruction.

"Mom, did you know God will beat all the bad guys?" My thoughts were interrupted by my four-year old son James, who joined me in the kitchen.

He hasn't been watching the news, but he is beginning to understand a song he sings at the CDC during the week: "My God is so big, so strong, and so mighty; there's nothing my God cannot do!" He sang it then, stomping around the house with his arms raised in bicep curls.

In Psalm 5, the psalmist teaches us how to pray, much like my son is reminding me how to believe. In desperation, we lay our requests before God. We ask God to attend to our needs, our anxieties. Then, we must remind ourselves, shout-singing, that our God is a mighty God of justice, who will bend the arc of the story toward good. Finally, we pray for God's broad protection and peace for all believers, and especially those in the path of destruction.

God, We carry our laments with us like poems in our pockets, pulling them out and re-reading them until the folded paper is worn. We are weary of violence and injustice. We know You are a God of peace and righteousness, but sometimes we need reminders. Help us to pray with our mouths and our feet. Remind us of the ways we can take action.

Prayer: Today, we pray: Lord, spread your protection over those who take refuge in you. Cover them as with a shield. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 5 (NRSV)

⁴“For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil will not sojourn with you.⁵ The boastful will not stand before your eyes; you hate all evildoers. ⁶You destroy those who speak lies; the Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful. ⁷But I, through the abundance of your steadfast love will enter your house; I will bow down toward your holy temple in awe of you. ⁸Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness because of my enemies; make your way straight before me. ⁹For there is no truth in their mouths; their hearts are destruction; their throats are open graves; they flatter with their tongues. ¹⁰Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of their many transgressions, cast them out, for they have rebelled against you.”

Thursday, February 26, 2026

by Emma Carmichael

There is no doubt that this is the story of a miracle. A paralyzed man is healed and made to walk again to the amazement of the entire crowd who has come to see and hear Jesus; however, it is Jesus himself who calls our attention to the real miracle.

In verse 9, Jesus questions which is harder, healing a man physically or forgiving his sins. For those of us used to God's forgiveness, healing a man to walk again may seem like the more difficult task, but for this biblical crowd hearing Jesus forgive the man's sins was a shocking and seemingly impossible task for someone who was not (to their knowledge) God. And when we really think about it, isn't the power of forgiveness to heal this man from the inside, to heal him mentally and spiritually before even considering what so many others deemed to be wrong with him the truly miraculous and inspirational act? Jesus could have first healed the man physically. He could have asked the man to stand, giving him the healing that the crowd expected, the healing that his friends clawed through the roof for, and likely the healing the man himself thought that he needed. But Jesus saw the faith of the man and his friends, He saw and understood them fully, and He gave them the healing that would allow them to walk with God long after their abilities to walk on earth would fade.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for your continued and unwavering love and forgiveness. Help me to feel and know this healing in all the ways that you offer and not just in the ways I expect or ask for. And Lord, help me to follow Jesus' radical example, forgiving my neighbors often and easily and when forgiveness seems difficult, give me the courage to scale buildings, dig through roofs, and elbow through crowds to share your love with others. Amen.

Scripture: Mark 2:1-2 (NRSV)

When he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. 2 So many gathered around that there was no longer room for them, not even in front of the door, and he was speaking the word to them. 3 Then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the paralytic lay. 5 When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Child, your sins are forgiven." 6 Now some of the scribes were sitting there questioning in their hearts, 7 "Why does this fellow speak in this way? It is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?" 8 At once Jesus perceived in his spirit that they were discussing these questions among themselves, and he said to them, "Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? 9 Which is easier: to say to the paralytic, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Stand up and take your mat and walk'?" 10 But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he said to the paralytic— 11 "I say to you, stand up, take your mat, and go to your home." 12 And he stood up and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, "We have never seen anything like this!"

Friday, February 27, 2026

by Kathie Cheatham

How God loves us! We are a temple and God dwells within us -- both a joy and a responsibility.

We must nurture God's Spirit, constantly on guard for human traps. One trap is wisdom. I hear the echo of Ecclesiastes, who taught that wisdom was foolishness. But why? It is foolish only if we think we have an answer to the meaning of our lives. We are but a tiny part (loved though we are) of God's plan. Jesus gave us God's Word as a code book for navigation within that plan. No human leader can know more than Christ-- or even each of us if we follow Christ.

Spiritual Mystery: When I was a child, my parents and I would sit on our front lawn during hot, mosquito-infested nights and look at the stars. Light pollution was not a problem. So many stars! I was awestruck by how small our spot was and how God's creation was so vast. Despite our smallness, I could still sense God's presence – how great was his power!

More than half a century later, I was excited to be in the African bush in a tent with an expectation of again seeing those billions of stars without light pollution. Then . . . a cloudless night, moon, but no visible stars – why? Scientists blame light pollution but, incredibly, something else was happening that African night. We wonder why, but God knows. During Lent, think about how we can let God's unknowable plan work through us.

Prayer: All-knowing God, let me trust in your wisdom above all else and follow your Word as brought to us by Christ, in whom we dwell. In Jesus' name, Amen.

**1 Corinthians 3:16-23
(NRSV)**

“Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. For the wisdom of the world is foolishness with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness”, and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.” So let no one boast about human leaders, For all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.”

Saturday, February 28, 2026

by Andrew Beal

This passage depicts one of the verbal conflicts between Jesus and the Pharisees, an influential sect within the Jewish community.

At issue is how strictly to interpret the meaning of the Sabbath as a day of rest. The Pharisees' interpretation seems so narrow as to make it a joyless burden, rather than a benefit. In their shortsightedness, the Pharisees even criticize a miracle by Jesus as a violation. Talk about missing the forest for the trees! Instead of celebrating an act of kindness and healing, the Pharisees focus on the fact that Jesus did the act at the "wrong" time!

If the Pharisees had truly been interested in debating Jesus, or having a conversation, they might have learned something, because Jesus makes points that are sound and based in tradition. Instead of conceding anything to superior arguments, the embarrassed Pharisees miss the point entirely and plot revenge, leading ultimately to the crucifixion.

It's easy to judge the Pharisees, but of course, human beings do this all the time. We like to think we are open-minded, but too often, we just seek to destroy that which we don't understand.

Perhaps, we all could use some more imagination, compassion, and humility.

Prayer: Lord, help us to have loving, open minds and hearts, and help us to recognize what is truly important in life. Amen.

Mark 2:23-3:6 (The Message)

²³⁻²⁴ One Sabbath day he was walking through a field of ripe grain. As his disciples made a path, they pulled off heads of grain. The Pharisees told on them to Jesus: "Look, your disciples are breaking Sabbath rules!"

²⁵⁻²⁸ Jesus said, "Really? Haven't you ever read what David did when he was hungry, along with those who were with him? How he entered the sanctuary and ate fresh bread off the altar, with the Chief Priest Abiathar right there watching—holy bread that no one but priests were

allowed to eat—and handed it out to his companions?" Then Jesus said, "The Sabbath was made to serve us; we weren't made to serve the Sabbath. The Son of Man is no yes-man to the Sabbath. He's in charge!" ³ ¹⁻³ Then he went

back in the meeting place where he found a man with a crippled hand. The Pharisees had their eyes on Jesus to see if he would heal him, hoping to catch him in a Sabbath violation. He said to the man with the crippled hand, "Stand here where we can see you." ⁴ Then he spoke to

the people: "What kind of action suits the Sabbath best? Doing good or doing evil? Helping people or leaving them helpless?" No one said a word. ⁵⁻⁶ He looked them in the eye, one after another, angry now, furious at their hard-nosed religion. He said to the man, "Hold out your hand." He held it out—it was as good as new! The Pharisees got out as fast as they could, sputtering about how they would join forces with Herod's followers & ruin him."

Sunday, March 1, 2026

by Mark Woodcock

As is often the case, scripture brings music to my mind. From John 5:19-24 I hear Hymn 630 Fairest Lord Jesus CRUSADERS' HYMN from our Glory to God hymnal. More specifically, I think of the arrangement of this hymn by the conductor and composer F. Melius Christiansen entitled Beautiful Savior. Please follow this posted link below to hear the St. Olaf Choir singing the piece: [Beautiful Savior](#)

It is a scripture, and music, that points us towards the profound connectedness of all things and from that connectedness the most profound beauty and transcendence.

- Can I feel this connection within our church?
- Can I feel it with my neighbors?
- Can I feel it with my favorite and least favorite oak or sweet gum tree?
- Will I take the time to see how my connectedness glimpses at the sublime and how I am bound up with it all?

