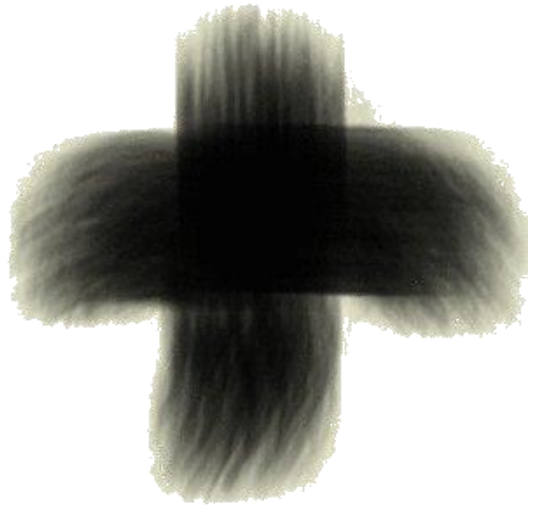




March 2

DUST



*You are dust,
and to dust you shall return.*
(Genesis 3:19b)

Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust

When I hear the word “dust”, I am taken back to my youth. When I was in pep club during the late 60’s, I remember cheering our basketball team with the refrain: “Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, you beat everybody but you won’t beat us!” That refrain carried us to the State Tournament. At some point in time, I too will return to dust. My life will be spent and I will cherish those basketball days. Yet, the ashes placed upon my forehead on Ash Wednesday are far more treasured than a ball game victory. The ashes remind me of God’s sacrifice and Christ’s victory over death. Forgiveness, sacrificial love, resurrection permeate my soul like dust in the wind. What does the word dust mean to you? Created from dust and to dust we shall return yet as Emily Dickinson said, “This world is not conclusion; a sequel stands beyond, invisible, as music, but positive as sound.”

Thank you, Lord, for the victory over death through the resurrection of Christ. Guide us to spread the good news like dust in the wind. Amen

March 3



*You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.
(2 Timothy 2:1)*

The word “grace” can mean a lot of things depending on the situation. One may need a grace period for rent that was due yesterday. Another moved with effortless grace on the dance floor during a routine. And let’s not forget the girl with all the social graces when it comes to good behavior. And finally, the one we are most familiar with, table grace before a meal.

As a believer in Christ, grace plays a very important role in my faith. God’s grace offers us a second chance and a new beginning each day. In fact, I’m not sure I would be here today without the grace of God. Motherhood brings on a whole new meaning to the word Grace. Motherhood is not for the faint of heart, and there are days when I am hanging by a thread. As I reflect on those days, I tend to bring attention to my faults and shortcomings. Did I love them enough, did I give the right consequence, will I ever figure out how to throw a football the right way? As a mother, we are our own worst critic. I am so grateful that as a child of God, I also have His grace. His mercy and grace also means I’m not judged on the decisions I make or the way I throw a football. At the end of the day, I can ask for God’s grace and know that tomorrow, I will get another chance. Another chance to show my love as a mother, another chance to throw the football.

Gracious God, to the mothers who try their hardest, show them your grace. Be with them when they are on their last thread. Give them your promise of tomorrow. A new day a new chance. Amen.

MARCH 4

LIFE



*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.
(John 10:10b)*

Jesus often talked about shepherds and their flock of sheep, comparing them to God and God's love for God's people (that's us!). Without a shepherd, a flock of sheep would be at risk of wandering off and becoming a meal for an animal higher up on the food chain. With a shepherd, sheep learned to trust the shepherd to care for them, protect them, and guide them to both nourishment and safety.

We are blessed to have God who does the same for us! With God in our lives, we are NEVER ALONE! Like the sheep trusting the shepherd, we can trust God to care for us and protect us. Does this mean that life isn't hard at times? No, we will still have challenges and dark times, but we can live our lives knowing that God is walking alongside us every step of the way -- through the happy and the sad. When we allow God into our hearts and minds and souls, God spiritually nourishes us as well. God teaches us how to live our lives in a way that shares God's love and its abundant. Living an abundant life does not mean we have lots of "things" but that we live a life that is full of God's love and care. God wants to be connected with us and God wants to be our shepherd! Can you think of a time when God was with you through a good or happy time? Can you also think of a challenging time when you knew God was by your side?

Awesome God, thank you for being our shepherd and giving us a life of abundance and love. You are the heartbeat of our life, keeping us going and walking by our side in good times as well as in challenging times. Thank you for guiding us, protecting us, nourishing us, and loving us. Amen.

MARCH 5



PROMISE

*¹²And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28:20b)*

Promise is a very powerful word. Promise means to declare that one will do or refrain from doing something. It is easy to promise something to someone, but it is not always easy to follow through and keep our promises. Lucky for us, God did realize the true meaning of the word promise. God sent his one and only Son to die on the cross. He promised that whoever believed in him would not perish but have eternal life. After Jesus rose from the tomb he told the disciples to “go out and make disciples of all nations and teach them to obey everything I have taught you.” Jesus promised the disciples “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” It is through God’s promises that we receive His grace and forgiveness for the promises that we do not follow through with.

What promises have you made to God? Have you promised your love and faithfulness to Him? How are you doing with those promises?

Faithful God, we can't thank you enough for keeping your promise to us. We look forward to the day when we claim our baptismal promise of eternal life with you and those we love. Until that time, help us keep our promises to you and each other. Amen.

MARCH 6



*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,
for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”*
(Matthew 11:28-30)

Many grow weary during their daily lives. They are faced with job demands, time demands, family demands, a cycle which often seems endless and leaves them tired and listless, physically and mentally, wondering if they can face another day or challenge. But God tells us, take my yoke and learn from me, I am gentle and lowly in heart ... my yoke is easy and my burden is light. You will find rest for your souls. Comforting words that tell us to trust in the Lord and seek our answers and strength in and through him. If we do, we will be at peace and realize there is no challenge or demand too large for us with the Lord in our hearts.

*Dear God,
Thank you for always being there when I need you. Thank you for listening to my complaints when I think my job is too difficult, and my life too complicated, and I want to give up. Please continue helping me find the strength you provide to face the daily challenges.
In your name we pray. Amen*

MARCH 7



FEAR

*Do not fear, for I am with you,
do not be afraid, for I am your God;
I will strengthen you, I will help you,
I will uphold you with my victorious right hand.
(Isaiah 41:10)*

Do not fear. This instruction is found many times throughout the Bible and three times within the 41st chapter of Isaiah alone. While I have read this instruction many times, I sometimes feel discouraged because sometimes I can't seem to stop myself from being afraid. Our world is filled with uncertainty; it seems to me like there are plenty of good reasons why we might be afraid.

When we are given this instruction to not fear, I don't think this is a command to ignore our instincts or the dangers of the world. What follows "Do not fear" in our verse for today is the promise that God is with us. Perhaps we can't totally keep the pit of fear from showing up when we encounter situations of uncertainty, but we can also trust that God is with us and put our faith alongside our fear.

What causes you to fear? How does your faith help to quell your fears?

God who is with us, when fear surrounds us remind us of your presence, strengthen and uphold us as we encounter the uncertainty of life. Amen.

