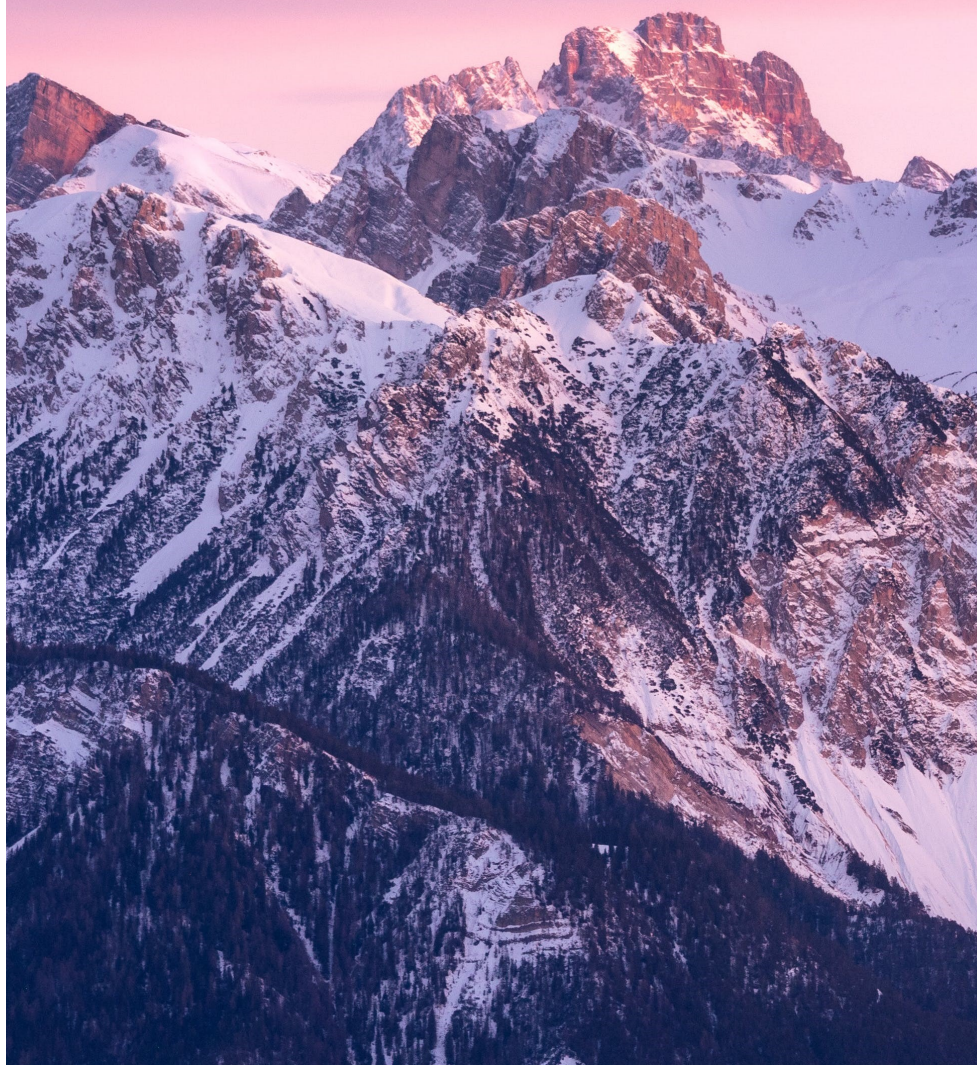


WILDERNESS & wandering

preparing for what's to come



Lent Devotion Guide created by St. Luke's Methodist Church

Lenten Devotional: Wilderness Wanderings Devotions and Prayers
by, St. Luke's Methodist Church members
February 2024

Senior Pastor: Rev. Dr. Allison Andrews
Associate Pastor: Rev. Wade Skinner



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Chief Contributor & Editor

Join us as we begin the journey through the wilderness as we make our way to the Cross of Easter morning.