Beautiful Savior lyrics:

Fair are the meadows,
Fairer the woodlands,
Robed in flowers of blooming spring;

Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer,
He makes our sorrowing spirit sing.
Beautiful Savior! Lord of the nations!
Son of God and Son of Man!
Glory and honor, Glory, glory, honor, Praise, adoration,
Now and forevermore be Thine.
Now and forevermore be Thine!



The Chorister's Prayer: Bless, O Lord, us Thy servants Who minister in Thy temple. Grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives. Amen.

Scripture: John 5:19-24 (NRSV)

The Authority of the Son
19 "Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own but only what he sees the Father doing, for whatever the Father^[a] does, the Son does likewise. 20 The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing, and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished. 21 Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. 22 The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son, 23 so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. 24 Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and does not come under judgment but has passed from death to life."

Monday, March 2, 2026

by Lucy B.

In Aaron Sorkin's thought-provoking-though-flawed adaptation of another sacred (to me!) text, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, the character of Scout observes that "trying to do the right thing is the right thing." That line has stuck with me since seeing the play seven years ago. Can it be that simple? I'm not sure.

I was reminded of that line when I read these verses. This passage shows me someone who is trying to draw nearer to God, to reflect Him more. The language is effortful. You can feel the work.

The psalmist prays to reach blamelessness before God. Is he there? Of course not — he also just prayed for shame to those who have beguiled him! But he is striving.

In this lifetime, none of us will reach blamelessness before the Lord. But this Lenten season, here's to the trying.

Prayer: Dear God, be with me in the trying, even—especially—when it's trying. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 119:73-80

73 "Your hands have made and fashioned me; give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.

74 Those who fear you shall see me and rejoice, because I have hoped in your word.

75 I know, O LORD, that your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness you have humbled me.

76 Let your steadfast love become my comfort according to your promise to your servant.

77 Let your mercy come to me, that I may live; for your law is my delight.

78 Let the arrogant be put to shame, because they have subverted me with guile; as for me, I will meditate on your precepts.

79 Let those who fear you turn to me, so that they may know your decrees.

80 May my heart be blameless in your statutes, so that I may not be put to shame."

Tuesday, March 3, 2026

by Becky Brown

If Lent had a theme song, Psalm 91 might be somewhere near the top of the playlist. It starts with this quiet, comforting line: “Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.”

And doesn't that sound like the spiritual equivalent of slipping into your comfiest sweatshirt and exhaling for the first time all day?

What I love about Psalm 91 is how direct it is. It doesn't tiptoe around the fact that life can be hard. There are challenges, worries, things we are not able to control.

But the psalm keeps saying, over and over: “You're not facing it alone. Come sit under God's shade for a minute.” And Lent is kind of like that, a season to pause, breathe, and settle back into God's presence. Not rushed or frantic. Just choosing to dwell there.

Psalm 91 describes God as our shelter, our covering, our place to rest. It doesn't promise that hard things disappear, but it does promise that God is with us through every single one.

So, this Lent, maybe the invitation is simple: Slow down. Let yourself rest in the One who already knows what you need. You are covered completely.

Prayer: God, help me slow down long enough to remember You're here. Teach me to rest in Your strength instead of trying to handle everything on my own. As I walk through this season, remind me again and again that I'm safe in Your love. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 91

¹ You who live in the shelter of the Most High,
who abide in the shadow of the Almighty,^[a]
² will say to the Lord, “My refuge and my
fortress; my God, in whom I trust.”
³ For he will deliver you from the snare of the
hunter and from the deadly pestilence;
⁴ he will cover you with his pinions, and under
his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness
is a shield and defense. ⁵ You will not fear the
terror of the night or the arrow that flies by
day ⁶ or the pestilence that stalks in darkness
or the destruction that wastes at noonday. ⁷ A
thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand
at your right hand, but it will not come near
you. ⁸ You will only look with your eyes and
see the punishment of the wicked.^b ⁹ Because
you have made the Lord your refuge,^[b] the
Most High your dwelling place ¹⁰ no evil shall
befall you, no scourge come near your tent. ¹¹
For he will command his angels concerning
you to guard you in all your ways. ¹² On their
hands they will bear you up, so that you will
not dash your foot against a stone. ¹³ You will
tread on the lion and the adder; the young
lion and the serpent you will trample under
foot. ¹⁴ Those who love me, I will deliver; I will
protect those who know my name. ¹⁵ When
they call to me, I will answer them; I will be
with them in trouble; I will rescue them and
honor them. ¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy
them and show them my salvation.

Wednesday, March 4, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

Are you stubborn like me? My hunch is that stubbornness is why Jesus spoke in parables. People just weren't "getting it." Jesus also begins this parable by telling everyone to "Listen!". We don't get to hear Jesus' tone here, but my guess is that he's pretty exasperated. So, with a crowd so large that he has to get in the boat and teach from there, he tells everyone a story. In a time when growing your own food was something common to every person, an analogy that makes a "holy point" rooted in growing food is one that probably made a lot of sense to people.

In this parable, I think Jesus is asking people to be careful. Be careful where you "plant" your seeds. Do it right. Because if you don't do it right the first time, you've wasted your chance. Jesus asks us to be intentional with our actions so that we are well-rooted, so our intentions won't be scorched by the sun the second they bloom.

- How can we be more intentional with our "roots" and how we "plant"?
- How are we making sure that our soil is healthy?

At the end of this parable, Jesus even refocuses everyone. He says, "If you have ears to hear, then hear!" I wonder if folks felt like Jesus lectured them a bit? Would Jesus say the same to us today? How can we make sure that our ears are clean and we are ready to hear? May it be so.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, sometimes we need to hear your word with a story. We need to hear it phrased just for us. Help us to hear you. Help us not only to hear but to listen. Amen.

Scripture: Mark 4:1-9

The Parable of the Sower
4 "Again he began to teach beside the sea. Such a very large crowd gathered around him that he got into a boat on the sea and sat there, while the whole crowd was beside the sea on the land. 2 He began to teach them many things in parables, and in his teaching he said to them: 3 "Listen! A sower went out to sow. 4 And as he sowed, some seed fell on a path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Other seed fell on rocky ground, where it did not have much soil, and it sprang up quickly, since it had no depth of soil. 6 And when the sun rose, it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it, and it yielded no grain. 8 Other seed fell into good soil and brought forth grain, growing up and increasing and yielding thirty and sixty and a hundredfold." 9 And he said, "If you have ears to hear, then hear!"

Thursday, March 5, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

Was your first thought the song? You know the one:

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine? (x3)

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

Hide it under a bushel? NO! I'm gonna let it shine! (x3)

Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine!

You'll be glad to know that every week (yes, every single week), the children sing this song with Dr. Nat Sparrow after Sunday School.

They're too young yet to understand metaphors, but we're planting a seed (get it? another metaphor) so they'll know these words well as they get older.

God gave each of us a light to shine. Perhaps your light is the compassion you have for others. Maybe your light is how you advocate for those in need? What is your light and how do you shine it?

One of the joys of working with children is watching them discover their light and encouraging them to shine it brightly, just as Jesus invites us to.

A bonus thought, if you read yesterday's devotion, you'll see that AGAIN Jesus is telling us to pay attention by saying "If you have ears to hear, then hear." Of course, this is a metaphor, too. I

believe the true message is: "Use your voice!"

Prayer: Gracious God, may we find our light – our individual light and our collective light. Let us shine brightly because this world can feel awfully dark sometimes.

Scripture: Mark 4:21-15

A Lamp under a Bushel
Basket

²¹ "He said to them, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under the bushel basket or under the bed and not on the lampstand?"

²² For there is nothing hidden, except to be disclosed; nor is anything secret, except to come to light.

²³ If you have ears to hear, then hear!" ²⁴ And he said to them, "Pay attention to what you hear; the measure you give will be the measure you get, and it will be added to you. ²⁵ For to those who have, more will be given, and from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away."

Friday, March 6, 2026

by Kathy Hopkins

My heart smiled as I read the first few verses of Psalm 95. I have sung these words many times in anthems over the years. They fill my heart with joy!

I love that this psalm invites us to praise God with song and “joyful noise”. It reminds us to come to God with thanksgiving in our hearts. Psalm 95 gives us a beautiful image of God as our shepherd and we as His sheep, living in the pasture He created for us. It comforts us with the knowledge that we belong to God and that He has made a covenant with us to care for us. Therefore, we are invited to kneel and bow down before our Creator.

