



Messiah Lutheran Church
2023 Lenten Devotional



Introduction

Welcome to “The Way of the Cross,” Messiah’s 2023 midweek Lenten journey.

The Way of the Cross is also known as the Stations of the Cross. On the one hand, it’s a liturgical practice using various events in the final hours of Jesus’ life as a structure for prayer and meditation. On the other hand, it can also refer to a series of depictions like paintings or sculptures, that coincide with the Stations of the Cross. The stations (14 total) are often set up around a church (inside or outside) so people might use them as prayer and reflection stations. Messiah will offer a modified Stations of the Cross (5 stations) during this Lenten season, adding one station weekly on each Wednesday in Lent.

This Devotional Journal was written by several people from Messiah’s community of faith. It is intended to aid the reader in thinking more deeply about his/her personal journey to the cross with Christ with real-life personal devotions from people that sit in the pews (and some pastors☺). The cross is another way of speaking about radical and sacrificial love. Jesus says, “If any want to be my followers, they must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.” (Luke 9.23) In what way is Christ calling you to bear the Cross of radical and sacrificial love?

In addition, there is also a Communal Element to our journey. There will midweek Lenten worship services and discussions each Wednesday at 12 PM and 7 PM. We’ll begin with a short worship service, followed by a coffee and light refreshment time, and conclude with a group discussion addressing a weekly theme. While this devotional booklet can certainly enhance your

Lenten season, the weekly service and discussion will enable one to go further and deeper in this discovery of faith. It's always amazing how that happens in group settings.

Lastly, a quick reminder about the logistics of the Lenten season. There are 40 days in the Lenten Season, beginning with Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2023. So, there are 40 individual devotions in this booklet, individually numbered according to its day in Lent. Each day, except Sundays, is counted as a day of Lent. Ash Wednesday is #1, Thursday is #2, Friday is #3, and Saturday is #4. Then the First Sunday in Lent, February 26, 2023, does not count in the Lenten total. So, Monday, February 27, is #5. If you're "giving something up" for Lent, technically Sundays don't count, and you could have a cheat day. ☺ The 40th day of Lent is the Saturday before Easter.

Also, devotions were not written for Sundays. Obviously, we hope you are in church on Sundays. However, we did provide basic introductory information for the Sundays in Lent including the introduction to the day's scriptures, a listing of the day's scriptures, and the prayer of the day.

MOST IMPORTANTLY, we hope this devotional journey is evidence of Messiah's mission: to help people grow a faith in Jesus Christ that works in real life. Blessings on your Lenten journey on the Way to the Cross. "For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it." (Luke 9.24)

Ash Wednesday, February 22, 2023 (Lent 1)

“Lent”

Carol Hupp

Joel 2:1-12, 12-17; Psalm 51:1-17;
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10; Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Ash Wednesday is the beginning of the Lenten season for the Christian religion. How significant that this comes at a time in our calendar year during the Spring Equinox when we plant seeds!

Those little brown dried up seeds that grow into something that will look nothing like what we put in the black dirt! But when watered and given a little sunlight grow into something different and amazing!

We too need to grow during this season! Grow our faith by planting the seed of prayer in each of us each day of Lent!

As we journey down the trail toward Easter Sunday may we discover the true significance of this holy season of resurrection.

Then on Easter Sunday we will be excited to say to one another.....

“Christ is Risen”

.....and know it's not magic...

....it's real!

Thursday, February 23, 2023 (Lent 2)

Amy Gilbert

Psalm 51; Jonah 3:1-10; Romans 1:1-7

We learn from Scripture that our walk with the Lord begins with acknowledging and accepting the hard truth that we are sinful. God is not asking that our sin be “always before me” as the psalmist laments; unrelenting shame is not what God desires. But He knows that until we realize how far we have fallen, we won’t recognize our desperate need for a Savior. Once we know the darkness of our hearts, we can grasp the incredible compassion He has shown in sacrificing His Son to rescue us from certain death. And this understanding frees us to trust Him, knowing that we are safe in the arms of One who loves us more than we can possibly imagine.

Father, show me the depth of my sin so that I might know Your incredible love and the lengths to which You will go to be with me for all eternity. Amen.

Friday, February 24, 2023 (Lent 3)

Ashley Gilbert Guntle

Psalm 51; Jonah 4:1-11; Romans 1:8-17

Oftentimes, when we run from God, He allows our path to become difficult so He can teach us to trust Him with our lives and with every part of ourselves. One day, self-doubt will come, and the world will appear bigger than God. We need these early teachings from Him to remind us what to do and which direction to travel in times of despair. God uses our challenges to change us and shine a light on others who are watching our struggle. When others see us handling situations by going to God, through prayer, through biblical devotion, they are more motivated to find the path of light in their own darkness.