FORGIVENESS

MARCH 8



*And forgive us our sins,
as we forgive those who sin against us.
(Matthew 6:12)*

We all make mistakes. We all need to be forgiven from sin daily. Sin can take many different forms. It can be things we do, words we say, or thoughts we think. We even sin by the things we leave undone. Asking God to forgive us of our sins is an intimate personal conversation with God, it's us telling Him we recognize that we screwed up and we are sorry. God doesn't have to forgive us, but He chooses to forgive us every time because He loves us! The price of our sins has been paid in full, so what does God do with our sin when we ask forgiveness? Psalm 103:12 states, "*As far as the East is from the West, so far has God removed our sins from us.*" God's love for us will always be greater than any sin. Any sin!

It takes love to forgive others. When we forgive, we are showing others the love that God gives us. We forgive others because we are forgiven by the God of the universe. When God forgives us, He is showing us He loves us! God is giving us a way we can be closer to Him.

I like to think of it like this... The relationship and love I have for my kids is more important to me than anything they can say or do. When they ask me to forgive, I do because I love them. When we ask God to forgive us, He does because His love for us is more important to Him than anything we can say or do. Let's show God that we love Him by forgiving others who sin against us. Let's also show God we desire to be closer to Him by asking Him to remove that sin barrier we've placed between us. Does God love you enough to take that sin and move it as far as the East is from the West? Absolutely!

Forgiving God, you know our sins better than we do. Please forgive us, help us to forgive ourselves and others, and help us to do better. Amen.

MARCH 9

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the King's horses
And all the King's men
Cannot put Humpty together again.

~ Mother Goose ~



While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.

(Mark 14:3)

Humpty Dumpty is usually thought of as an egg. Eggs are very fragile, and once their shell is broken, it is pretty much over. We usually think we are pretty tough, and are able to take care of ourselves. Unfortunately, being human also means we are fragile and broken. No matter how hard we try, we can't be perfect, or even close to it. Luckily, we are not alone. We have God's love and his son's sacrifice to rescue us. No matter what has gone wrong, what mistakes we've made, how completely 'broken' we are — Jesus can put our pieces back together and make us whole again.

In Mark 14:3, the woman is very conscious of her brokenness, and possibly aware of the trials about to happen to her beloved Jesus. She took something that is very dear, and usually saved for her own burial, and sacrificed it to honor him. The act of breaking the jar was a physical representation of what was about to happen to Jesus as well. This was a 'single use' item, not something you can open, use a little, and then close it back up again. It was once and done, with no re-do's. Mary was able to offer him the best she had, and pour it out with total commitment.

Jesus broke himself to save us. He died on the cross to save us from all our sins, all our brokenness. Too bad The King of King's son, Jesus, wasn't around to help Humpty Dumpty! How does Jesus and your faith help your brokenness?

Loving God, we are not perfect, yet you love us. You love ALL of us — even our broken parts. You accept us for who we are and offer us love, grace and forgiveness. May we offer the same to each other in your name. Amen.

MARCH 10

MERCIFUL



Be merciful; sympathetic, tender, responsive, forgiving, and full of compassion in exactly the same way as your Heavenly Father has shown mercy to you. That's not an easy thing to do, is it?

So, why is showing mercy to others such an important principle to our Father in Heaven? Because He has been gracious, forgiving, and merciful with us. God wants us to take this mercy and grace He has shown us and share it with others. Just as He has shown it to us, we are to show it to others! Again, it's a tall order, but not only will God help us do whatever it is He asks us to do, He will continue to be merciful with us while we try to follow His commands.

How have you been merciful with others? How have you been merciful with yourself?

Merciful God, help us to be as merciful and loving to others as you are with us. Guide us in your Holy Word and in Your ways. Amen.

MARCH 11

H O P E

*May the God of hope fill you
with all joy and peace in believing,
so that you may abound in hope
by the power of the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 15:13)*

I love the word abound in this scripture. Abound means to exist in large numbers. To me it also means to have excess or to overflow. If we are abounding in hope from God and the Holy Spirit then we have more than we need. If we have more hope than we need then we have some for others. We can share our hope with those who don't have enough of their own. Our hope, of course, being hope in a future with Christ in heaven one day. We can share this good news or "hope" in many ways. In simple conversations, sponsoring a child overseas, teaching Sunday School, or offering encouragement to those who need it. To be abounding with hope will fill us with joy and peace as the scripture says. That sounds pretty amazing to me.

Dear God, help us to abound in your hope. Help us to share the hope we have in you with those around us. Amen.

MARCH 12



*Trust in the LORD with all your heart.
(Proverbs 3:5a)*

Trust and faith go hand in hand. It is so easy to trust in God when everything is going along smoothly and we are not questioning God's plan. I can't imagine how Mary felt, as a mother, as she watched her son giving his life for our sins. Her trust was unwavering and she drew strength from God and God's plan. How did Noah trust God's plan when so many did not!? It is important to trust God at all times. His plan is not always ours and it is difficult to have faith and trust in how things are in our lives. In God's time, not ours! We cause ourselves so much stress, and our wanting to make things happen before their time has come, causes us to question God. It is important to practice trusting God in quiet times, when everything seems fine. Then when something happens, a true storm or stress is upon us, our trust and faith is untouched. In spite of questions, doubt, or uncertainty, we can always turn to Him and keep praying. Trusting is having a FIRM belief in truth, ability, strength, and reliability of someone!

How strong is your trust in God, especially when things are not going as well as they could?

God it is so easy to feel like we must do things on our own in our time, but we TRUST you, God, to walk with us and for our faith to not waiver. Please help us to trust You to give us direction and to walk alongside us on our day to day and difficult journeys in life. In your name, Amen.

MARCH 13

EMPTY



⁵Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
⁶who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.
And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself
and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.
(Philippians 2:5-8)

When we think of the word empty we often have negative thoughts. Empty gas tank, empty glass, empty bank account. If the empty gas tank leaves you stranded on the side of the road it can bring a whole bunch of other thoughts. Negativity about yourself because you didn't think to fill up before you left town or despair because the bank account is empty and now what are you going to do.

At times we are emotionally empty. Going through grief or a major crisis can leave us exhausted, emotionally, spiritually and physically empty.

True to form, God sees things differently and gives us the opposite of what we think. When Mary and others who knelt at the foot of the cross were exhausted, empty with grief, God had more in store for them. Two days later they found the tomb where Jesus' body had been laid to be empty. At first anguish and confusion took over then turned to pure delight when they realized the reason the tomb was empty was because Jesus was alive. Jesus defied death and rose again fulfilling God's promise.

The resurrection Easter egg is an egg that has no candy inside to remind us of the empty tomb. When one of my Grandchildren found this egg he was anything but delighted. He missed the candy that his cousins were enjoying. We explained the significance of the empty egg and he wasn't a whole lot happier. We as humans don't see things the same as God sees them. He understood why the resurrection egg was empty, but he still thought it was a dumb idea.

One thing to be sure — the empty tomb was never a dumb idea because it is the promise that assures us of eternal life.

What meaning does the word empty have for you?

Dear God, thank you for the empty tomb. Because Jesus did not stay in the tomb but rose to live again we are assured of eternal life. We are grateful for the gift and the promise you gave us. Help us to see things the way you do. Amen.

MARCH 14

HOLY



*We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."
(John 6:69)*

Names are important. It is our identity. Hearing our name said, we know we are being spoken to. We also listen for how our name is said — lovingly, to get our attention, or to discipline us. Names give us an identity as a person, a family member, a place in a community. A name gives a sense of who we are and that we are known. Names are important.

Holy is a word that gets stuck in front of so many un-holy things. Holy in this verse is not descriptive but the name of Jesus — Holy One. To make this statement of belief is to know Jesus' relationship to our Heavenly Father. Jesus is God's Son. You are baptized by stating first your name and then baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Then you are named "child of God." "Of God" makes you special, just as it makes Jesus special. To be special is to be set apart, to have a purpose. God sent Jesus, the Holy One of God, into the world to make known God's love and to love us to death.