There is also a call to listen to His voice and to obey Him. We are admonished not to harden our hearts like the Israelites in the wilderness. Meribah means “quarreling” and Massah means “testing”. These names describe the attitude of the Israelites when they tested God and quarreled with Moses. The Israelites doubted God’s providence to provide them with water, even though God had parted the Red Sea to allow them to escape from Egypt and had provided them with manna to eat in the desert. God became angry at their lack of faith and trust; however, God’s anger was rooted in love, for He was grieved that His people would not enjoy the blessings and fullness of life that He had planned for them.

Psalm 95 teaches us to stay in relationship with God, in joyful times and in distressing times, by calling us to praise, to worship, and to listen to and obey God’s voice.

Questions: How can we express joy and thanksgiving in our daily lives? How do we harden our hearts against God? How can we combine worship and obedience in our walk of faith?

Prayer: Dear Lord, we thank you for the covenant relationship we have with you, our Creator. Grant us opportunities to express both joy and thanksgiving each day. Turn us away from anything that would harden our hearts against you. Show us how to stay in relationship with you through worship and obedience. Amen.

Psalm 95 (NRSV)

A Call to Worship and Obedience

1 “O come, let us sing to the LORD; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation! 2 Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

3 For the LORD is a great God, and a great King above all gods. 4 In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also. 5 The sea

is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed. 6 O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD, our Maker! 7 For he

is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. O that today you would listen to his voice! 8 Do not harden your hearts, as at

Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, 9 when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work. 10 For forty years

I loathed that generation and said, ‘They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways.’ 11 Therefore in my anger I swore, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’”

Saturday, March 7, 2026

by Jennifer Brearley

As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Christianity does not promise that we will not suffer. Sickness, heartache, loneliness, and pain are a part of the human experience. What then does God promise us? Whatever we are going through, Christ promises to walk with us, to support and sustain us, and to redeem us. This passage from Romans also reminds the divided citizens of Rome long ago and all of God's people today that He is at work, even in the difficult times. Perhaps most amazing of all, Paul assures us that NOTHING at all can separate us from the love of God. Wherever we are and whatever we are facing, we can be confident that God is with us, God is for us, and God will always love us. All of us. Full stop.

Questions to ponder today:

- How do we deal with suffering?
- Are there times when, looking back, you can see that God provided a blessing even in a dark time?
- What gives you hope today as you face challenges?
- How can you be a blessing to others who are facing difficulties?

Prayer: Heavenly Father, I am grateful that you walk with me each and every day, supporting and sustaining me through the challenges that come my way. Help me pay attention to the opportunities you provide for me to support and encourage others. Thank you for your unconditional love, made flesh in your Son, always and forever. Amen.

Scripture: Romans 8:28-39

"We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a large family.

And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not also give us everything else? Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?"

Sunday, March 8, 2026

by John McClain

In the lead-up to the passage above, Jesus has healed a lame man who had suffered for 38 years, causing Jewish leaders to attack him because he did so on the Sabbath. After telling the leaders he is doing only what God has shown him to do, Jesus warns them (and us) of the coming Day of Judgment where he will judge all mankind “because he is the Son of Man.” (v.27) Jesus adds that his actions will be just, “for I seek not to please myself but him who sent me.” As part of the Trinity, Jesus Christ has a distinct role in God’s plan to bring about our salvation, and his equality to God is underscored here as he states that he, not God the Father, will Judge, and, more importantly, he is the source of everlasting life!

Lent is a time for all to reflect upon our faith as Christians, and as we reflect on the meaning of Jesus’ coming crucifixion and resurrection, it is a time to renew our commitment to living our faith daily.

A song in the 1990's entitled “The Great Divide” underscores the fact that all mankind, as sinners, must have help in crossing the canyon between our sinful life and a life deemed righteous by God. Jesus Christ is that bridge, having died at Calvary for the sole purpose of being a sacrifice for our sins. Passage only requires that we “hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.” (v.25)

As we go through the Lenten Season, we should ask ourselves these questions:

- Do I believe faithfully the message of the One sent by God, Jesus Christ?
- Do I listen daily to hear the guidance from the voice of the Holy Spirit?
- Do I live my life as a witness to all of my faith in Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Holy God, help us to hear your word, in faith, and having placed it in our hearts, help us to live our lives as a witness to all that Jesus Christ is the bridge to eternal life. Amen.

Scripture:

John 5:25-29 NRSV

²⁵ “Very truly, I tell you, the hour is coming and is now here when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. ²⁶ For just as the

Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, ²⁷ and he has given him authority to execute judgment because he is the Son of Man. ²⁸

Do not be astonished at this, for the hour is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice ²⁹ and will come out: those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation.

Monday, March 9, 2026

by Mary Jo Littlewood

This verse from Psalm 121 is one that gives me great comfort. I feel the comfort when things around me may be on the dark side of reality but do not seem to be directly affecting me or those whom I know or love. It is when I begin to balk at what is happening or try to maneuver what is happening because I do not want something to be other than “my way” that discomfort sets in.

God has given us free will, meaning we can accept or reject God’s way. I am much more comforted, for the most part, to accept God’s will than my own free will. I do not think God deliberately places obstacles in my path or puts me in harm’s way. I put myself in harm’s way. God provides all that is needed for our life on earth, even the protection spoken of in this verse, by day and by night.

The entirety of Psalm 121 speaks to God’s eternal protection of mankind. We must have faith that what God has said is truly for our benefit, and we must be a reflection of this promise in how we treat others in our daily walk on earth. Jesus, the son of God was born and lived amongst us. He died and was resurrected. His resurrection surely shows that God was and continues to be in control of the protection of mankind, and why the death and resurrection of Jesus should surely be celebrated as God’s supreme act of showing his love and protection for his earthly son.

Since we all are God’s children, we should truly rejoice in what God has done to show and to assure our eternal love and protection.

Scripture: Psalm 121, Verse 6

The sun shall not smite you by day, nor the moon by night.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for protecting us even when we choose to behave as though we are in control of what is affecting us at times.. Forgive us when we try to take charge. Draw us back in faith to your eternal protection stated so well in the 6th verse of Psalm 121: “The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night.” May this statement resonate with me during Lent as well as every day of my life here on earth. Amen.

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

by Anonymous

Has anyone ever made a presumption about you? Assumed they knew you even though they didn't really know you?

In this passage, Jesus returns to Nazareth not to be met with welcome, but instead to be downplayed and second-guessed. His knowledge and wisdom are questioned because how could a carpenter (or builder as some translations use) have such wisdom? Emphasis is also made on him being Mary's son and scholars suggest that they are implying Jesus was an illegitimate child, especially since they refuse to call his father, Joseph, by name.

To me, this foreshadows future betrayal of Jesus. His own hometown cannot acknowledge his divinity.

Mark goes on to say that Jesus "could do no deeds of power there" which some scholars believe to mean that miracles cannot exist without first having faith.

Questions to consider:

- Has your own wisdom been doubted before? How did that make you feel?
- Have you ever doubted God's wisdom?
- How do you think Jesus felt to not be welcomed in his hometown?
- Where do you see yourself in this story? Are you a fellow Nazarean who is questioning Jesus? Do you empathize with Jesus in times when you have been second-guessed?

Prayer: Patient Lord, thank you for being with us in our doubt. When we have been like the Nazareans, thank you for waiting on us. Amen.

Scripture: Mark 6:1-6

The Rejection of Jesus
at Nazareth

6 "He left that place and came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him. 2 On the Sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, "Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands! 3 Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary^[a] and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offense^[b] at him. 4 Then Jesus said to them, "Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown and among their own kin and in their own house." 5 And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them. 6 And he was amazed at their unbelief."

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

by Jim Nichols

Lent invites us face our lives honestly and to trust God more deeply.

Jesus is named “a great high priest” who is not distant but who knows and cares for us. Just like us, Jesus experienced temptation, suffering and loss. His humanity and humility allows us to approach Him with confidence rather than fear.

The writer of Hebrews connects Jesus to Melchizedek, an ancient priest-king of Jerusalem whose authority came not from religious lineage but from God. By calling Jesus a priest in this order, we are reminded that Christ’s ministry is rooted in compassion, obedience and grace. For modern disciples, this means we do not have to earn God’s love or hide our brokenness. In Christ we are met with mercy.

Lent becomes a season not of self-condemnation, but of deeper trust drawing nearer to God and extending the love of Christ to others.

Prayer: Compassionate God, thank you for Jesus who is the high priest who lives among us, the one who knows our weaknesses and yet meets us with grace. Help us to grow in faith and extend that same mercy to others. In Jesus’s name we pray...Amen.