Father, change me for Your good so I can follow Your light in my darkness. Strengthen me to walk in Your steps so I can model to others where to turn when life falls apart. Amen.

Saturday, February 25, 2023 (Lent 4)

“Stumble Stones”

Pastor Wendy Piano

Psalm 51; Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 18:1-7

Throughout Germany, among the cobblestones of the old city streets are placed stumble stones. You can't miss them. They are shiny brass among the browns and greys of the natural stone. They are part of the Stolpersteine project and each one is a memorial to a person who was a victim of the Holocaust. Though these stumble stones are very different than the ones Jesus warns about in Matthew 18, they stopped me in my tracks. They, figuratively, made me stumble. I bent low to read the message – names, dates, most often places of death. A stone not placed to lead one into sin, but as a bold reminder of the evil that befalls our world when we turn away from God and God's ways. In this Lenten season may we remember and renew our walk with God.

God of the stumbling people, steady us for our walk with you. Amen.

Sunday, February 26, 2023

The First Sunday in Lent

Introduction

Today's gospel tells of Jesus' temptation in the desert. His forty-day fast becomes the basis of our Lenten pilgrimage. In the early church Lent was a time of intense preparation for those to be baptized at the Easter Vigil. This catechetical focus on the meaning of faith is at the heart of our Lenten journey to the baptismal waters of Easter. Hungry for God's mercy, we receive the bread of life to nourish us for the days ahead.

Readings

First Reading: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7

Psalm: Psalm 32

Second Reading: Romans 5:12-19

Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

Prayer of the Day

Lord God, our strength, the struggle between good and evil rages within and around us, and the devil and all the forces that defy you tempt us with empty promises. Keep us steadfast in your word, and when we fall, raise us again and restore us through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday, February 27, 2023 (Lent 5)

Stefanie Hamrick

Psalm 32; 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18

Blessed is the one whose sins are forgiven. Sin is heavy – acknowledging your sin lifts the heavy burden that lies within your heart. Our Lord forgives you and the guilt of your sin to all who believe. Our Lord will protect and guide you. Follow your heart and always trust in the Lord even when others don't. Jesus was made human, flesh and blood like us, and in doing so he suffered being tempted just like us therefore he understands and can help us as we are tempted. Your sins were forgiven when he died on the cross.

Turn to the Lord no matter how bad you think things are; he will strengthen you to handle what lies ahead. The Lord never gives us more than we can handle, although some days I wonder how much more he thinks I can handle. Always trust in the Lord; he will lead you.

Dear Heavenly Father, Thank you for all you endured dying on the cross to forgive all our sins. Sin is heavy and we pray you continue to help us lift the guilt that is on our hearts. Lord, continue to watch over us and help us especially when we are feeling tempted or lost. Wrap your arms around us and fill our hearts with joy reminding us you are always with us. Amen.

Tuesday, February 28, 2023 (Lent 6)

Craig & Shelly Musolf

Psalm 32; Genesis 4:1-16; Hebrews 4:14–5:10

The series 'The Chosen' depicts the story of Jesus as he began to perform miracles and call his disciples to follow him. While all of them willingly followed, it was not easy. They had to learn to trust Jesus to guide them. It is the same for us. As Christians, we know we must ask for help and we must do it with the right attitude. When we try to take matters into our own hands, the struggle is harder than when we give it to God. When we fail, we ask for forgiveness, knowing that Jesus died for our sins and that we will be forgiven. We have faith knowing He will guide us and watch over us.

Dear God, We give you thanks for the sacrifice of your Son so that our sins may be forgiven. Help us turn to you in our difficult times. Amen.

Wednesday, March 1, 2023 (Lent 7)

Mary Satre

Psalm 32; Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28; Matthew 18:10-14

“And be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Ephesians 4:32

We have learned this Bible verse in our early days of Sunday School or a song at Camp Lutherwald. Since we have known this most of our lives, why is it something we still struggle with as adults? We want others to forgive us, but why is it so hard for us to forgive others? Good question.

We need to be acceptive of God’s forgiveness. We must learn how to make peace with ourselves when we ask for God’s forgiveness.

Dear Lord, during this Lenten journey help us to follow your commandments. Thank you for your grace and mercy. Give me the strength and power to extend the same mercy and grace to others. Let us all rejoice in the joy of forgiveness.

In your name we pray, Amen.

Thursday, March 2, 2023 (Lent 8)

“Trust God for Our Strength and Salvation”

Beth Crilly & Dori Meighan

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7

God is ever faithful to us. We need to trust God always and take comfort in his salvation. God cares for us so much that he is willing to come into our world to comfort and change us in beautiful ways! There are no “mights” or “maybes” from God. He is there for us, always. No matter who we are or what we truly deserve. God provides strength to us always. We need to rely on God during all times of our lives, both good and difficult. He will be there for us.

Dear God, continue to give us strength and the wisdom to trust that you will be there for us, always. Amen.