What do you think God has special for you to do? And/or — what is special about my name?

God, thank you for your Holy One, Jesus. Thank you for calling me "child of God." Amen.

MARCH 15

LIGHT



*³All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being ⁴in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
⁵The light shines in the darkness...
(John 1:3-5a)*

As I look out into my garden at this time of year, I see the life that the growing light of springtime brings -- bulbs sprouting and flowering, my fruit trees blossoming, the grass growing green and full, and I'm reminded that the word Lent itself comes from the word "lengthen." This is the time when the days are growing longer, when the light lengthens, when life comes back to the world from a winter of darkness. Fittingly, therefore, John uses this imagery of light and darkness to begin his Gospel, reminding all of us that like the sun, Jesus is the light of our spiritual lives -- his example, his teachings, his person. Lent is when, in preparation for Easter, we take special time to intensify this light within us. We practice restraint to clear the way for greater illumination. We deepen our prayer to welcome more light in to our soul. We cultivate our inner garden of patience and hope in anticipation of the full light of Easter and the resurrection.

In what person, place or thing in your life, do you see the light or feel the warmth of Jesus' presence shining through to you?

"Dear Lord, shed the light of your presence upon us throughout all we do today, so that through our words and actions, others may feel in us the light of your creative and life-giving presence in the world. In your name, we pray, Amen."

MARCH 16

Darkness

and the darkness did not overcome it. (John 1:5b)

One of my favorite liturgical dialogues is from the Evening Prayer. I find myself singing it at odd moments, and not always in the evening:

Jesus Christ is the light of the world,
A light no darkness can overcome.
Stay with us Lord, for it is evening,
and the day is almost over.
Let your light scatter the darkness,
and illumine your church.

As the sun sets, darkness settles in. For many, that darkness is fleeting. A flip of a switch turns on lights that chase away the darkness. Similarly, when emotional darkness threatens to overtake us, most of us find support to chase away the darkness. While this might be true for much of the world, it is certainly not true for everybody. Not everyone has easy access to lighting or to support to chase away the darkness. For some, the darkness seems so overwhelming that there is no light to be found.

But Jesus brings light to everybody: those with electricity and those without, those who have uplifting support and those without. Jesus' light is true light, shining in our darkest moments and places, bringing a light that the darkness can not overcome. Even the darkness that we can't see or are afraid to acknowledge gives way to the light of Jesus. Jesus' light reveals to us the Kingdom of God, one where all people can live in the light of love, mercy, and justice.

Good and gracious God, you came to earth through Jesus to bring light to the world. Even in the darkest moment, through death on the cross, Jesus' light shone on the world to reveal your glory and love for all. Help us see that light today and reflect that light to others so that all may be freed from darkness. Amen.

MARCH 17



*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled,
and do not let them be afraid.
(John 14:27)*

In a world full of trouble we all want peace. We want the peace that is an inner peace that we can have by trusting God. We all have struggles and problems in our lives. Jesus does not promise to remove all of them. The peace God gives us is not dependent upon our circumstances. Jesus promises that we can have peace in spite of our circumstances. God's Holy Spirit can guide us through every situation. We need to trust God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to guide us throughout our lives. When we pray about every situation in life, the Holy Spirit can give us peace to crowd out our fear and anxiety.

*Dear Lord, help me to remember that you are present with me always. Let me always be comforted by your Holy Spirit. In the middle of my struggles please give me that inner peace and calm my fears. In your name I pray.
Amen.*

MARCH 18



*Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.
No one comes to the Father except through me."
(John 14:6)*

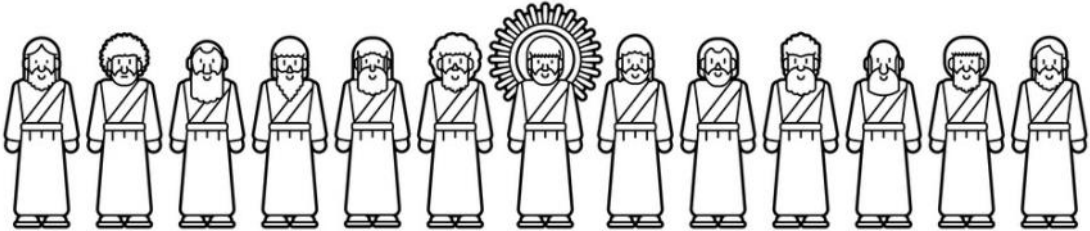
When you think about heaven, what is the picture you have in your mind? What does your room or place in heaven look like? Trusting in Jesus and allowing him into your life everyday will allow that picture-perfect vision to become a reality when we finally get to meet God. But in order to get to there, we need to trust and follow Jesus in our day-to-day lives here on earth. Definitely easier said than done some days! Being a part of a church and a community of believers is one way to ensure we are doing what we can to follow Jesus.

The scriptures tell us that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Saying that Jesus is the way means that he is our way of life and our way of salvation. Jesus is the way we get to heaven — he went first to show us the way, and he died for our sins to give us the gift of eternal life with him and those we love in heaven.

*Dear God,
we are all sinners and sometimes forget that Jesus is the way, truth and life.
Help us look for reminders of this in our daily lives. Amen.*

MARCH 19

DISCIPLES



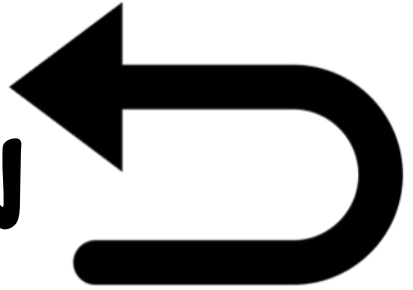
*³¹Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him,
³²"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;
and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."
(John 8:31-32)*

When I hear “*Word*,” John 1:14 jumps out at me. ¹⁴*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.* Jesus has come to live in the neighborhood. He is God incarnate actually coming to dwell among us, a fallen humanity. Jesus has been teaching his students (disciples) who he is and why he came into the world. Jesus acknowledges those who believe in him with words of encouragement, telling them they are truly his disciples if they continue in his word. Jesus then tells them that they will know the truth and the truth will make them free. The words of Jesus...that’s where freedom lies. When we continue to practice keeping our minds centered on his word and dwell in his promises each and every day, we will be able to live our lives in the light of His truth. We will live our lives of faith, knowing that the trappings of this world can no longer encumber us. The truth has set us free to serve and love our neighbors as Christ loves us. If we continue in his word, we are truly his disciples. I can’t think of anything better than that!

*Word made flesh,
you came to dwell among us. You have made your home in us.
Help us to share your words of love and grace with our neighborhood.
Amen.*

MARCH 20

RETURN



*¹²Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;
¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing.*

*Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.
(Joel 2:12-13)*

As a retail store owner, I get my fair-share of returns. Because I knew that returns were going to be inevitable, it was important to create a return policy so that customers had clear guidelines as to what was an acceptable reason to return an item and be aware of the time parameters as to which a return could be completed.

While it's important for me to set such guidelines for my business, I'm so glad that the Lord hasn't set guidelines, qualifications, or a time-limit on our return to Him. He yearns for the broken, downcast, and heavily laden. No exceptions. No conditions. No time frame. No disappointment. The intent is quite simple, really: "return to him with ALL your heart." Whatever your current condition may be, God is asking that you just bring yourself back to Him.