Soup & Sermon

Wednesdays, February 21-March 20

11:45am | Family Center

*excluding March 13

Easter Egg-stravaganza

Saturday, March 23

10:00am-11:30am | Activity Lot

Palm Sunday

Sunday, March 24

8:30am & 10:30am Worship

11:30am Chicken Spaghetti Lunch

Maundy Thursday: Seder Meal

Thursday, March 28

6:00pm | Family Center

Good Friday: Tenebrae Service

Friday, March 29

6:30pm | Sanctuary

Easter Sunday

Sunday, March 31

Arise Worship

8:30am | Kilgore City Park

Breakfast

9:30am | Family Center

Butterfly Release

10:00am | Family Center Lawn

Traditional Worship

10:30am | Sanctuary

One: Bread - S.G. Thompson

"It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Matthew 4:4 (see also Luke 4:4; Deuteronomy 8:3)

When Jesus is fasting in the wilderness before his ministry begins, the devil offers him something very tempting: bread. I think it's safe to say most of us have craved bread at one point or another, but imagine how tantalizing it would be if you hadn't eaten in 40 days!

As we see in the Lord's Prayer, bread is a stand-in for food in general. Sustenance. Fuel. A necessity. And Jesus doesn't deny the importance of food in this verse—we know he will go on to do some of his most important ministry over meals! What he is saying is that food is not enough. What the devil is offering—even when he offers all the kingdoms of the world—is not enough.

In this verse, Jesus is quoting what Moses says to the people in Deuteronomy after their 40 years of wandering in the desert. Moses is reminding them that God gave them manna, the bread of heaven, knowing they could not feed themselves. God also gave them the law, the incredible gift of divine guidance, knowing they could not govern themselves. God gives us these higher forms of sustenance when we follow the Spirit into desolate places, all the while teaching us that what we do for ourselves is not enough.

During Lent, many of us choose to fast in one way or another as we prepare to commemorate Christ's death and rejoice in His resurrection. Many of us choose to take up a new practice, such as more disciplined prayer, meditation, or scripture reading. We do this not because food is bad, but because it is so easy to forget the insufficiency of our own forms of sustenance. We

know from experience that the more we fixate on the things of this world, the more tempted we will be to take the devil up on his offer of a free lunch.

Indeed, Lent is a season to remember what truly sustains us: every word that comes from the mouth of God. We understand Jesus himself to be the Word Made Flesh, the Bread of Heaven, truly present in the Eucharistic feast. So whether or not you are planning to give something up for Lent, we invite you to take on the practice of consuming God's words by reading scripture, reflecting, and praying. This is the manna we need as we journey through the Lenten desert of humility, self-examination, penitence, and gratitude.

Dear Lord,

We ask that you feed us with spiritual food as we imitate your Son's holy fast. Lead us out into the deserted places where we feel our insufficiencies; grant us assurance of your all-sufficient grace. And may we, like Christ, be empowered by our time of meditation to rejoice in the ministries you have prepared for us.

In Christ's name we pray,

Amen.

Two: Reflections on Faith - Bill Bryant

As the NLT Study Bible says regarding Hebrews 11, "Faith involves confident action in response to what God has made known." That statement is packed with spiritual meaning: some think faith is simply believing, but real faith is so much more than that. As it says in James 2:17, "So you see faith by itself isn't enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless."

This goes along with Matthew 9:37-38, as Jesus said to his disciples, "The harvest is great, but the workers are few. So pray to the Lord who is in charge of the harvest; ask him to send more workers into the fields."

In my own humble way, it is with faith that I pray and I pray a lot, to serve God daily with good deeds for our church and for our brothers and sisters in Christ Jesus wherever they may be. Thanks be to God!

**Dear Lord,
Grant to us in this season of reflection a greater
understanding of what it means to have faith in you.
Help us not only to believe in you and shelter in your
grace, but to live to you and give shelter to those in
need.
Amen.**

Three: Reflections on Salvation - Sharon McCann

I was baptized at the age of 13, but honestly didn't feel any different as a teenager. I rededicated my life when I was 32. I have a vivid memory of that day. That was the day Jesus entered my life and forgave me of my sins. It was such a joyous feeling.