Friday, March 3, 2023 (Lent 9)

Cindy Riebersal

Psalm 121; Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-31

We should be so thankful! Our God is an awesome God. He is our teacher. We should strive to live as he teaches. He is our protector. He watches over us and keeps us from harm even in times when we don't deserve it. We have all disappointed him. We are all sinners. We give him many opportunities to turn away from us. But he doesn't! Lucky for us, God delights in mercy and has compassion on us. He can't stay angry. Instead, he forgives our sins and doesn't hold them against us. When we fall short, he still loves and cares about us deeply. He is there for all people in this way.

Dear God, help us to walk in your light. Keep us safe. Stand by our side in times of trial and temptation. Give us wisdom to see our sinful ways. Grant us your mercy and give us strength to do better. Thank you so much God for your unending love and compassion. Amen.

Saturday, March 4, 2023 (Lent 10)

Pastor Wendy Piano

Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:4-8; Luke 7:1-10

To keep, to watch, to preserve.

What wonderful words of assurance flow from Psalm 121. The last time I read these words aloud I gathered with a grieving family around one of God's beloved as he was dying. As the psalm ended, "The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore," like a bold amen he breathed his last. In that moment God was there gathering to Godself not only the one who had died but also the tears of those who grieved. A reminder that in all the ups and downs of life God has promised to never leave us. In this Lenten season, may we be assured that as we live and as we die, God watches over and holds us in his loving embrace.

God of the promise, we praise you for your faithfulness. Amen.

Sunday, March 5, 2023

The Second Sunday in Lent

Introduction

During Lent we journey with all those around the world who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. In today's gospel Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born of water and Spirit. At the font we are given a new birth as children of God. As God made a covenant with Abraham, in baptism God promises to raise us up with Christ to new life. From worship we are sent forth to proclaim God's love for all the world.

Readings

First Reading: Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalm: Psalm 121

Second Reading: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

Gospel: John 3:1-17

Prayer of the Day

O God, our leader and guide, in the waters of baptism you bring us to new birth to live as your children. Strengthen our faith in your promises, that by your Spirit we may lift up your life to all the world through your Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday, March 6, 2023 (Lent 11)

Nancy Hickman

Psalm 128; Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 3:1-6

As the Israelites were traveling from Egypt to the Red Sea, they became discouraged with God and Moses. They complained because there was no food and no water and were afraid they would die in the wilderness. God then sent poisonous serpents among the people which bit them and killed many. They went to Moses and asked him to pray to God to help them. So God told them to make a snake on a bronze pole to look at when bitten and they would survive. God had provided a way of escape that required faith from the people.

When we complain about how our lives are turning unpredictable and turn away from God, we must remember all that God has given us; our families, loved ones, church, home, and livelihood. And most of all we must have faith in God to love us, help us and grant us eternal salvation through Jesus.

Dear Heavenly Father, Grant us hope and faithfulness as we search for meaning and salvation through Christ as we walk in his ways. Make us mindful of our blessings from the Lord and remain true to him always. Amen.

Tuesday, March 7, 2023 (Lent 12)

Stan & Pam Engle

Psalm 128; Isaiah 65:17-25; Romans 4:6-13

Sometimes we want to pray, but we feel inadequate to come before God. After all, God is so far above and beyond us, that we wonder why he would want to hear what we have to say. And even if he would want to hear us, how can we find the words to express our thoughts and needs?

Isaiah says, "Before you call I will answer; while you are yet speaking I will hear." God is a passionate lover and wants to care for each of us. God knows our needs and will answer our prayers before we even think them. So pray boldly, honestly, and passionately, for God understands where we are. We are in good hands.

Loving God, help us to come to you in prayer, for we know that you care deeply for us. Amen.

Wednesday, March 8, 2023 (Lent 13)

Kristina Snider

Psalm 128; Ezekiel 36:22-32; John 7:53–8:11

The readings for today have a common theme. Our Heavenly Father forgives us. All we have to do is ask Him for forgiveness. We must confess and repent. True repentance is turning away from sin. Often, we will confess a sin and later, crawl right back to our wicked ways. To completely turn from our sinful ways, we need to surrender all to God and be renewed in Him. He is there! He listens! What a glorious Father we have!

Dear Lord, help me to be honest with myself about my sins. Please bring my unconfessed sins to the forefront of my mind so I can ask for forgiveness. Please renew me to have a spirit of true repentance, with every effort to turn from sin. Remind me that you are always listening and ready to forgive. In Your Holy Name, Amen.

Thursday, March 9, 2023 (Lent 14)

Dave & Jaci Beard

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:1-8; Colossians 1:15-23

Author: Sarah Young

I am the culmination of all your hopes and desires. I am the Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: who is and was and is to come. Now My Presence safely shields you, enfolding you in My loving arms. I have lifted you out of darkness and into My marvelous Light.