Scripture: Hebrews 4:14-5:6

¹⁴ “Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested^[a] as we are, yet without sin. ¹⁶ Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. 5 Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness, ³ and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴ And one does not presume to take this honor but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵ So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest but was appointed by^[b] the one who said to him, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you”; ⁶ as he says also in another place, “You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Thursday, March 12, 2026

by Jane MacLeod

Psalm 102 is a psalm of lament of someone who is overwhelmed. We become anguished about our lives and problems. We are reminded here, though, that God is forever and does hear our prayers, the prayers of the destitute, the broken-hearted.

The one praying is crying and seeking answers from God. "My heart is stricken and withered like grass..." "All day long my enemies taunt me." "But You O Lord shall endure forever... You are the same."

In the times we are living, with violence and hatred and disregard for our fellow humans so prevalent, perhaps we feel as if there have never been worse times than these and that we may not be restored. We may wonder if God hears our prayers.

As we read these ancient words, we are reminded that God has heard suffering for all eternity and hears our laments now. God will be with us and with our children and grandchildren and future generations forever.

Questions to ponder:

- How can I rise above the desperation and hopelessness many feel?
- How can I answer calls of lament myself and be both patient and active?

Prayer: Dear God, We are in a hurting world and need you so badly. Many are suffering from hunger, lack of shelter, feelings of helplessness, lack of hope for the future. Help us to see beyond the present time of division and pain and to remember your mercy and power. Help us to see our role in working towards restoration and show our faith in you. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 102: 1-16

¹ "Hear my prayer, O Lord; let my cry come to you. ² Do not hide your face from me in the day of my distress. Incline your ear to me; answer me speedily in the day when I call. ³ For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. ⁴ My heart is stricken and withered like grass; I am too wasted to eat my bread. ⁵ Because of my loud groaning, my bones cling to my skin. ⁶ I am like a desert owl^[a] of the wilderness, like a little owl of the waste places. ⁷ I lie awake; I am like a lonely bird on the housetop. ⁸ All day long my enemies taunt me; those who deride me use my name for a curse. ⁹ Indeed, I eat ashes like bread and mingle tears with my drink, ¹⁰ because of your indignation and anger, for you have lifted me up and thrown me aside. ¹¹ My days are like a lengthening shadow; I wither away like grass. ¹² But you, O Lord, are enthroned forever; your name endures to all generations. ¹³ You will rise up and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to favor it; the appointed time has come. ¹⁴ For your servants hold its stones dear and have pity on its dust. ¹⁵ The nations will fear the name of the Lord and all the kings of the earth your glory. ¹⁶ For the Lord will build up Zion; he will appear in his glory."

Friday, March 13, 2026

by Anonymous

In our passage, Joseph and his family are in need. They and their flocks need land and refuge.

We see Pharaoh grant them permission to live there and care for his flock.

You're probably thinking, "Wait, isn't Pharaoh a 'bad guy' in the Bible?". This story takes place 400 years (ish) before the story of Moses and the Exodus story that we're so familiar with. Different Pharaoh and different story!

In our story today, we see an example of generosity, hospitality, and refuge.

Has there been a time when someone has offered this sort of hospitality to you?

In what ways does God call us to live similarly?

In this story, it's hard for us to tell what (if anything) Pharaoh has to sacrifice by being so generous. Possibly nothing. And if Joseph's family cares for his flock, perhaps he even benefits?

In either event, we are given an example of hospitality. Perhaps those with power (like Pharaoh) have an even bigger responsibility to be hospitable.

Prayer: God, your words are holy and ancient. Help us to hear them for the days we live today. Help us to share your holy welcome. Amen.

Scripture: Genesis 47:1-12

47 "So Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan; they are now in the land of Goshen." 2 From among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. 3 Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our ancestors were." 4 They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to reside as aliens in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks because the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, we ask you, let your servants settle in the land of Goshen." 5 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 The land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land; let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know that there are capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." 7 Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and presented him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the years of your life?" 9 Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my earthly sojourn are one hundred thirty; few and hard have been the years of my life. They do not compare with the years of the life of my ancestors during their long sojourn." 10 Then Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. 11 Joseph settled his father and his brothers and granted them a holding in the land of Egypt, in the best part of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had instructed. 12 And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents."

Saturday, March 14, 2026

by Allison Hawkins

I, like many others in this congregation, am a lawyer in my day job. Because of this, the first thing that struck me about this passage was God swearing an oath on Himself.

Much of my day-to-day is working within a system that is based on people promising to tell the truth. There are some days when my trust in that as a basis for our system is higher than others.

There are also some days when my feelings of belief are higher than others. This passage gives me reassurance that even on the days I'm struggling to feel God's presence it is impossible for Him to lie and he has made promises to us that he will keep. This hope isn't fleeting, it is an anchor for our soul, keeping us safe even in storms.

Prayer: Dear God, there is no higher authority than You. In times when You feel far away help us remember that You tell the truth and are the Truth. Amen.

Scripture: Hebrews 6:9-20 (NRSV)

⁹ “Even though we speak in this way, beloved, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. ¹⁰ For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the^[a] love that you showed for his sake^[b] in serving the saints, as you still do. ¹¹ And we want each one of you to show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, ¹² so that you may not become sluggish but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

The Certainty of God's Promise

¹³ When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, ¹⁴ saying, “I will surely bless you and multiply you.” ¹⁵ And thus Abraham,^[c] having patiently endured, obtained the promise. ¹⁶ Humans, of course, swear by someone greater than themselves, and an oath given as confirmation puts an end to all dispute among them. ¹⁷ In the same way, when God desired to show even more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it by an oath, ¹⁸ so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God would prove false, we who have taken refuge might be strongly encouraged to seize the hope set before us. ¹⁹ We have this hope, a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters the inner shrine behind the curtain, ²⁰ where Jesus, a forerunner on our behalf, has entered, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Sunday, March 15, 2026

by Nancy Crew

Jesus is declaring himself as the light of the world, confronting the Pharisees about their lack of spiritual understanding, and affirming his authority as the Son of God. "I am the light of the world" is a powerful statement. It signifies Jesus' divine nature and mission as the source of spiritual illumination and truth. Those who follow Jesus are assured they will never walk in darkness and will have the light of life, promising eternal life.

This scripture passage reminds me of favorite a song we sang in church youth group back in the 1970's.

The chorus is:

*I am the light of the world
You people come and follow me
If you follow and love,
You'll learn the mystery,
of what you were meant to do and be*



Scan here to hear
"I Am the Light of the World."

How has Jesus helped you learn "what you were meant to do and be"?

The song has 4 verses. Verse 3 seems especially relevant today:

*To free the prisoners from their chains
To make the powerful care
To rebuild the nations with strength of good-will
To be at one with people everywhere*

How can our faith help us do these things? Wouldn't it be nice to see more "strength of good-will" between nations and to "be at one with people everywhere"?

Prayer: Dear God, Thank you for sending Jesus to be the Light of the World! Just as a lighthouse guides ships safely to shore during a storm, we know Jesus offers spiritual guidance and direction in the midst of life's challenges. Help us to remember this always and inspire us to live lives that reflect His light to others and offer hope. Amen.

Scripture: John 8:12-20

¹² "Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world.

Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." ¹³ Then the Pharisees said to him, "You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid." ¹⁴ Jesus answered, "Even

if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards;[a] I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid, for it is not I alone who judge but I and the Father[b] who sent

me. ¹⁷ In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸ I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf." ¹⁹ Then

they said to him, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also." ²⁰ He spoke these

words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come."

Monday, March 16, 2026

by Lucille Stevenson

When we read this passage it can make us remember that when we focus on earthly things—like social media, how you look, or what other people think of you and influence your thoughts—it does not help us. The good feeling doesn't last.

However, when we are connected with God, he helps us like He has helped others for years and years and will for years to come. He has shown beyond doubt again and again how much he helps and loves His people.

Good feelings from Earthly things go away quickly, but the feelings we get from following God's path will last forever.

God invites us to follow His path and his Son's path so we can accept His help to enhance and expand ourselves to be an improved self.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for guiding us in the right direction and helping us to be more like your Son. Please help us to be more like your Son and use our strengths and talents for the greater good. In your name we pray, Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 156

"Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord,
O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals,
in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs,
they return to the earth;

on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of
Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and
all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;
who executes justice for the oppressed;
who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord
opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed
down; the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers; he
upholds the orphan and the widow, but the
way of the wicked he brings to ruin.

The Lord will reign forever, your God, O
Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!"