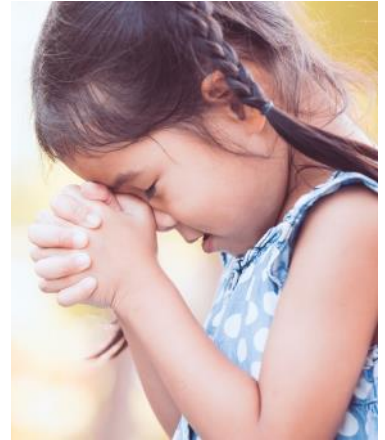
Most of all, it's important for us to realize that we don't have to be in complete shambles before we return to Him. Most of the time, the Holy Spirit moves me to return to God when I put worldly things before Him. He wants me to return when I have ignored him and removed Him from my daily life. He wants me to return when I harbor unforgiveness in my heart. Whatever your current spiritual condition, God asks us to humbly come back to Him with sincere and contrite hearts. Only then will He wrap his "gracious, merciful, forgiving, and loving" arms around us. I'm so glad for unconditional returns.

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for your unconditional love for us. We don't deserve your grace and mercy, but time and time again, you prove your love to us by reminding us that through Jesus' death on the cross, we can return to You time and time again. Amen.

MARCH 21

PRAY

*Then Jesus went with them
to a place called Gethsemane;
and he said to his disciples,
"Sit here while I go over there and pray."
(Matthew 26:36)*



When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane with the disciples, he went off to pray. His time of suffering was near, yet he prayed, “not my will, but yours be done.” He knew he would be betrayed by those closest to him. As powerful as we feel Jesus is, the Bible reflects on how he often went to pray when he was exhausted or burdened.

Do we pray like Jesus did? Do we pray for ourselves to follow God’s will and not our own? We often talk of how God is in control of our lives, not us. I have often felt inadequate in my own prayer life. I asked for guidance from a former pastor with praying. I have learned along with my Sunday School students as I taught them the Lord’s Prayer, “Praying with 5 Fingers,” or many other aspects of prayer. There is no right way or wrong way to pray to our Lord and Savior. God wants to hear our prayers, whether in silence or aloud, as we awaken to face a new day or at bedtime, at work, or relaxing, or in times of trial...God listens. In Matthew, it states that “our Father knows what we need before we ask him.”

We are often busy, in tough situations, or feeling heavy burdens. Other times we are excited, happy, and feeling extremely blessed. Let us all make prayer a daily priority — to ask for God’s help or guidance; to praise him with thankfulness for our blessings; to pray for others and ourselves, and to know we can pray from wherever we are.

Heavenly Father, please guide us in our daily prayers. Help us to praise you with prayers from our hearts and minds, knowing you are always listening. Let your will guide us in the words and actions of our lives. May we use this wonderful gift of prayer to grow closer to you each day. Amen.

MARCH 22

"ELI, ELI, LEMA
SABACHTHANI?"

FORSAKEN



*And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice,
"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"
that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
(Matthew 27:46)*

In the St. Matthew Passion by J.S. Bach, every time the bass who performs Christ's words sings a recitative, his is the only voice accompanied by a "halo" of strings. But when he sings, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani," the strings do not play. Bach, the theologian, is suggesting through the musical setting that at the moment when Jesus felt abandoned he was completely human.

Do you ever feel abandoned, forgotten? Does it sometimes feel as though God isn't answering your prayers? Jesus experienced those same feelings. We may not feel God's presence in times of despair, but God has promised to never abandon us. We might be unaware of God's presence at the moment because of our pain, but that doesn't mean God isn't there. In fact, God's promise to "never leave you nor forsake you" is found many times in both the Old and New Testaments. God promises are sure; take heart.

What would not have escaped the Jews who heard Jesus cry those words from the cross is that He was quoting Psalm 22. Although the Psalm begins with this cry of anguish, "My god, my God, why have you forsaken me?" it ends triumphantly. "Posterity shall serve him; men shall tell of the Lord to the coming generation and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, that he has wrought."

Almighty and merciful God, when we are feeling overwhelmed or facing adversity, help us to remember that you are always with us. At those times of doubt, grant us faith to trust your promises and help us to feel your loving arms around us. We ask this in the name of your dear son, Jesus. Amen.

MARCH 23

⁶⁵*Pilate said to them,
"You have a guard of soldiers;
go, make it as secure as you can."*

⁶⁶*So they went with the guard
and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.*
(Matthew 27:65-66)



See? Even Pilate knew there was something to what this Jesus had said about his rising again. What's laughable is that somehow Pilate and the other authorities have persuaded themselves that one who has the power to rise from the dead can be held back by a stone sealed in place. Ah, the illusions, the performance of "security."

I have a friend who studies airport security, a strange and very specific field. But if you've taken a commercial flight in the last two decades, you know it's a field that has predominated in our lives. What's happening in the security line — the unlacing of shoes, the undoing of belts — is really just a performance of security, something to make the travelers feel like they're secure. The real security is taking place in what we cannot see: the trained eyes looking for what might be out of place. But even then, can any human being ever be truly secure?

It's a scary world out there. And much of what we do to make it less frightening is a performance of security. In truth, our only hope, our only sure-thing, our only trustworthy promise is in Jesus Christ, whose promise to Pilate and to you: that he will come again, gives us all hope and security to know that our lives are safe in him. That can be frightening for all the powers of the world that, like Pilate, cannot fathom the resurrection of the dead. But for we who know we have been given the precious and very great promises of God in baptism, in the Eucharist, and in the cross of Christ, we know God is always faithful to God's promises. Here is how we are truly secure.

Strong Deliverer, be with us in these days and always, giving us the promise of your presence and the hope of resurrection. Amen.

MARCH 24

GLORY



And one called to another and said:

*"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."
(Isaiah 6:3)*

Glory is defined as: 1. high renown or honor; 2. magnificence or great beauty; 3. take great pride or pleasure in.

Watching Nebraska sunrises and sunsets captures all three of these definitions of the word glory. These colorful, amazing, beautiful skies show me that the whole earth and sky are truly full of His glory. It is during December, January, and February when the skies display the most colorful wonders of God in Nebraska. There is something about watching the colors change in the sky from pastels to bold hues that I find mesmerizing and I am in awe of this beauty. There are other evenings during the year when colors light up the horizon but it seems that when we are in the cold, dull, days of winter is when God paints His masterpieces in the sky. It is also interesting that this blaze of glory is most beautiful when there are clouds. There is color on the horizon when the sky is clear but it needs some clouds in order to become magnificent. I think God is telling us to work through the clouds of life to see His glory.

Are you shining through with positive thoughts or are the clouds and doubts showing in your life? Have you taken a moment to look at the sunrise or sunset? Are you upset with life and experience negative feelings? Seek God and take pleasure in the daily beauty around you. Look for the color and take pleasure in the moment.

Dear Lord, I want to see your Glory. Help me experience the beauty and color of this day. Cast my fears and negativity from my life. Let me know your Glory surrounds me wherever my journey takes me. Amen.