Though I have brought many pleasures into your life, not one of them is essential. Receive My blessings with open hands. Enjoy My good gifts, but do not cling to them. Turn your attention to the Giver of all good things, and rest in the knowledge that you are complete in Me. The one thing you absolutely need is the one thing you can never lose: My Presence with you.

Dear God, continue to guide us to Your word and Your ways through this Lenten season. Amen

Friday, March 10, 2023 (Lent 15)

“Belonging”

Karla Myers

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:9-21; Ephesians 2:11-22

Don't we all want to belong? To not be adrift in the world? As Christians, we belong to God through the death of Jesus Christ. There is no longer a barrier between God and us. We can take our concerns, anxieties, prayers, and petitions to our heavenly Father.

Have you ever felt like you didn't belong? It's devastating to be told we're not enough. The world is full of us-vs-them, and the -isms that divide us on earth are devastating. Beware of the devil's strategy: emphasizing these differences, telling us some people are less loved by God, telling us we are less loved by God, telling us we don't really belong. If you ever hear these words from the devil, send him packing!

We do belong. We belong to our church. We belong to The Church, Christ's body. We belong to the family of God. We belong to each other.

Heavenly Father, your saving grace shown to us on the cross shows us we do belong. Thank you for the gift of grace, the gift of Jesus Christ, and the gift of belonging to you. Amen.

Saturday, March 11, 2023 (Lent 16)

“Being Responsible”

Loraine Bickford

Psalm 95; Exodus 16:27-35; John 4:1-6

As a child, I went to church each Sunday and developed a closeness to God. However, in youth group once, my behavior was woeful. My assistant pastor was popular with everyone, and he led our meetings on Sunday evenings. One Sunday, he had to leave to take a phone call in the office. My friends and I began to act silly, pounding on the piano, singing off key, and being clowns. Suddenly a voice announced, “What are you doing? Is this how you follow God’s ways?” I was ashamed. Each of my friends and I were embarrassed to admit that we were ignoring the fact that we were in God’s house, that our conduct was reprehensible.

I learned a lesson that day. No matter who I am with or where I am, God expects and demands that I respect him and his commandments.

Dear God, help me to be mindful of your word and strive to follow your expectations daily. Amen.

Sunday, March 12, 2023

The Third Sunday in Lent

Introduction

In today's gospel the Samaritan woman asks Jesus for water, an image of our thirst for God. Jesus offers living water, a sign of God's grace flowing from the waters of baptism. The early church used this gospel and those of the next two Sundays to deepen baptismal reflection during the final days of preparation before baptism at Easter. As we journey to the resurrection feast, Christ comes among us in word, bath, and meal—offering us the life-giving water of God's mercy and forgiveness.

Readings

First Reading: Exodus 17:1-7

Psalm: Psalm 95

Second Reading: Romans 5:1-11

Gospel: John 4:5-42

Prayer of the Day

Merciful God, the fountain of living water, you quench our thirst and wash away our sin. Give us this water always. Bring us to drink from the well that flows with the beauty of your truth through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday, March 13, 2023 (Lent 17)

Jack Howard

Psalm 81; Genesis 24.1-27; 2 John 1.1-13

As I reflect on the many blessings I have received from God in my lifetime, I realize He has always been with me. He walks beside me each day thru sunshine and the darkness. But the greatest blessing He has given both you and me is Jesus Christ who died on the cross for our sins. Thanks be to God.

Dear God, thank you for always being with me. Amen.

Tuesday, March 14, 2023 (Lent 18)

“Time Fasting”

Richard Ellison

Psalms 81; Genesis 29:1-14; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Lent is defined as an annual season of fasting, prayer, and contemplation. We have often heard in jest that “for Lent I am giving up watermelon and Hungarian potato salad.” What I am suggesting is that you give of your time to fast from your regular time and activities for a period of time for prayer, scripture reading, and quiet contemplation, considering what Jesus has done for us by dying on the cross to atone for our sins providing us with the best gift of all, Eternal Life. You will find that this will warm your heart, calm your anxieties, and make you smile. What better is there to spend your “time fast?”

Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to atone for our sins, providing us with the best gift of all. I pray that the time we spend with you during this 40-day period will continue for the next 325 days. Amen.

Wednesday, March 15, 2023 (Lent 19)

Shirley Craven

Psalm 81; Jeremiah 2:4-13; John 7:14-31, 37-39

As Easter approaches, let's remember God sent his own son to die for us. Jesus endured ridicule, distrust, and conspiracy; yet was willing to be crucified on the cross. It's easy to get "busy" or to think our possessions or any transitory thing can be our security. There is no security apart from God. God is our deliverer despite our wanderings; He restores those who listen to him and have faith in him. He valued us from before we were born; his love is constant. Hang onto God's love.