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

by Ed McLeod

It's not like we needed another feeding story. Just a moment ago, if you were reading Mark from cover to cover (which, as the shortest gospel, would be the one to pick!), you would have seen that in chapter 6, Jesus fed 5000 people, having multiplied 5 loaves and two fish, so that everyone who was there had something to eat, with 12 baskets of leftovers. A remarkable story of the power of God to provide, hearkening to the manna in the wilderness.

But then, two chapters later, we get our story, the feeding of 4000 people, from different, but similar provisions, 7 loaves and a few fish. And again, once the people have feasted, there are leftovers, this time 7 baskets full. If you have a particularly good memory, you have heard me preach on this text, and its significance, and I've returned to it again and again over the years, and again this Lenten season, because it tells an important story, for it is a story of the wideness of God's mercy.

When 12 baskets are left over in the first miraculous feeding story, there is a scholarly consensus that those baskets are a reminder that Jesus came as the long awaited Messiah to the 12 tribes of Israel, though by the time of his arrival, they are mostly scattered and lost to history, but God's faithfulness is eternal.

And because numbers are important in Biblical interpretation, we might ask, what about the 7 baskets of leftovers from the 4000 story? To whom are they intended. Well, this is where the Bible likes to surprise us.

But first, a look back at Deuteronomy 7: "When the LORD your God brings you into the land that you are about to enter and occupy and he clears away many nations before you—the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and mightier than you— 2 and when the LORD your God gives them over to you and you defeat them, then you must utterly destroy them. Make no covenant with them and show them no mercy.

If you were counting, you came up with the 7 nations that Israel perceived as a threat, 7 nations which Israel hated. But now they get leftovers. That's right. It seems that the presence of Jesus in the world reminds us that we need to re-think our enemies list, and that we can't count on God to hate the people that we've been trained to hate. It's a long story, but between Mark 6 and Mark 8, Jesus met a woman, an outsider, who challenged him to consider her plight. After an initial resistance, he healed her daughter, and then headed straight to the Decapolis, Gentile land, where he carried out in ministry of healing. And in one of the next major stories, he has leftovers, grace, for despised outsiders.

This suggests to me a simple truth: in God's eyes, there are no outsiders. So if you have ever felt like an outsider, it's likely because someone told you an untruth about God, for what we have seen in Jesus is that his love is genuine and his embrace is wide, which means that's the very nature and character of God, too. We'll see that love on full display as we get closer to Easter. Thanks be to God!

Scripture: Mark 8:1-10

Feeding the Four Thousand

8 "In those days when there was again a great crowd without anything to eat, he called his disciples and said to them, 2 "I have compassion for the crowd because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way—and some of them have come from a great distance." 4 His disciples replied, "How can one feed these people with bread here in the desert?" 5 He asked them, "How many loaves do you have?" They said, "Seven." 6 Then he ordered the crowd to sit down on the ground, and he took the seven loaves, and after giving thanks he broke them and gave them to his disciples to distribute, and they distributed them to the crowd. 7 They had also a few small fish, and after blessing them he ordered that these, too, should be distributed. 8 They ate and were filled, and they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. 9 Now there were about four thousand people. And he sent them away. 10 And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha".[a]

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

This is a favorite passage of mine, because it highlights how God has created us. God has created each of us in God's image, but also created us so uniquely that we are all so very different.

There is no greater example of Spiritual Gifts than to look at our congregation or even our leadership structure.

On every committee, in each member of the Session and the Diaconate, and on our staff, we are smattered with a variety of gifts given to use. These gifts of leadership, creativity, technical skill, wisdom, humor, and more all piece together to give us a beautiful mosaic built to do God's work.

In this time of Lent when it can be easy to be caught up in our own fragility and awareness of our own limitations, may we be inspired and hopeful by the gifts displayed right before our very eyes.

Go and do: In response to this reading, write someone a note whose gifts you see on display. Share with them the ways that you see them caring for others or using their gifts creatively.

May we all be present to witness God's mosaic of gifts on display, for the kingdom of God and God's people.

Prayer: Generous God, you have created a beautiful piece of art in humanity. While we often give attention to where things are going wrong, help us today to celebrate the joyful work of your hand. May we carry that joy boldly through this Lenten season. Amen.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Spiritual Gifts

12 "Now concerning spiritual gifts,^[a] brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be ignorant. ² You know that when you were gentiles you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. ³ Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says "Let Jesus be cursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except by the Holy Spirit. ⁴ Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit, ⁵ and there are varieties of services but the same Lord, ⁶ and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. ⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ⁸ To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another the working of powerful deeds, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses."

Thursday, March 19, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

In this passage, Paul is writing to the people of Corinth. They're a pretty divided community at the moment. Divided over status, power, and background.

Sound familiar?

We modern day folks may need to pay special attention to this passage because I think it's stood the test of time.

Paul reminds the people that no one person is better or more important than the other and that unity and appreciation is what we need in this moment.

Still sounds familiar.

The verse that jumps off the page to me is "If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

How can we better live this verse in 2026?

In a world where "comparison is the thief of joy" how do we celebrate the gifts of others rather than compare? Rather than put down?

How can we inspire others to embrace Paul's message to the people in Corinth?

Prayer: Creator God, not only have you built us to be unique individuals, you have created us to be in community. Help us to build up one another so that your peace can be found in this world. Amen.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 12:12-26

One Body with Many Members

¹² "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. ¹⁴ Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. ¹⁵ If the foot would say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear would say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many members yet one body. ²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect, ²⁴ whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, ²⁵ that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it."

Friday, March 20, 2026

by Ken Gwynn

I want to thank whatever Bible publisher or editor who first came up with the idea of printing Jesus' words in red. This is a special signal to pay attention and this passage delivers a special message.

The story is about Jesus' healing of the man born blind--spit, mud and washing away blindness into a new life of faith. As with all of Jesus' miracles, the act was not welcomed by all: the neighbors were skeptical; the Pharisees did not believe and found fault; the parents believed but were too scared to say so---only the healed man believed and the story shows his faith growing from "I don't know how he did it" to "he is a prophet" to "Lord, I believe".

The healed man was granted physical sight but the extra gift was also spiritual sight. The commentators say: "when you turn to Christ, you begin to see him differently. The longer you walk with him, the better you will understand who he is. If you want to know more about Jesus, keep walking with him."

Lent is a long walk to the cross; Jesus wants us with him all along the way. Let's join him, not just during Lent but every day.

Prayer: Gracious Heavenly Father, with our eyes, help us see; with our hearts, help us feel and with our faith, help us bring your Glory to those around us each day.

Scripture: John 9:18-41

¹⁸“The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight ¹⁹and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” ²⁰His parents answered, “We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, ²¹but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” ²²His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus^[a] to be the Messiah^[b] would be put out of the synagogue. ²³Therefore his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” ²⁴So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” ²⁵He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” ²⁶They said to him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” ²⁷He answered them, “I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?” ²⁸Then they reviled him, saying, “You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from.” ³⁰The man answered, “Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. ³¹We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. ³²Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. ³³If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” ³⁴They answered him, “You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?” And they drove him out. ³⁵Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, “**Do you believe in the Son of Man?**”^[c] ³⁶He answered, “And who is he, sir?^[d] Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” ³⁷Jesus said to him, “**You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.**” ³⁸He said, “Lord,^[e] I believe.” And he worshiped him. ³⁹Jesus said, “**I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.**” ⁴⁰Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, “Surely we are not blind, are we?” ⁴¹Jesus said to them, “**If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, ‘We see,’ your sin remains.**”

Saturday, March 21, 2026

by Babs Nichols

This psalm is a psalm of David and shows David's unending trust and dependence on God. He is confident that God is his protector, his defender, his advocate. David trusts in these attributes of God, even when his own life is challenging. He believes, without reservation, that God will never leave him defenseless or subject to shame.

I think it's interesting that David does not name the specific circumstance that has prompted him to declare his confidence in God's abiding protection of him. He doesn't do this, I think, because it doesn't really matter what the circumstance or situation--David is going to trust God and God's protection, no matter what. His imagery of the rocks and mountains/fortresses as metaphors for safety help us to see and know how God acts as a protector and shield for us.

David is very clear about his dependence on God's protection, no matter the circumstance. Even when the events in his life are challenging, or scary, or dangerous, or frustrating, David trusts and believes that, even though God has not caused the bad things to happen, God WILL protect him through it. No matter what. Sometimes God's protection does not look like what we hoped for, but that doesn't mean it's not there. God uses even bad things for God's good purposes. Centuries later, Jesus echoed David's trust and dependence on God in the Garden of Gethsemane and as He was dying on the cross.