My faith is such a comfort and St. Luke's helps reinforce that faith. For that, I am very grateful.

My favorite Bible verses are **John 3:16-17**: *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.”*

Dear Lord,

We praise you for the awesome and undeserved gift of our salvation. As we walk with your Son toward His cross and resurrection, through which you have granted us eternal life, remind us of the times you have offered us your grace and empowered us to respond. In your abundant mercy, forgive us our sins, and help us to journey ever closer to you.

Amen.

Four: Reflections on Gratitude - Anna M. Rohde

Each day when I arise, I am thankful. Before I start my day, I give thanks to Him. I am thankful for all God provides and protects. I am still amazed by the beauty of the world, by how His Word nourishes us and by His tremendous blessings on me and my family. Gratitude is mine for Him. It often overwhelms me just how much He cares. Now, how can I best love God? Three ways: 1) pray, talk to Him; 2) enjoy the beauty of His creation, the world around you; and 3) read His word, read the Bible every day. We live in an imperfect world, and yet, because God loves me unconditionally, as He showed us on the cross, His presence in our lives daily fills me with joy, hope, and peace. Praise the Lord! As we revisit the Easter story, let us be thankful for all His mercy and grace on us.

Dear Lord,

We thank you for all the blessings of this life; but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ; for the means of grace, and for the hope of glory. And, we pray, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives. Amen.

- From the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (pg. 101)

Five: Reflections on the Journey - Danny Harrison

Through the ups and downs of my spiritual journey, the primary constant has been God's love for me. Even in my darkest moments, though I may not have been aware of it at those times, He was with me, pushing and pulling me through. Though I wasn't, at times, thinking of Him, He was always thinking of me.

Looking back over my life, I see so many instances when only his love could have gotten me through. I thank Him every day for loving me, saving me and never giving up on me.

Philippians 4:6-7:

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Dear Lord,

We thank you for being the solid rock in our lives.

Help us to turn to you and rely on you when we face difficulty, rather than trying to rely on ourselves.

Grant us peace through the knowledge of your presence and your love.

Amen.

Six: Honor – Dr. Andrews

When couples have visited my office for premarital counseling, much time is spent cataloging and exploring the similarities and dissimilarities between the betrothed—views on child rearing, money handling, and faith practices are just a few of the major topics discussed. The hope is that the couple will draw upon their prior knowledge of one another through these sessions when a bump in the road comes along. The key point is this: understanding in advance the differences that exist between people disarms our universal human tendency to be personally affronted in the tough moments of a relationship. The vow to love and honor one another is not philosophical. It is a requirement which supersedes lesser desires. Likewise, during Lent, we know in our spiritual core that loving and honoring God and others is non-negotiable. Subjugating self-interest and elevating the good of others is the path of Christ.

Romans 12:3b; 10: *“Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you....Be devoted to one another in love. Honor others above yourself.”*

God our Father,

We pray that our life on earth is one that honors you.

As humans, we know that your will is what will be done with all of us. We pray that you will forgive us our sins and accept us with your loving and open arms. We will be tempted, but we know that faith and love in you will enable us to thwart evil.

Amen.

- Prayer offered by a St. Luke's member

Seven: Forgiveness – Rev. Skinner

Our Father in Heaven,

Today we ask forgiveness for our sin of using your name so commonly, for treating it as though it were ordinary. Lord Father, forgive us for living as though we were kings of our own little worlds and not as though Jesus is King and Lord of all. Forgive us for expanding on our kingdoms to the neglect of yours. Father, forgive us for placing our own will ahead of yours and for not living for your glory and honor. Lord, we have challenged you, delayed in fulfilling your commands, and made excuses for not obeying your will which is so clearly expressed in Scripture. Father, we have doubted your ability to provide our daily needs—food, clothes, shelter—and have too often focused on our own desires and not given thanks when we received them. Father, we have not forgiven others as you forgive us. Forgive us for demanding others pay their debts to us even while our debts to you are so much greater.