Preparing for Easter, let us remember John 7.37-38
NIV:

"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."

Let the Holy Spirit lead us to God who promises to refresh us with himself, his life-giving blessings, and eternal life. Amen.

Thursday, March 16, 2023 (Lent 20)

Anne Simerman

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:10-21; Ephesians 4:25-32

“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.” Ephesians 4:28.

Not “he who steals must pay penance.” Or “he who steals must work to support himself.” Instead, we are to turn from selfishness to selflessness.

A reflection: Did I wake up this morning with a glad heart because I can not only care for myself but also care for others? Did I allow myself to suffer, seeing the injustices done to others, and respond with care and concern? Did I pray this day for eyes to see the need around me?

Gracious God, stir our hearts to repentance, that we might turn from sin and seek to do what is useful for the good of ourselves and all your beloved children. Amen.

Friday, March 17, 2023 (Lent 21)

Pastor Tim Graham

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:22-31; Ephesians 5:1-9

When I was a small child, my dad would come home from church and place his shoes by the door. Then I would take my small shoes and place them inside of my dad's shoes. I wanted to be like my dad, to imitate his actions, simply by placing my shoes in his. Even today, I still want to imitate my dad's devotion to Christ and Christ's church.

Likewise, Paul issues Christians an order, to be "...imitators of God." Above all, Christians must imitate the love and the forgiveness of God just as Christ did on the cross. Living in love is the cross and the new sacrifice, and like the sacrifices of the Hebrew Scriptures, love is the new sweet odor of sacrifice to God.

Dear Lord, imitating you seems like a tall order. Let our trust in the sacrificial love of Jesus to empower us to be complete imitators of God. Amen.

Saturday, March 18, 2023 (Lent 22)

Pastor Tim Graham

Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:32-34; John 1:1-9

People often ask me how I can officiate a funeral when I don't know the deceased person. It's not easy, for sure. But when I really want to know someone, I go to someone who is an intimate relative or friend for many years' standing. In most cases, that person will really be able to connect me to the heart and soul of the other person.

When John proclaims, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God," he is saying that Jesus has always been with God. In fact, Jesus is so intimate with God that he is the one person in all the universe who can reveal to us what God is like and how God feels towards us.

Dear God, as we follow Jesus to the cross, help us to know you and your love more intimately. Amen.

Sunday, March 19, 2023

The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Introduction

Baptism is sometimes called enlightenment. The gospel for this Sunday is the story of the man born blind healed by Christ. "I was blind, now I see," declares the man. In baptism God opens our eyes to see the truth of who we are: God's beloved children. As David was anointed king of Israel, in baptism God anoints our head with oil, and calls us to bear witness to the light of Christ in our daily lives.

Readings

First Reading: 1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm: Psalm 23

Second Reading: Ephesians 5:8-14

Gospel: John 9:1-41

Prayer of the Day

Bend your ear to our prayers, Lord Christ, and come among us. By your gracious life and death for us, bring light into the darkness of our hearts, and anoint us with your Spirit, for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday, March 20, 2023 (Lent 23)

“Ordinary People”

Karla Myers

Psalms 146; Isaiah 59:9-19; Acts 9:1-20

When I reread the story of the conversion of Saul, I focused on Ananias, who I believe was instrumental in carrying out God’s work. Ananias is reluctant to actually approach Saul and put his hand on him, even though that’s what God instructs him to do. Ananias knew that Saul had been “breathing threats” against the disciples of the Lord, and that he could have been put to death. He even tried reminding God of the dangerousness of the task. But Ananias trusted God and did as he was instructed. Saul – Paul – was able to embark on his missionary duties in large part thanks to Ananias’ answering of God’s call.

Dear God, thank you for using Ananias in this important way, furthering your mission using ordinary people. Help us to remember that ordinary people like us can also be used to further your mission, if we will only listen, learn to trust, and heed your call. Amen.

Tuesday, March 21, 2023 (Lent 24)

Annie Holt

Psalm 146; Isaiah 42:14-21; Colossians 1:9-14

When I was young and was facing surgery, my dad told me to envision myself cradled in the palm of God's hand. This was such a comforting thought. When we are scared and hurting it is good to remember God's great Love for us. It is humbling to realize that the powerful creator, "the God of wonders beyond the galaxy..." *can* meet us where we are, in our most vulnerable circumstances and that he *wants* to!

God lets us know in these verses that we are never forgotten, always loved, always protected, and cared for by God. He is the Ruler over all generations, he is the One True God, He is powerful, and He is merciful. And most importantly, he sent us Jesus, that we may have the key to his kingdom. The kingdom of God is within us. We are not alone. We are held in the palm of God's loving hand.