MARCH 25

DENY



*Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said:
“Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”
And he went out and wept bitterly.
(Matthew 26:75)*

Most of us know the story of Peter on the night that Jesus was betrayed and handed over to the authorities. While Jesus was being interrogated, Peter stood outside by a charcoal fire (remember this detail) and proceeded to deny any connections with Jesus as others questioned his affiliation. Of course, after three denials, the cock crows, and Peter is faced with the reality of what Jesus had foretold. Now, we would never do that right? Yet, if we were to take that approach, we’d find ourselves in the same position as Peter. In fact, Peter had the same reaction himself when Jesus shared what would happen. If we are to be honest with ourselves, we have all denied Jesus in some way. The question is this: what happens now? Didn’t Jesus say that if we deny him before others that he would deny us before his Father? Given these statements, we would only expect that Peter’s fate would be sealed, but that’s not what happened. After Jesus’ resurrection, we are provided a scene that takes place on the shore as Peter has returned to his previous life. Sitting by a charcoal fire, Jesus approaches Peter and asks, “Do you love me?” Juxtaposed against the night of Peter’s betrayal, Jesus asks him this question three times. After Peter profusely affirms his love, does Jesus condemn him or doubt his sincerity? No. It is at this point that Peter is given the responsibility of taking care of Jesus’ followers. This Lent, let us reflect on the grace of God in Jesus Christ and that God’s love and forgiveness extends far beyond our failures. Remember that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ.

Forgiving God, you know us better than we know ourselves. Thank you for loving us anyway. Help us stay true and faithful to you, no matter what the circumstances may be. Help us to never deny our relationship with you. Amen.

MARCH 26

WEPT

*Jesus wept.
(John 11:35)*



The first time I remember hearing this verse was at a funeral for a friend's mother. She had died very unexpectedly. As in all deaths, this was very hard on the family and friends. A large part of the pastor's sermon was based on chapter 11 of the Gospel of John, which is titled *The Death of Lazarus*. We all knew the story, but the pastor wisely focused on the verse, "Jesus wept."

In my life I have found it more and more difficult to weep. Perhaps I saw it as a weakness, or perhaps I simply had shut down my emotions so much that I could not weep. It was not long after the funeral that I went to a movie. It was a wonderful story about an older man, but it's been so long, that I cannot tell you the name of the movie or the plot. But I do remember that I found myself sitting in the darkness with tears streaming down my face.

I could not understand why I was sitting in the dark, silently crying with no sound, only tears. When I got home it finally hit me, that the old man in the movie had the voice, the mannerisms, and the personality of my granddad. Granddad had died about a year before and I did miss him terribly, but I never wept. Then it occurred to me, that I felt better, I was more at peace, and I realized it was because I, like Jesus, WEPT.

Gracious God, thank you for your Son. He came down to teach us how to live. For many of us he taught us how to grieve because when faced with death of a friend, he wept. Help us as we face grief to have the strength to weep. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

MARCH 28

PARADISE



*Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you,
today you will be with me in Paradise."
(Luke 23:43)*

I was approached to choose a word and write a devotion for it, although it was something I felt compelled to do even before being asked. As my over-thinking took me some time to commit, there weren't many to choose from, but *PARADISE* stood out for me, and my name was added to the date. The next day I looked up the bible verse and read it within scripture, took some notes, and tucked it away to ponder until I was ready to write.

Paradise; a place of perfect beauty and happiness.

We can travel to places that we consider paradise or experience paradise like moments during our days. These are all beautiful and happy states, but have you ever witnessed someone on their way to paradise? To heaven? Should a person feel blessed to witness this, to hold their hand, see them take their final breath? Twice within six months I was a witness. The moments leading up to the final breath I felt broken, I felt pain, I wept. Yet witnessing their last breath, I felt a peace, a calm. Their suffering was lifted and the ultimate joy of paradise given to them because of the promise of Jesus. "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

If we have a true, genuine heart of forgiveness, the promise of Paradise awaits each and every one of us. Continue to pray for all, even in the final moments. I would do anything to have my loved ones back here on earth but I also am quite happy for their new life in Paradise.

Dear Heavenly Father, help us keep a true and genuine heart of forgiveness even during our trials and tribulations. May we find peace with those who have passed. Thank you for granting us the gift to be with you in paradise. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

MARCH 29



My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick..
(Jeremiah 8:18)

Grief makes us uncomfortable, whether our own or someone else's. We want to get past or over it and somehow "move on". We live in a world where happy is acceptable and grief is to be avoided. Yet, it is a very real part of our day to day lives. It's not only when a beloved one dies, but also in all the myriad of changes that occur daily. Even when we celebrate big events like births, marriages, retirements and the like, there are certain aspects that we may mourn the loss of – full nights of sleep, alone time, purpose.

Grief is not bad but rather it points to the life that we have experienced. While we mourn the change or the death, we give thanks for that person or life situation we were blessed to have in our midst.

A powerful experience was when my husband received a lifesaving double lung transplant. Even in the midst of the grief that one family experienced, they sought to bring hope and new life for the sake of another. In this way, they celebrated the life of their loved one and that love lived on in someone new.

Jesus accompanies us in our grief, leading us through this time filled both with tears as well as promise. For in Christ, our grief is transformed and offers us the gift of new life and possibilities.

How have you experienced joy and grief mingled together?

God of new life, help us to be ever mindful of your loving presence when we grieve. May we more fully see that through grief, you offer us new life in abundance. Amen.

MARCH 30

LOVE



⁷*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*
⁸*Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.*
(1 John 4:7-8)

What is love? An emotion? An action? Respect for another? Commitment to someone?

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary The meaning of Love is:

- 1: a feeling of strong or constant affection for a person
- 2: warm attachment, enthusiasm, or devotion
- 3: the object of attachment, devotion, or admiration
- 4: unselfish loyal and benevolent

The Bible tells us... “God is Love.” (1 John 4:7-8)

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8)

The only one I know who has shown this perfect love for me and the rest of the world is God. He showed His love by giving us His one and only Son to die on the cross for our sins, so we can have eternal life, if we accept it.

Can we show God’s love to others? Can we love like God?

Holy Father Almighty, we thank you for your love and showing us how to love. May we follow your guidelines and love one another as You love. Amen.

MARCH 31

KING



*Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross.
It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."
(John 19:19)*

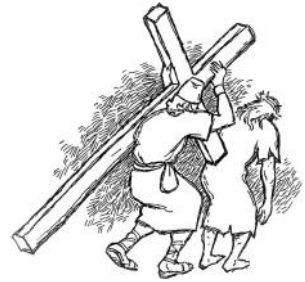
What do you picture when you think of a king? You may think of what a king wears; a golden crown with sparkly jewels, a heavy robe lined with fur. Maybe you think of a fancy throne, with a seat covered in rich fabric, and positioned in a high place that can only be approached by invitation of the king. Pilate tells those who are preparing the cross for Jesus' crucifixion to add a sign that calls Jesus "King of the Jews". I wonder if he really knew what he was saying. I wonder if he understood just how different this King was. Jesus was — and is — a King, but of a new and very different kind of kingdom. In this kingdom, love rules above all. It's a love that gives its whole self for others. In this kingdom, the King comes down to be close to us, even within us, to help us live lives of love for others.

How does King Jesus rule in your life?

Almighty King, you rule with love and compassion for all of your servants. You have called us to serve you with love, grace, and forgiveness. Help us to do what you have called us to do. In your holy name, Amen.

APRIL 1

CARRY



*They compelled a passerby, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.
(Mark 15:21)*

Carry is a common word in the English language. "yourdictionary.com" lists the 129 best meanings of the word carry. Even though I may not speak the word daily, I am sure that I do a form of carry many times throughout the day, and I am sure you do also. "Hawkeye" Pierce in the show M.A.S.H. recites examples of "carry" when he refuses to carry a gun. He says, "I'll carry your books, I'll carry a torch, I'll carry a tune, I'll carry on, carry over, carry forward, Cary Grant, cash and carry, carry me back to Old Virginia..."