We live in a world full of things that scare us, that challenge us, and while God wants us to work for justice and to be involved in making things right in the world, we also know that all the things of the world are not of God. There is injustice and tyranny and betrayal all around us, which are not of God. Even though we are called to pray for God's intervention in those bad things, our prayers are not always answered in just the way we would want them to be. What we can know and can trust, though, is that God is with us through it all. We are God's people, we are loved, and we are protected.

Scripture: Psalm 31:1-2

To the leader.

A Psalm of David.

¹"In you, O Lord, I seek
refuge; do not let me
ever be put to shame; in
your righteousness deliver
me. ²Incline your ear to
me; rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for
me, a strong fortress to
save me."

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for your protection and for your abiding love. Help us to remember that you are always with us, through good times and bad. Amen.

Sunday, March 22, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

Have you heard the word “Selah” before? It’s a word that is used just in the Psalms and musically means to “pause.”

It also translates loosely to “forever” and is often used to emphasize God’s eternal presence. It’s pronounced “seal - uh”.

I include that because I think it’s important following these verses about forgiveness. Have you ever needed forgiveness? And when you receive it, you simply want to just pause. It feels like a “hallelujah” moment. A thank God moment.

Acknowledging our mistakes is hard. It makes us be vulnerable and admit that we’re not perfect. We’re humans, of course, so we know we’re not perfect, but we sure live in a world that seems to expect perfection.

In this psalm, we’re invited to confess, to stop hiding our failures. What a freeing feeling to have our humanity acknowledged in this way. Selah!

This Lenten season, may we be better about acknowledging our missteps, to ourselves and to those we share our lives with.

Prayer: God, we are not perfect, but you are. We acknowledge our imperfections and ask that you continue to forgive us and free us to live each day working to love you better. Amen.

Scripture: Psalm 32

The Joy of Forgiveness
Of David. A Maskil.

- ¹ “Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.
- ² Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.
- ³ While I kept silent, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
- ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up^[a] as by the heat of summer.
- Selah
- ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not hide my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,”
and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Selah
- ⁶ Therefore let all who are faithful
offer prayer to you; at a time of distress,^[b] the rush of
mighty waters shall not reach them.
- ⁷ You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from
trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.
- Selah
- ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go;
I will counsel you with my eye upon you.
- ⁹ Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,
whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle,
else it will not stay near you.
- ¹⁰ Many are the torments of the wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.
- ¹¹ Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous,
and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.”

Monday, March 23, 2026

by Anonymous

We always remember that Jesus was fully human and fully God. It's what connects us both to Jesus divinity and to our very own humanity. Jesus even refers to himself as the "Son of Man" in this passage, emphasizing and reminding the disciples of his humanity.

With that in mind, do you think Jesus was afraid? Did he feel the same human emotions we tend to feel? Or does Jesus' divinity override these feelings?

In this passage, Mark tells us of Jesus' foretelling his death and resurrection. Scholars tell us that this is the end of Jesus' public ministry in Galilee and that he focuses on teaching the disciples ... because he knows what's coming.

However, the disciples are not fully comprehending Jesus' words. Their humanity is on full display (and ours would be, too, I bet!).

Questions to consider:

- How would you respond if you were one of Jesus' disciples here? Would you ask more questions or would you be silently confused (as they seem to be)?
- How do you think Jesus is feeling? Do you think Jesus experiences human emotions about what is to come or is there a sense of calm about him?

Scripture: Mark 9:30-32

Jesus Again Foretells His Death and Resurrection

³⁰ "They went on from there and passed through Galilee. He did not want anyone to know it, ³¹ for he was teaching his disciples, saying to them, "The Son of Man is to be betrayed into human hands, and they will kill him, and three days after being killed, he will rise again." ³² But they did not understand what he was saying and were afraid to ask him."

Prayer: Omniscient God, you are the author of history and the author of our lives. We are often like the disciples, with our human emotions on full display. We are often afraid. Comfort us and inspire us to bravery and boldness in troubling times. Be with us and help us to use this Lenten season to grow in our knowledge of you. Amen.

Tuesday, March 24, 2026

by Richard Boyette

Most of us have been called upon to undertake a task or try something new that is outside of our comfort zone, or for which we did not feel we had the appropriate skills.

For many, as in Moses' case, it might be public speaking. Or as Moses put it: "I am slow of speech and tongue."

Lent calls upon us to be honest about our inadequacies.

How often are we able to overcome our perceived inadequacies, not on our own, but with the help of others.

In Moses' case, God equips him with Aaron.

Lent reminds us that God's call is rarely dependent on our strength. Aaron and Moses meet, embrace their call, and speak to Israel together.

The people believe and worship because they heard God had seen their suffering.

Lent reminds us that God sees, hears, and acts—often through imperfect people like us.

Prayer: Prayer: God of mercy, thank You for calling us even in our reluctance. Use our weakness to display Your strength, and make us signs of Your compassion in the world.

Scripture: Exodus 4:10-17, 27-31

10 "But Moses said to the LORD, "O my Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor even now that you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." 11 Then the LORD said to him, "Who gives speech to mortals? Who makes them mute or deaf, seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD? 12 Now go, and I will be with your mouth and teach you what you are to speak." 13 But he said, "O my Lord, please send someone else." 14

Then the anger of the LORD was kindled against Moses, and he said, "What of your brother Aaron, the Levite? I know that he can speak well; even now he is coming out to meet you, and when he sees you his heart will be glad. 15 You shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth, and I will be with your mouth and with his mouth and will teach you what you shall do. 16 He indeed shall speak for you to the people; he shall serve as a mouth for you, and you shall serve as God for him. 17 Take in your hand this staff, with which you shall perform the signs." 27 The LORD said to Aaron, "Go into the wilderness to meet Moses." So he went, and he met him at the mountain of God and kissed him. 28 Moses told Aaron all the words of the LORD with which he had sent him and all the signs with which he had charged him. 29 Then Moses and Aaron went and assembled all the elders of the Israelites. 30 Aaron spoke all the words that the LORD had spoken to Moses and performed the signs in the sight of the people. 31 The people believed, and when they heard that the LORD had given heed to the Israelites and that he had seen their misery, they bowed down and worshiped."

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

Do you remember the song “Anything you can do, I can do better? I can do anything better than YOU”? Sorry if you have that stuck in your head now!

This sort of “one-upping” is what Pharaoh is trying to do with God. However, Aaron throwing his staff (big stick!) down and turning it into a snake isn’t enough to produce some faith. Even doing it again with sorcerers and wise men won’t do it.

At the end of the passage, we read that “Pharaoh’s heart has been hardened”. I wonder, does that tell us that magic and miracles alone aren’t enough to produce faith, we have to have a willing heart ... an open heart.

This passage reminds us that for us to be moved and changed by the goodness of God’s miracles, we must be open to it. We must be ready to receive it.

May we use this Lenten season, as we say in worship, “to prepare our hearts and minds for worship” and not just for worship, but for the life that God calls us to. A life of trusting God and a life of serving God.

Questions to consider:

- Am I making enough time and space so that I can listen for the Holy Spirit?
- How do I ensure that I don’t have a hardened heart like Pharaoh?

Scripture: Exodus 7:8-13

Aaron’s Miraculous Rod

⁸ “The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ⁹ “When Pharaoh says to you, ‘Perform a wonder,’ then you shall say to Aaron, ‘Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.’ ” ¹⁰ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. ¹¹ Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers, and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. ¹² Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes, but Aaron’s staff swallowed up theirs. ¹³ However, Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said.”

Prayer: Everlasting God, thank you for stories like this one that help prepare us to receive your goodness. Help us be open to it. Amen.

Thursday, March 26, 2026

by Hope Carmichael

Don't we all have a little of the "I need to see it to believe it" in us? I often find myself taking the part of a skeptic, questioning information before I trust and believe what someone is telling me.

Putting myself in Martha's shoes in this story from John, I doubt I would have been consoled by Jesus's cryptic words of comfort "...everyone who believes in me will never die." Huh? Come on, Jesus, my brother is dead – your best friend! We know you've been performing all kinds of miracles, healing the sick, giving sight to the blind. If you'd only been here, you could have done something.

Jesus knows what is coming, but his faithful friends do not. He has lived as a man and he knows that humans are, by nature, skeptics. So He knows they need to see to believe and to understand - both because they are witnessing the miracle of bringing Lazarus back to life, but also so that they will believe and understand when soon they will experience Jesus's resurrection. God came to dwell on earth to give us that tangible understanding through witnessing Jesus as he lived and loved as a human.