Wednesday, March 22, 2023 (Lent 25)

Phyllis Agness

Psalm 146; Isaiah 60:17-22; Matthew 9:27-34

Promises, promises, promises. We hear them from politicians, businesses, family members, and friends. The promises, and our hearts, have often been broken. We have been conditioned not to trust. This scripture from Isaiah promises peace, righteousness, and elimination of violence. I have prayed for those things. Have you? Have we seen them? The last verse of the scripture is "...in its time I will do this swiftly." In Matthew 9, Jesus restored sight to the blind men after they had been calling to him and following him for what appears to have been a long time. When they persisted and acknowledged him as the promised "Son of David," he finally turned to them and asked, "Do you believe?" Only true faith and perseverance will allow us to see all of the promises kept... "in its time."

Jesus, I believe. Help me overcome my unbelief. (Mark 9:24)

Thursday, March 23, 2023 (Lent 26)

Kristy Huffine

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11

As we walk our journey with Jesus, we continue calling upon God to assure ourselves of an answer of peace from him. Lord, hear my voice, my complaint and prayer, and let my ears be attentive to the voice both of my afflictions and of my supplications.

Let us admire God's patience and forbearance. Jesus Christ is the great Peace Maker, he is an advocate for us, and through him we hope to obtain forgiveness.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ: He set his right foot upon the sea and his left foot upon the earth, to show the absolute power and dominion he had over the world. And he held in his hand a little book opened, probably the same that was before sealed, but was now opened, and gradually fulfilled by him.

Carry your cross high and be mighty in your journey.

Friday, March 24, 2023 (Lent 27)

John & Cindy Sabo

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 33:10-16; Revelation 11:15-19

God doesn't hold grudges!

As humans, it is hard for us to imagine the wonder of God's involvement in our lives. It is remarkable to realize that nothing-NOTHING-we could ever do would cause our Father God to love us less.

Thanks be to God..... Absolution is always a miraculous current event!

God doesn't dwell on how we failed, and neither should we. Our Faith assures us of His promise of complete and absolute forgiveness without recall, memory, or repercussions for past failures.

What a Blessed comfort to know that God's abundant Love and eternal concerns for each of his children are sacred bonds and unconditional! Amen.

Saturday, March 25, 2023 (Lent 28)

Cory & Erica Dold

Psalm 130; Ezekiel 36:8-15; Luke 24:44-53

Jesus wants us to know that although at times things appear hopeless and we have doubts, we can turn to him for comfort. Just as Christ was first to suffer and die, he would later be raised and glorified. The first act of the disciples was to worship Jesus after he was taken away to heaven. The Ascension is focused on Jesus now being with God. It is not possible to talk about God without talking about Jesus. Our thinking about God must always include a crucified, risen, and living Christ.

Dear Lord, inspire me to spread your Gospel message in word and deed. Help me to do so wisely and joyfully, with your help, your guidance, and your grace! And remembering your ascension, help me to seek Heaven, where you are seated at the right hand of God the Father! Amen.

Sunday, March 26, 2023

The Fifth Sunday in Lent

Introduction

In today's gospel Jesus reveals his power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies God breathing new life into dry bones. To those in exile or living in the shadows of death, these stories proclaim God's promise of resurrection. In baptism we die with Christ that we might also be raised with him to new life. At the Easter Vigil we will welcome the newly baptized as we remember God's unfailing promise in our baptism.'

Readings

First Reading: Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm: Psalm 130

Second Reading: Romans 8:6-11

Gospel: John 11:1-45

Prayer of the Day

Almighty God, your Son came into the world to free us all from sin and death. Breathe upon us the power of your Spirit, that we may be raised to new life in Christ and serve you in righteousness all our days, through Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday, March 27, 2023 (Lent 29)

Bill & Charnell Marker

Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12

The power of God has always been seen in His answering of prayers; even the reversing of death is within His power. God heals His people through their prayers and never forgets them, ever. During the darkest times, the times of doubt and when my compass has been skewed, God has listened to my prayers and answered them by guiding me back to His righteous path. There is nothing you have done that cannot be taken to God through prayer. He will forgive you and love you until the end of time.

O Lord, my God, I come to you in prayer for all things - when I'm grateful for your blessings, when my life is in turmoil, when I'm full of self-doubt, or when my heart is full of hate. Please keep my heart open to Your love and use me for Your work here on earth. Thank You for Your grace and love. Amen.

Tuesday, March 28, 2023 (Lent 30)

Steve & Monica Ealing

Psalm 143; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Ephesians 2:1-10

Worry does not lead to having faith in God. God is rich in mercy and his love for each of us knows no end. Whatever worries or difficulties we face, He is our protection and provider. Let us be willing to put our trust in the Lord. We should strive to be like the Shunammite woman who had so much faith in the Lord that even after her only child had died said, "It is well" when asked if everything was ok. She knew God had given her this son and God was able to heal him.