Jesus, making the journey out of the city of Jerusalem with the portion of the cross he is to be hung from, falters under the weight of it. Simon of Cyrene is just passing by, not even headed in the same direction as Jesus, but traveling from the country into the city. He is compelled to carry the cross of and for Jesus. Simon physically carries the cross in Jesus' place. The definition of carry here means to support and move someone or something from one place to another. But he is not only supporting the weight of the cross but supporting Jesus in this act. Another definition of carry is to help someone through a difficult situation.

But unlike the word carry, compel or compelled is a word I don't think I have ever used, either speaking, or in writing. I view compelled here as Simon's reaction, his decision, his action, not of those who chose him. I wonder if Simon was called or pulled from the crowd. I wonder if he was hesitant, if he wanted to refuse, or if he ran toward it?

I try to imagine myself in Simon's place. What a physical and emotional burden to support Jesus in this way. And I wonder how this act of carrying the cross of and for Jesus might have changed Simon.

What or whom are we being compelled to carry? Is it anything equal to what Simon is compelled to do? Do we hesitate and want to refuse? Do we refuse? What happens when we are compelled to carry the burdens of others acting as Simon did? How might we change because of those actions?

*Dear God, just as Simon was compelled to carry the cross of and for Jesus, may we be compelled to serve and support, by carrying the cross of and for others. By the work of the Holy Spirit, move us in ways that honor your name, the name in whom we pray.
Amen.*

APRIL 2

CROSS



¹⁶Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; ¹⁷and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸There they crucified him.
(John 19:16-18a)

How many times have you said or heard, “Well, that’s the cross I have to bear”? We are all trying to live the way God wants us to, but how many times do we get impatient for the answer WE want, and we don’t even try to look at what God is trying to show us or teach us? We often do not know what other people around us have going on in their lives or what crosses they are bearing? We might be thinking “poor me” or we might be thinking “why is that person acting that way?” We need to put all our trust and faith in God amidst the storms and battles in our lives, not just in the good times. We need to not only pray for God to help us, but for others and their struggles as well. God will not give us more than we can carry or handle with Him by our side. Can you imagine carrying the cross Jesus carried for us and for our sins? God has a plan for us. It is in our nature to want to be in control, but we need to turn everything over to God.

What cross are you carrying now? How can you turn it over to Jesus to carry it for you?

Dear God, thank you for carrying the cross for our sins. Please help us to turn our struggles and our joys over to you and to know you will not give more than we can handle with your help. Please give us the strength to turn to you always. Amen.

APRIL 3

CROWN



They clothed Jesus in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him.
(Mark 15:17)

Most days during my elementary and junior high school years, my father dropped me and my sister off at school on his way to work. After breakfast, we would pile into his 1969 Carolina Blue Volkswagen Beetle and head down the driveway to begin our days. I don't remember much about those morning car rides except that it was incredibly cold in that tiny car on winter mornings. The "bug" wasn't luxurious or comfortable and got smaller and smaller as we got older. Looking back, it was also an unusual choice from the get-go for a 6'3" tall man who worked as a comptroller/Chief Financial Officer for a textile company, but it "got great gas mileage" (read that with a slow, Southern drawl) and Daddy drove that car until my sister and I were both in college in the mid-1980's. On the days that he was out of town or unavailable to take us to school, my Mom would take us to school and as we exited her car, she would say, "I love you. Have a great day. Remember who you are and whose you are." (And I've heard my sister say that to her own children in more recent years...we really do become our parents...)

I'm sure that as elementary children, we didn't fully understand what Mama meant when she said "remember who you are and whose you are." Maybe we heard it as more of a gentle reminder (or warning? or threat?!?) that in a small town everyone knows who you are and who your parents are and if you misbehave, parents and/or grandparents will hear about it before you get home from school. Maybe by the time we got to our confirmation classes, we had begun to make the connection that "whose we are" had a bigger connection to our baptisms into God's family; but what my sweet Mama wanted us to know was that no matter what happened during the course of a day, each of us is a beloved child of God and nothing can separate us from God's love. That thought reminds me of two of my favorite memes. (Are you asking yourself, what's a meme? Just think a bumper sticker for social media/computers.)

The first meme includes a picture of a pineapple with the words: "Be a pineapple. Stand tall. Wear a crown. Be sweet." It's a perfect nod to gracious hospitality and being kind to others while balancing a crown on your head; sort of like an Hawaiian "golden rule." The second meme pictures a child wearing a crown with the words: "On the darkest days when I feel inadequate, unloved, or unworthy, I remember whose child I am and I straighten my crown." This Lent and always, I hope you remember that you are God's child, straighten your crown, and remember that you are always enough, always loved, and always worthy!

What kind of crown are you wearing today? Is it on straight or is it slightly crooked? Who helps you remember who you are and whose you are? Who might you encounter today that needs to be reminded that God loves them, no matter what?

Gracious God, we give you thanks for loving us unconditionally and for sending your beloved son, Jesus Christ, who wore a crown of thorns as he hung on the cross, so that we can live eternally in your kingdom. Amen.

APRIL 4

PAIN



NO
PAIN



HURTS
A LITTLE



HURTS A
LITTLE MORE



HURTS
EVEN MORE



HURTS A
WHOLE LOT



HURTS
WORST

*So you have pain now;
but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice,
and no one will take your joy from you.*

(John 16:22)

The wrench just slipped and tore all the hide off your knuckles!!!#%@!
That's pain! So you head to the medicine cabinet. A band-aid and some
Neosporin, and in a couple of days it is better and the pain is gone. 😊

Some pain is not so easy to fix, like when the spiritual wrench slips and our
very soul is in pain because of events in our lives. ☹️ It is then we open a
different medicine cabinet. The scriptures and a conversation with Jesus
are the only way to heal this kind of pain. This kind of pain often takes
longer to heal, but Jesus assures us that relief will come and joy will once
again return. 😊

As we converse with Jesus concerning our pain, we need to be mindful of
the pain He endured just so we could turn to Him when pain enters our
lives. Have you really considered the pain Christ endured for all of our
sins?

*Jesus, during this Lenten season make us aware of the pain you endured on
our behalf. Grateful are we for your healing presence in our lives. Amen.*

APRIL 5

SPICES



*When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene,
and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices,
so that they might go and anoint him.
(Mark 16:1)*

My parents, being of English and German descent, were raised with salt and pepper as the spices of choice. They did not enjoy hot and spicy foods. My father would make fun of my brother and I as we ate hot wings with tears running down our cheeks. He thought we were crazy to eat such spicy foods, especially if it made us cry. He often remarked about how hot it felt going down, was probably how hot it might feel coming out...

Now, let me be clear - these are NOT the spices that Mary, Mary, and Salome brought to the tomb after Jesus died. They brought anointing and embalming spices. A hasty but lavish embalming of Christ's sacred body had been begun on Friday evening by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus. According to John 19:39, Nicodemus came bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. This would have been a compound - the gum of the myrrh tree, and a powder of the fragrant aloe wood mixed together. They would completely cover the body with this mixture and then swathe the body with linen cloths that were also steeped in the aromatic preparation. Finally, the shroud would be placed over the whole body.