And because we know the rest of the story, we can believe, even though we haven't seen. That is the essence of faith, and the greatest comfort of our faith is in the hope of the Resurrection.

Scripture: John 11:17-44

"When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.' When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?' Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"

Friday, March 27, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

I love how scripture reminds us that Jesus has foretold his death now 3 times. We're still pretty stubborn people, just like the disciples, who need to hear things more than once to fully grasp them.

Jesus is much more descript this third time saying "Look, we're going to Jerusalem and this is happening." That's not exactly how he says it, of course, but it's what I imagine!

James and John then ask for, in my opinion, more power and responsibility. Jesus says "You do not know what you are asking." which gives me a chuckle. I can see him shaking his head here. Jesus then goes on to tell James and John what will happen with such power & how hard life will be and to deny their request. James and John are essentially asking for a "blank check" and Jesus says no. It is striking to me that they ask this right after Jesus says he will die. It reminds me of every parenting challenge – you're doing something difficult and "adult" and your child keeps asking you for a snack.

Jesus then circles things back to his divinity, of course still referring to himself as the "Son of Man" with a reminder that he has come "not to be served but to serve".

Jesus continues to be an inspiration to me. When the world is asking for things, Jesus keeps bringing it back to the heart of the matter: service.

Prayer: God, forgive us for the ways we act like the disciples at times. When we ask for the world, but we simply don't know what we're doing. Continue to inspire us to be like Jesus. Amen.

Scripture: Mark 10:32-45

A Third Time Jesus Foretells His Death and Resurrection

³² "They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the gentiles; ³⁴ they will mock him and spit upon him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise again."

The Request of James and John

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." ³⁶ And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" ³⁷ And they said to him, "Appoint us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" ³⁹ They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized you will be baptized, ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to appoint, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." ⁴¹ When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. ⁴² So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; instead, whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many."

Saturday, March 28, 2026

"The Fragrance of Extravagant Love" by Nancy Austin

Jesus arrives in Bethany six days before the Passover. Lazarus rests at the table and Martha is very busy serving everyone. Mary opens a jar of expensive perfumed ointment and anoints Jesus' feet, wiping them with her hair. The fragrance fills the house. Judas objects to this extravagant gesture and asks why this expensive ointment is not being sold and the money given to the poor?

Judas is very quickly calculating the value of the ointment, and then he objects and covers up his own greed with a voice of concern for the poor. "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." Mary's act is both extravagant and even shocking. She gives what is most precious without restraint or explanation to anyone. Mary recognizes what others in the room cannot face: Jesus is moving toward the cross.

Lent confronts us with the same choice. Do we measure our devotion, offering Jesus what feels reasonable and controlled? Or do we dare to pour out love freely, even when it is misunderstood? The fragrance that fills the house is the aroma of surrender. Mary does not speak, yet her actions proclaim faith, grief, gratitude and trust. Lent is not only about what we give up. Lent is also about what we pour out.

Self-Reflection

What is the "costly perfume" in my life--time, comfort, reputation, control--that I hesitate to give to Christ? Where might I be tempted to disguise self-protection as wisdom or responsibility? How can my life more fully reflect love rather than calculation this Lent?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You receive love even when others misunderstand it. You welcome the gift that costs us something. During this holy season, loosen my grip on what I cling to. Teach me to love you with my whole heart. May my life carry the fragrance of devotion, pointing always toward your saving cross. Amen.

Scripture: John 12: 1-11

12 "Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 2 There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. 3 Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them^[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. 4 But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, 5 "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" 6 (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) 7 Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it^[b] so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. 8 You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

The Plot to Kill Lazarus

9 When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. 10 So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, 11 since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus."

Sunday, March 29, 2026 | Palm Sunday

“Pick Your Power” by Judy Pidcock

In the 11th chapter of John, Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, an act which sets the religious and political powers on edge. From that point on, the chief priests and Pharisees seek to kill Jesus. By contrast, Lazarus’ raising from the dead inspires crowds near and far to seek and follow Jesus. When Jesus stands at the entrance to Jerusalem in this Palm Sunday scene, it’s a stand-off between two versions of power. One form of power pursues death while Jesus’ form of power offers life.

The Pharisees watch the rising swell of the adoring crowds. They watch their own power irretrievably slipping away. Desperately, they say to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the whole world has gone after him!” The Greek word for world is cosmos, meaning all of Creation in every form. The entire universe swirls around Jesus in obedience and wonder. Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Even the donkey waits to serve.

- What does power look like in the world around us today?
- Do present powers seek to end life or offer life?
- What kind of power do we seek and serve?

Prayer: God of the Cosmos, help us to seek you and to test the powers that we serve. Give us tender hearts and determined minds, ready to follow the One who offers life abundant. Amen.

Scripture: John 12:12-19

“The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord— the King of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.

So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

Monday, March 30, 2026

by Betsy Kelly Williams

The words we hear from Jesus in this passage are not the warm-and-fuzzy, feel-good, Instagram-style ones we tend to gravitate toward. They're more challenging: "Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life." Losing the things we love? On first (or even third) read, this does not feel like good news.

But really, I think Jesus is asking us two questions: What do we value? Are we willing to take this seriously?

Let's be honest about what we value in 2026. We value financial stability, friendship, and safety. We value looking presentable, staying employable, keeping relationships smooth, avoiding conflict, protecting our peace. We value what is familiar to us.

None of that is bad. In fact, I believe God wants ALL people to have those things - self confidence, a supportive community, resources to sustain our lives. These are all gifts from God. But when comfort, status, or possessions matter more to us than Jesus' instructions, we begin to lose the plot of the Gospel.

Jesus is clear about what following him looks like: love God, love your enemies, do good, give generously, welcome the stranger, take care of each other.

These instructions are simple, but not easy. Loving this way often involves risk. It might mean speaking up when someone is excluded, even if it makes things awkward. It might mean offering a smile and a "good morning" to the unhoused neighbor you pass on the way to work or school, even if it makes you nervous. It might mean advocating for someone who is being treated unfairly, even when it feels safer to stay silent.

This scripture is Jesus' way of telling us to take this calling seriously, even when there is risk. Our comfort isn't the ultimate goal. Following Jesus sometimes requires us to let go of what feels safe and choosing love anyway.

I wonder... What do we value? Are we willing to risk it for the sake of loving God and loving our neighbors?

Prayer: Holy God, help us to reorder our priorities. Give us courage to love like Jesus, even when it costs us something. Amen.

Scripture:

John 12:20-36

"Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'

Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. Jesus answered them,

'The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.'

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

by Beth Thaxton

“For they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from the Lord.” Aren’t we all guilty of this? In our passage, John is speaking about the Pharisees, highlighting their unbelief in Jesus’ divinity, even though Jesus has performed miracles before their very eyes.

This passage is considered Jesus’ last public appearance before his crucifixion. Despite his life full of miracles, healing, and flipping tables, he spends this time reminding people that he is the Incarnate God (“Whoever sees me sees him who sent me.”). Despite so many reminders of who Jesus is and who God is, don’t we mirror the unbelief of the Pharisees? In our humanity, we fail to point ourselves to God, preferring to trust ourselves more than we trust God.

Questions to consider:

- How can we better remind ourselves and point ourselves to God? Not just in times of need, but in our everyday lives?
- What messages might we be missing when we trust ourselves more than we trust God?

At the end of this passage, Jesus cries out. I’m reminded of Jesus’ humanity here. Jesus is frustrated. God incarnate and still frustrated. Jesus even quotes himself from chapter 3, verse 17: “Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.”

Prayer: God, we are a stubborn people. We prefer to trust ourselves when you are right here. You sent Jesus to show us how to love, yet we prefer to do it our own way. Turn our hearts back to you, showing us the true example of light in the darkness. Amen.

Scripture: John 12:37-50

³⁷ “Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him.

³⁸ This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” ³⁹ And so they could not

believe, because Isaiah also said, ⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes and understand with their heart and turn—and I would heal them.” ⁴¹ Isaiah said this because^[a] he saw his glory and spoke about him. ⁴² Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue, ⁴³ for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.

Summary of Jesus’s Teaching

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried aloud: “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵ And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. ⁴⁷ I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world but to save the world. ⁴⁸ The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, ⁴⁹ for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.”

Wednesday, April 1, 2026

by Kathy Johnson

Lent offers an opportunity to pause, reflect, and pay attention to the ways faith meets everyday life. It is the traditional time in the church between Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem and his glorious resurrection on Easter.