Dear God, remind us of your promise and that even in our darkest moments "It is well" when we put our faith and trust in you. Amen

Wednesday, March 29, 2023 (Lent 31)

Pastor Tim Graham

Psalms 143; Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41; Matthew 22:23-33

Lament is a profound expression of sorrow or grief, particularly related to loss. We associate it with death, but it can relate to many of life's losses – unemployment, broken friendships, divorces, moving, disability, or illness, etc. Whatever way lament surfaces, it creates crisis. And when we experience crisis, we yearn to know God cares.

The psalmist believes God is a big God, so he prays big prayers. He is not stoically asking for the strength to endure. He wants God to act on his behalf. He wants answers. He wants deliverance. He wants God to bring his soul out of trouble and to thwart his enemies. He wants revival, to be alive again. The psalmist believes God is able.

Dear God, take away our fear to lament. Help us be bold and courageous in our prayers to you. Help us believe you are able. Amen.

Thursday, March 30, 2023 (Lent 32)

Kathleen Ormiston

Psalm 31:9-16; 1 Samuel 16:11-13; Philippians 1:1-11

Suffer ... to submit to or be forced to endure; to feel keenly; labor under Salvation ... deliverance from the power and effects of sin; deliverance from danger or difficulty.

We suffer. This is a fact. The world is a tough place and life is difficult. Being a Christian does not make us exempt from suffering, but as we work our way through Lent and Holy Week we know that Jesus suffered too, and we take comfort in knowing that He knows what we're going through.

We are offered salvation. This is also a fact. As we read in today's scriptures, God has heard our cries for help and relief and has answered them with Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. Being a Christian is how we claim that salvation.

May God bless you through your Lenten journey as you endure your suffering and embrace His salvation.

Friday, March 31, 2023 (Lent 33)

Amy Gilbert

Psalm 31:9-16; Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-30

The Saints had a profound - almost irrational – trust in God. In terrible and distressing conditions, enduring pain and suffering, abandoned by friends and pursued by enemies they still believed in His goodness and compassion. They relied on His mercy. They still loved Him. Yet they did not passively succumb to their misery. They boldly brought their sorrows, complaints, and anguish before Him. They spoke honestly and fearlessly with the Creator of the Universe about their burdens and torment. And they were confident that He heard them. They were certain that He would act. They took refuge in His faithfulness. They had an unwavering belief that transcended their circumstances. And they accepted whatever outcome He allowed, still praising Him.

Father, help me to open my heart to you when life is difficult so that I might see Your Hand at work and know the boundlessness of your love for me. Amen.

Saturday, April 1, 2023 (Lent 34)

Pastor Tim Graham

Psalm 31:9-16; Lamentations 3:55-66; Mark 10:32-34

Mark's Gospel tells us they were going along the road and Jesus was out ahead of them—alone. It remains difficult for us to consider how much of a load Jesus was bearing in this moment. There are certain decisions which can only be made alone. Even when Jesus shares this decision with the disciples, they still can't comprehend it.

There are certain decisions which we must make and certain roads that we must walk in the awful loneliness of our own souls. Picking up our cross is much like that when we deeply consider what God is calling us to and what it might require from us to follow through. And yet, even in these times we are not alone, for God is always near to us.

Dear God, going to the cross is an unnerving journey. Remind us that you walk with us in these lonely personal moments. Amen.

Sunday, April 2, 2023

Sunday of the Passion/Palm Sunday

Introduction

Today, we encounter the paradox that defines our faith: Jesus Christ is glorified king and humiliated servant. We too are full of paradox: like Peter, we fervently desire to follow Christ, but find ourselves afraid, denying God. We wave palms in celebration today as Christ comes into our midst, and we follow with trepidation as his path leads to death on the cross. Amid it all we are invited into this paradoxical promise of life through Christ's broken body and outpoured love in a meal of bread and wine. We begin this week that stands at the center of the church year, anticipating the completion of God's astounding work.

Readings

Processional Gospel: Matthew 21:1-11

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalm: Psalm 31:9-16

Second Reading: Philippians 2:5-11

Gospel: Matthew 26:14--27:66

Prayer of the Day

Everlasting God, in your endless love for the human race you sent our Lord Jesus Christ to take on our nature and to suffer death on the cross. In your mercy enable us to share in his obedience to your will and in the glorious victory of his resurrection, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Monday, April 3, 2023 (Lent 35)

Kathleen Ormiston

Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15;
John 12:1-11

It's Day 35.

Time is running out. Just a few more days and it will be finished.

It's Monday. Yesterday was a triumph. Today the clouds gather.

Time with old friends.

Time with new enemies.

None of it is a surprise and yet none of it is at all what they expected.

This is Old Testament stuff - Isaiah prophesied about it and David prayed about it.

And it will be the essence of the New Testament as well.

Yes, time is running out, soon comes the end ... and then a new beginning.