Many times over their 3 years together, Jesus told his disciples and followers that that He was going to die and rise again. While they heard it, I'm not sure they wanted to believe it. After his death, the disciples are in hiding and it is the women who come to the tomb; they are carrying burial spices instead of hope. They have come to care for Him one last time. These spices represent love, they represent compassion, they represent death. But Jesus is not there – he has risen as he had told them. So, once again, God offers us hope in the place of death. God love and compassion turns death into life, and sadness into joy. How has God turned your sorrow into joy? When have you received hope instead of discouragement?

Living God, you meet us where we are and always offer us love and hope. We are easily discouraged by the world around us, but even in the face of war, fear, and evil, you bring life. Help us to be the embodiment of your love and hope in our world. Amen.

APRIL 6

GARDEN



Out of the ground the Lord GOD made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
(Genesis 2:9)

Thinking of a garden on an afternoon like today may seem a bit loony! It just reached the daily high of 12°, and yet a clear vision of a garden is clearly in my mind. Because to me, gardens, on this bone chilling day, represent HOPE. I visualize all things spring and summer during the cold months, and even though it seems impossible, I hope that things work well for green things. The smell of freshly tilled soil, the thrill of the first seed sprouting, and the taste of the first freshly picked green beans. Will these things happen? Will nature follow its traditional course? So it goes for us as well; we hope for newness, for fresh starts, for the chance to reach higher goals. I want to be better than I was — I just hope that I, like my garden, have the ability and chance to reach full bloom.

Dear God, I pray that, like a garden in the spring, I may feel a renewal of energy to seek your light and work for growth in your word. Amen.

APRIL 8

SEASON



*For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven...
(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)*

My favorite season is spring...the awakening of all that was resting during the winter. Birds begin to appear, grass turns green, daffodils show their face, rhubarb sends up its sturdy stalks to be the first fruit of the season, herbs pop up and green...there is life. I make sure to involve my grandkids in the garden, planting tiny seeds. As farmers and stewards of the land, we inhale the smell of freshly turned earth as we plant our crop of corn and soybeans, one little seed to grow into abundance to feed many. Thank you God! Spring turns to summer as we watch our seeds grow, producing food to nourish us, and see green cover the brown earth as the crops take over the landscape. Fall enters and a time of harvest provided by God's hands comes our way. Thank you God! Winter takes over providing a time of rest or silence for the earth and humans alike.

I was reminded at my Dad's celebration of life service that "God wastes nothing of our lives" and "what God creates, God loves." Words so true. During all our times whether they be a time to weep, a time to laugh, a time to mourn, a time to dance, etc., God is there and doesn't waste a moment.

Dear God, thank you for all you give to us each season and every day of our lives. And let us always take time to be thankful and not waste a moment in the life you have given us. Amen.

APRIL 9

TOMORROW



*"So do not worry about tomorrow,
for tomorrow will bring worries of its own.
Today's trouble is enough for today. .
(Matthew 6:34)*

In just about every rational way, these words make sense and for the most part, we accept them without question. On the other hand, when it actually comes to living this realization out, well, that's a whole different story. In fact, a good deal of our daily lives are focused on upcoming events or even how past events are going to impact our future. It's not that it is wrong to plan, it's not that being thoughtful of what lies ahead doesn't have its benefits; just look at other living creatures, one would be amiss to say that their preparations for Winter are to be frowned upon. Yet, with all of this said, I'm convinced that we can become so entangled in trying to control the future and reduce risk that we miss what is happening in the here and now. In not being in the here and now, we miss out on the richness of being alive. We miss the important moments that can never be retrieved, and we miss how those opportunities impact the lives of others. Again, it's not so much that planning or preparing for tomorrow is a horrible or foolish thing, but to what level are we invested?

If you are living in tomorrow, then how can you be here today? And if you are not here today, then what might you miss or overlook? This Lent, with the cares of life pulling us in every direction, let us commit ourselves to a place called "here and now" and realize that tomorrow is in a place called "later" and that we don't get to "later" until we successfully navigate "here and now."

God of all time and space, we do not know what the future will bring, so we worry. Help us to trust and remember, that you hold the future in your hands and that you want nothing but the best for us. Amen.

APRIL 10

HOSANNA!



So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, "Hosanna!"
(John 12:13)

Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna!

Jesus enters the city. His path is strewn with Palm branches (ancient symbols of victory). Crowds are waving them in the air as shouts of "Hosanna" (meaning save now) grow with excitement! Their King, the one who is blessed by God, promised to them as their Savior, and the one many believe will deliver them from the Roman government has arrived. Just as quickly, their revelry is dampened when He speaks of spiritual rather than political goals. How could so many miss His true message and mission?

Perhaps, in a somewhat comparable story in which the supposed "winner," cheered on by adoring and emphatic fans, returns to aid a competitor who has fallen, and subsequently loses the race. The bystanders were looking forward to the earthly goal rather than the goal God had in mind. (a more lasting goal)

What are your priorities? Are you focused on God's Hosannas or your own?

Heavenly Father, remind us in our daily lives that Jesus came to bring us the one true message of his life and reign. He came to save, not from political injustices of this life, but so much more. He came to save us for life eternal with Him, in His Father's home. Keep us ever looking forward to that day. Hosanna! Hosanna! Hosanna! Amen.

APRIL 11



BODY

*While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread,
and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples,
and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."
(Matthew 26:26)*

Bread is a necessity to life. When we eat nourishing food, our body functions as a machine performing intricate and exceptional tasks; many of which we are even unaware of. While bread is important, Jesus has given us something even more spectacular when he distributed the first communion to his disciples. By giving bread and calling it his body, Jesus gave all of his disciples a way to share in and remember Him. We are reminded during communion that we are a part of the intricate workings of God, some which we are even unaware of.

What does Holy communion, the body and blood of Jesus, mean to you? How does it strengthen your body and your relationship with Jesus?

*Dearest God, when the bread is given in remembrance of Him, please let us do just that. May we remember the sacrifice of Jesus as we sacrifice for others. May we dwell upon his giving as we struggle to give of ourselves. May we hold his service close as we serve our church and community.
Amen.*

APRIL 12

BLOOD



*In the same way he took the cup also,
after supper, saying,
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you drink it,
in remembrance of me."
(1 Corinthians 11:25)*

Blood... probably not something that you think about every day, but I do. As a Medical Laboratory Scientist, I work with blood all day. I run tests on it to help your doctor diagnose and treat you. I inventory and check out blood units to patients in critical need, and recently, I donated my own for the first time. With all this experience dealing with blood, I feel I now have a unique consideration about the gift that Jesus gave each of us when he shed his own to pay the price for our sins, and bring us closer to God.

Right now, the United States is experiencing a blood shortage – the worst in decades. The American Red Cross is offering incentives to encourage people to donate, and yet less than 10% of the population does. We all have our own excuses as to why we can't donate, but when it comes down to it those excuses help no one. There is simply no life saving alternative when blood is needed and unavailable. Your healthcare team knows this, and God knew it too, and that is why he offered the life of his only Son to bridge the gap between God and humanity. Christ knew what his "donation" would cost, and he still didn't make excuses. He donated every drop of his blood for all of us sinners. He suffered and bled, and because of his sacrifice, we live. As Christians, we will never have to endure a blood shortage. We will never be sent away because we need too much, and we will never be separated from God. Jesus gave all, and we will forever be saved.

Because of my work in healthcare, I can now understand a little more the full implications of that sacrifice. I am reminded of it every time I hear the words of 1 Corinthians 11:25, and I am grateful for the ultimate blood donation that Jesus gave to save my life. The gift of blood donation saves lives. Sometimes it is a stranger's life, and sometimes we are the stranger needing saved.