Today's Holy Week scripture tells us of the betrayal of Jesus by his disciple, Judas. Judas was willing to give Jesus up for the price of a slave, handing him over to be crucified. The story of Judas reveals the complicated nature of betrayal. Our human sin hurts others, wounds the very heart of God, and can even lead to our own demise.

Fortunately for us, God loves us even to the point of death. God's love is greater than any sin. Today, may we turn from the things in our lives that wound us and others and return to the Lord our God, who is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.

Reflection Question:

In what ways might I be "betraying" the love of Christ in my daily life, and how can I, instead, offer my life in service to others?

Prayer: Dear God, we acknowledge that, like Judas, we have often turned toward the night. We thank You that even in the midst of betrayal, Your plan of redemption was never thwarted. Grant us the grace to recline near Your heart, to be defined by Your love, and to live for Your glory alone. Amen.

Scripture: John 13:21-32 (NRSV)

Jesus Foretells His Betrayal

21 "After saying this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." 22 The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. 23 One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining close to his heart; [a] 24 Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. 25 So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" 26 Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." [b] So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, son of Simon Iscariot. [c] 27 After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." 28 Now no one knew why he said this to him. 29 Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival," or that he should give something to the poor. 30 So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. 31 When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. 32 If God has been glorified in him, [d] God will also glorify him in himself & will glorify him at once."

Thursday, April 2, 2026 | Maundy Thursday

by Karl and Lora Zinsmeister

Listen to this hymn (205 in Glory to God):

Ubi Caritas Taizé.



The translation is “Where there is charity and love, God is there.” We recall the Last Supper every time we celebrate communion, but on Maundy Thursday, we commemorate all the parts of this final time of Jesus being together with his disciples.

In the above passage, John describes two “events” from the Last Supper story:

1. Washing the feet of the disciples / verse 14 “If I, your Lord and teacher have washed your feet, you too must wash each other’s feet.”
2. Sharing a new commandment / verse 34 “Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other.”

Both in service and in love, Jesus is the example for all of us. While many things might compel us to serve others—obligation, guilt, necessity, etc., the greatest motivators are compassion and/or love. The word Maundy, as in Maundy Thursday, comes from the Latin *mandatum*, which is commandment.

While many tense and horrible things are about to unfold in the story that leads Jesus to the cross, how powerful it is to remember in the final hours of Jesus with his closest friends, he gives them an example of service to others and a new commandment to love one another.

Prayer: Where charity and love prevail, there God is ever found; brought here together by Christ’s love, by love we thus are bound. Love can exclude no race or creed if honored be God’s name; our common life embraces all whose Maker is the same.

(stanzas 1 & 5 of Glory to God hymn 316; TEXT: Latin, 8th c.*; trans. Omer Westendorf, 1960, alt. link: [Where Charity and Love Prevail with lyrics](#) *the same Latin hymn which inspired Ubi caritas)

Scripture: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

13 “Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The devil had already decided^[a] that Judas son of Simon Iscariot would betray Jesus. And during supper 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 got up from supper, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples’ feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. 6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, “Lord, are you going to wash my feet?” 7 Jesus answered, “You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand.” 8 Peter said to him, “You will never wash my feet.” Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no share with me.” 9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus said to him, “One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet,^[b] but is entirely clean. And you^[c] are clean, though not all of you.” 11 For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, “Not all of you are clean.” 12 After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had reclined again, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for that is what I am. 14 So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Very truly, I tell you, slaves are not greater than their master, nor are messengers^[d] greater than the one who sent them. 17 If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.”

Friday, April 3, 2026 | Good Friday

by Laurie Taylor Weicher

I was really into the show, "The X Files" in college. Each week, I'd gather with friends to see what mystery or conspiracy theory Scully and Mulder would explore. I was especially drawn to the words that appeared during the opening credits that said, "The Truth is out there."

This longing for what is real or at the heart of all things stirred my curious soul and had me looking for Truth with a capital T.

We hear Pilate ask a similar question in the scripture for today. Jesus has been arrested, taken to the high priest, and then passed on to Pilate, a Roman governor. He says to Jesus, "So, you are a king?" and Jesus replies, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice. And then Pilate asks, "what is truth?" Pilate doesn't realize what we, as people of faith, know. That Jesus is the Truth with a capital T. He is the one who took on the sin of the world for the sake of God's people. The one who overcame death and offered us eternal life. Jesus is the one who is real and at the heart of all things. On this Good Friday, read this entire scripture passage, hard and awful as it is, remembering that we know the Truth, and the Truth, Jesus the Christ, has set us free.

Scripture: John 18:1–19:42

18 "After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron Valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. 2 Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place because Jesus often met there with his disciples. 3 So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. 4 Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" 5 They answered, "Jesus of Nazareth." [a] Jesus replied, "I am he." [b] Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. 6 When Jesus [c] said to them, "I am he," [d] they stepped back and fell to the ground. 7 Again he asked them, "Whom are you looking for?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." [e] 8 Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. [f] So if you are looking for me, let these people go." 9 This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, "I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me." 10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest's slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave's name was Malchus. 11 Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?" 12 So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. 13 First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. 14 Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. 15 Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, 16 but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. 17 The woman said to Peter, "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." 18 Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. 19 Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching."

Saturday, April 4, 2026 | Holy Saturday

by Ernie Thompson

I still remember a Good Friday Service I attended 40 years ago. I was an Intern for Urban Ministry in Mobile Alabama, serving my first church. We gathered at noon to hear reflections on Jesus seven last words from the cross. But it was the way the service ended that has stuck with me.

After hearing the story of Jesus' death on the cross we said together, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord; who was conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified dead and buried; he descended into hell ..." Then there was silence. No benediction. No words of comfort or hope. Just this stark reminder. "He was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell." Then we all left in silence.

Holy Saturday is a day of darkness. It is a time to remember that Jesus suffered as we do. Jesus experienced not just physical suffering, but spiritual suffering – the feeling of God's absence, of being cut off from God, which is what "hell" means. Holy Saturday is a day of waiting and wondering. It's a day with more questions than answers. It's a day when God seems hidden and inactive. And the truth is, that we all experience Holy Saturdays in our lives, times when God seems absent and it feels like the world is falling apart.

Valentin Tomberg says that just as God created the world with a rhythm of day and night, so also the spiritual history of the world has a rhythm of light and darkness, times when God's work of revelation and salvation seem clear, and times when God seems silent and absent. But, Valentin says, God does some of his most important work in secret, behind the scenes, in the darkness of Holy Saturdays.

After a long weekend of waiting, with those haunting words echoing in my memory – "he descended into hell" – I arrived at church early on Sunday morning. The associate pastor greeted me with the words I has been longing to hear, "Christ is risen!" Because I had experienced and sat with the darkness of Holy Saturday, this Easter greeting took on deeper meaning, and I could respond with joy, "He is risen indeed."

God you are the maker of heaven and earth, of all things seen and unseen. On this Holy Saturday, help us to sit patiently in the darkness, recognizing the suffering of the world and the suffering in our lives. Give us faith to trust that you are present, even in the darkness, and that you are at work in ways that we cannot see, to bring the light and new life of resurrection. We pay in Jesus' name, who for us and for our salvation, was crucified, dead, and buried, who for us and for our salvation, descended into hell.

Scripture:

Matthew 27:57-60

"When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph, who also was himself a disciple of Jesus.⁵⁸ He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him.⁵⁹ So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth⁶⁰ and laid it in his new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away."

Sunday, April 5, 2026

by Tara Bulger

What a morning Mary Magdalene had! In her grief, she goes to the tomb early in the morning on the third day and finds the stone rolled away.

As she stands weeping, she sees two angels in the tomb. She then encounters a gardener, who is revealed to be Jesus. The Lord has risen! He instructs her to go and tell the disciples all she has seen and heard. Her testimony is that she has seen the Lord!

There is a link between seeing the Lord and telling the story of his resurrection again and again. To have seen the Lord is also to tell others. We, as a community of faith, have also seen the Lord—in our church community, in the love we share with others, and in countless other ways.

Let us be a people who can also tell our story of faith to all who need to hear it. Let us proclaim with our lives and our words, “We have seen the Lord!”

Question for discussion or consideration:

1. Where or when do you feel closest to the Lord? When and where do you feel as if Jesus is there?
2. What are the things you do in your life that help you experience Jesus? Is it in prayer? Quiet time? Reading scripture?
3. What would it look like for you to share with another person how you have “seen the Lord?”

Scripture:

John 20:18

“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.”

Prayer: Resurrected Lord, may we see you in our ordinary lives and have a testimony to share. Increase our experience and knowledge of you and give us words to say about the miracle of your presence. Amen.