Dear God,

Holy Week is absolutely the hardest time of the year.

Each day of the week has its own story and message.

Please stay with us at this most difficult time.

Every year the same and yet every year different.

None of it a surprise and yet none of it what we expect.

Please be with us, Lord. Amen.

Tuesday, April 4, 2023 (Lent 36)

Ashley Gilbert Guntle

Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31;
John 12:20-36

I have often wondered why so many gathered to Jesus. He didn't start with great wealth or many fans. He did, however, have a light and love that no one had seen before. He loved intensely and reflected the light of His Father. Jesus made it His mission to let others know about God. God used Jesus as a symbol to show the world His enduring love, and God has chosen to use you, too. Jesus came to remind us when the world is chaotic and we don't know what to believe, there is a light that will guide us to safety. Our purpose, the one God placed on you and me in our mother's womb, is to guide others, lost and lonely, to this same light so we can be children of light together.

Father, teach me to reflect Your light so I can bring others home to You. Amen.

Wednesday, April 5, 2023 (Lent 37)

“Race of Our Lives”

Joyce Black

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3,
John 13:21-32

Many times in the hustle and bustle of our busy lives we forget that there were many that came before us. They worked, lived, and died in the faith. They ran the races of their lives, and our Lord Jesus Christ strengthened them and met them at the finish line. During this Lenten Season as we study “The Way of the Cross” we are invited to look inward in retrospection. During this time of Lent, let us let go of the sin that binds us and hinders us in our own races. Let us look to Christ and the Way of the Cross for the eternal victory that is promised to us.

Dear God, please be with us as we look inward. Never let us lose sight of the cross so that our race can be won and our victory assured. Amen.

Thursday, April 6, 2023 (Lent 38)

Felicity Steere/Norma Driver-Wehrle

Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10); Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19;
1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-7, 31b-35

Lamb of God, our very Bread from Heaven, remain in our hearts as we enter this time of your betrayal and passion. May we feel your presence and give praise for all you have provided. You have modeled your love for us even in the face of your own tribulation. The sacrament of Holy Communion, this blessed bread and wine, fills and nurtures us in an intimate relationship with you. As we prepare to partake of this Holy Meal may we join with all Christendom to-

Rise up – A mystery

Assured

Forgiven

Loved

A taste of salvation.

Jesus, our bread of life, lead us out of darkness to the joy of your resurrection. Amen.

Friday, April 7, 2023 (Lent 39)

Pastor Brian Spahr

Isaiah 52:13—53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25;
John 18:1—19:42

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Jesus cried out these words from Psalm 22 as he suffered on the cross. In our times of struggle, we cry out in a similar fashion. “Where are you, God?” “How could you let this happen?” “Why God?” Why now?” When our hearts are troubled we often lose sight of God’s presence with us, yet God remains with us all the same. God hears the cries of the broken-hearted. God never abandons us, especially in our time of need. We may lose sight of God, but God never loses sight of us.

God, we call to you in our time of need. Our words may not be polished or reverent, but you hear us and listen just the same. Help us to know your loving presence with us. Help us to know your perfect peace through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Saturday, April 8, 2023 (Lent 40)

Pastor Tim Graham

Job 14:1-14; Psalm 31:1-4; 1 Peter 4:1-8;
Matthew 27:57-66

Peter says, “⁸ Above all, maintain constant love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins.”

If we really love a person, we can accept their faults, tolerate their foolishness, and even endure their unkindness. At first glance, that sounds ridiculous. But as one who has experienced such love, I have no doubt it’s true. It must be.

Likewise, it means that God’s love covers the multitude of our sins. It is the wonder of grace that, as sinners, God loves us, God loves the world; that is why God sent the Son. Maybe that is why Paul declares “the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” God’s love seems foolish; yet it is the source of our life.

Dear God, for love so encompassing, gracious and free; Thank you. Amen.

Sunday, April 9, 2023

Resurrection of the Lord/Easter Day

Introduction

This is the day the Lord has made! Christ is risen, and through him all creation is made new! Indeed, “God shows no partiality” (Acts 10:34): Christ’s resurrection truly brings life to everyone. We sing hymns of praise, gather around sacred words, and proclaim God’s faithfulness, power, and love in the feast of holy communion. With the women at the tomb, we are astonished, elated, and grateful. We depart with joy to proclaim the good news of God’s endless love.

Readings

First Reading: Acts 10:34-43

First Reading (alternate): Jeremiah 31:1-6

Psalm: Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24

Second Reading: Colossians 3:1-4

Second Reading (alternate): Acts 10:34-43

Gospel: Matthew 28:1-10

Prayer of the Day

O God, you gave your only Son to suffer death on the cross for our redemption, and by his glorious resurrection you delivered us from the power of death. Make us die every day to sin, that we may live with him forever in the joy of the resurrection, through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.