*Thank you, Jesus, for the sacrifice of shedding your blood that we might live.
Help us, as we are able, to shed our own blood for others. Amen.*

APRIL 13



PRICE

*You were bought with a price.
(1 Corinthians 7:23a)*

We have all heard the saying everything comes with a price. The price of many things is measured with money. Inflation is on the rise making the buying power of the money in your pocket less. This is evident in the fact that the five and dime stores of my childhood have been replaced with dollar stores. While not everything costs money, everything does have consequences. The price of freedom in the United States can be measured in the sacrifices of the members of our military. The price of freedom from sin is measured in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

What price are you willing to pay for your sins? There isn't enough money or possessions or good works for us to buy our freedom from sin. But God did all the hard work for us to be free from sin. He gave it to us as a gift of grace. All we have to do is trust Jesus as our Lord and Savior. We were bought and paid for with the blood and sacrifice of his Son. Jesus was obedient to God's will that he died to take our sins to the grave for us. That is real love.

How obedient are we to God's will as gratitude for all he has done for us?

Lord God, I thank you for all of the things you have done for me, but especially for your sacrifice to free me from sin, death and the grave. Help me do your will in helping others come to you. I don't always know what to say or do, but I trust the Holy Spirit will guide me on the right path. Amen.

APRIL 14

BETRAY

*And while they were eating, Jesus said,
"Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."
(Matthew 26:21)*



There is a saying, “Better to have an enemy who slaps you in the face than a friend who stabs you in the back.” When someone betrays, it is the deepest kind of hurt because it comes from a place where it isn’t expected – someone we trust, someone on whom we rely, even someone we love. Nearly every one of us has, or will, experience some kind of betrayal in our lives. It is painful when someone professes to be our friend and then turns against us. The desire for revenge, to hurt the other person in some way is strong – and it can take us years to get over the feelings of anger and pain.

Jesus didn’t walk blindly into his betrayal. Jesus knew and trusted his betrayer. Jesus taught and loved his betrayer. His betrayer was sitting at the table as one of his friends. What pain Jesus must have felt! How easily he could have lashed out, revealed everything, condemned Judas, and run to save his own life. But he didn’t. Instead, with Judas at the table, “Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” Then likewise, after supper, with a cup of wine, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” (Matt 26:26-28) Jesus fed them all – even Judas. In spite of it all, Jesus shared grace with all those present. Even today, even when we put ourselves and our desires first – before God and God’s love and call to serve – Jesus forgives and seeks to feed all.

How often have you betrayed Jesus, not as Judas did, but by your thoughts or actions?

Jesus, knowing you would be betrayed, you still made sure everyone was fed. Through the Holy Spirit, fill us with your love and compassion so that we, too, have the strength and courage to forgive. In your name we pray, Amen.

APRIL 15

DEATH



*If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord;
so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*
(Romans 14:8)

Are you afraid to die? I confronted that question the day my grandfather died. He seemed to know, as the two of us spent time together in his living room that afternoon, that our time together would be the last. It seemed totally unreal that he would be speaking with me that afternoon and then, that night, he was gone. Some deaths are sudden and tragic, while others seem like sweet release from suffering and decay. In any case, with the gift of Christian faith we can see clearly that just as death was not the end for Jesus, so also we who trust in Christ, know that death is not the final word for us. When we live, we live to love and serve God. When we die, we rest awaiting resurrection. We need not fear, because no matter what happens, we belong to the Lord.

Gracious Lord, through the innocent suffering and death of your Son You redeem the whole world. Free us from the fear of death, and grant us, by Your Spirit, faith to trust the promise of eternal life through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Amen.

APRIL 16

TOMB



*And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation,
and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

(John 19:42)

Perhaps you've stood in a cemetery at the committal of a loved one or friend. Sometimes the casket is carefully lifted by those specially chosen as pallbearers onto the frame over the grave. Beautiful flowers, or perhaps a flag or baptismal pall, drape the casket. Sometimes, an urn is carefully carried and placed on a stand near the grave and similarly surrounded by flowers, or a neatly folded flag, or graced with a smaller baptismal pall, the words of Paul spoken at the funeral service still hang in the air: "When we were baptized in Christ Jesus, we were baptized into his death. We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death..."

We, too, are laid in tombs eventually - all of us - trusting and resting in the promise of the One who has the last Word on our lives: "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his."

The people who laid Jesus in the tomb didn't know the end of the story. How do you think they felt? What difference does it make to know the end of the story?

Jesus Christ, the resurrection and the life, who suffered death for all humanity, who rose from the grave to open the way to eternal life, we praise you. Amen.

APRIL 17

LIVING



*"Why do you look for the living among the dead?
He is not here, but has risen.
(Luke 24:5b)*

In one of the Easter stories in the Bible, it was early in the morning, three days after the body of Jesus had been laid to rest in a cave. Several of Jesus' women disciples came there. But they found that Jesus' body was not in the cave. Instead, they saw two angels disguised as humans. The angels asked the women, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen!"

My brother and sister and I used to walk to our country school. To get to Valleyside School we had to go up a big long hill and down the other side. People around there still call that hill Graveyard Hill, because of a small country cemetery at the very top. So from a young age, I knew that those whose names were on the stones in the cemetery were not really there, they were already with God. They had a new life in heaven. When Jesus was raised from death he wasn't only just "brought back" to life. Instead, he now had a whole new life. For this reason, baby animals like bunnies, ducks, and chicks make us think of Easter. But so do baby calves and lambs and green grass and trees with new leaves and (my favorite) wild plum blossoms! New life all around!

Have you ever seen a newborn human being or a baby animal? Did seeing this new life bring joy to you? Does God's creation also bring joy to God? Tell someone what you think.

Dear God, your Son came to our world to give us new life and to show us what your heart is like. Wonderful are your thoughts toward us, O God. Amen.

APRIL 18



NOW WHAT?!?

*You are witnesses of these things.
(Luke 24:48)*

Now what? These two disciples had been eagerly listening to all that this stranger had been teaching them, but now as they turn in to their village, he keeps walking. In that instant, they have two options — to do the expected and let the traveler go his way, or to take a risk and invite the stranger to stay with them. They take the risk of hospitality, and their invitation leads to them seeing Jesus and then running back to Jerusalem with the good news of the resurrection — that Jesus is alive!

How often do we have moments like that — where we could simply do the expected, or take a risk and practice real, vulnerable hospitality? It might involve bringing someone into our home. It might simply be the difference between not really noticing a visitor sitting in the corner of the church and intentionally going over to welcome her. One never really knows what might happen, but in the interaction that follows, there's always the possibility of experiencing Jesus, alive, right there in the form of another person.

Now what? How might you take a risk to extend welcome to someone?

Living God, when the disciples came to a 'Now what?' moment, you surprised them with the new life of the resurrection. Help us to find new life by practicing radical welcome always. Amen.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to all who contributed in any way to the making of this Lenten Family Devotional. We pray that it is a blessing to you and all those with whom you share it.

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Lent
 repent
 Good Friday
 confess
 pray
 Christ
 Ash Wednesday
 sacrifice
 savior
 Jesus
 forgiveness
 prepare
 confession
 repentance
 absolution
 hope
 crucified
 abstain
 Lord
 sins
 for given
 Thursday
 Holy Thursday
 fast
 buried
 devotion
 death
 living
 contemplate
 black
 everlasting
 blood
 wilderness
 faith
 God Man
 holy
 grave
 dust
 tempted
 ashes
 palms
 ground
 Wednesday
 time
 training