Amen.

Eight: Sin – Dr. Andrews

It might be argued that the primary focus in the season of Lent is to look squarely upon the obstacles standing between ourselves and God. In seeing those practices and ideas that separate us from God and God's will, we are obliged to deconstruct, eschew, destroy, and denounce these harmful elements in our lives! We remember Christ's words to the woman, "Go and sin no more!" While we cannot earn our way into a state of salvation, we are required to live as those who are in fact wrapped in the loving arms of God and want to please God, growing ever closer to His will.

1 John 1:8-10: *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."*

Father,

We have sinned against you and ask for your forgiveness. We know you are a forgiving God, and we strive each day to earn your praise. We ask that you will lead us in a path where we are not tempted to stray, and when we do, we ask that you will be there to forgive and accept us into your Kingdom. We praise your holy name and know that the path to Heaven is through you and your love.

Amen.

- Prayer offered by Mike Kerr

Nine: No Falling – Dr. Andrews

We live within a framework of victory, regardless of our tripping and stumbling through life. When you are asked about the moment in which you were saved, your answer should confidently be, “When Jesus died on the cross, taking my sins upon himself.” Yes, God turned the tragedy of the cross into the triumph of salvation so that we may live with him always, starting NOW!

Because we humbly accept the grace of God, we regularly pray that we will live a life parallel with God’s perfect will: “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” Have you contemplated this astonishing expectation outlined in The Lord’s Prayer? We are to be coworkers and co-creators with God while in our mortal state. Jesus reveals the radically divine truth that God commands us to live as Kingdom dwellers, even while wrapped in our mortal coil. God has no expectation that we will fail or fall.

Philippians 4:12–13: *“I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: everywhere and in all things am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”*

O Lord my God, who reigneth over all things, may we always keep you first in our thoughts and prayers and lives until your kingdom comes. As you provide daily for us, forgiving us as we are to forgive others, help us to navigate our lives according to your will and protect us from those who want us to fall. Amen.

- Prayer offered by Kay McKinley

Ten: Holy – Rev. Skinner

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!” Isaiah 6:3

The only attribute of God’s that is ever repeated three times in a row for emphasis is his holiness. The Hebrew word referring to God’s holiness means “cut apart.” Every attribute of God is holy. His anger is holy. His patience is holy. His love is holy. His righteousness is holy. God is in a completely different category than humanity. And so, the seraphim in Heaven sing in constant, never-ending antiphonal response about God’s holiness. According to the seraphim, the entire earth is full of his glory. God’s glory is his holiness on display. Humans were designed to glorify God and in doing so enjoy him forever. The more we glorify him, the more we enjoy him. But, we must do so on his terms and not on ours. Jesus is the only way sinful humans can approach a holy God.

Our most holy of Lords, our Father above all fathers, you who gave us all and will continue to give us all that we are and all that we will ever be, holy – blessed – honor – wonderful is your name. Your kingdom and Lordship come to us, as it is in heaven; so it will be on earth. Give us daily what we need as we will long for nothing else. Forgive us when we fail and fall short of what you created us to be. Forgive us for our petty thoughts and actions. Lead us to do your will, and lead us to become, to praise, to worship, to appreciate, to love as your children. Lead us to do as you will; not as we will. Keep us from wickedness; keep us in your holiness. Amen.

- Prayer offered by Carolyn Holcomb

Eleven: Hallowed – Rev. Skinner
“Hallowed be your name...” **Matthew 6:9**

The first petition of Jesus’s model prayer is “Hallowed be your name.” The word “hallowed” is somewhat antiquated and we don’t often hear it in our culture except when we talk about “Halloween.” To hallow something is to make it holy. In Scripture, the word “holy” means to set “apart,” “different,” “other.” Regardless of your feelings about the day, the word “Halloween” refers to a day that is literally set apart, a “holy day”; this is why we call days like Thanksgiving and Christmas and Halloween and Easter “holidays.” They are days set apart from the rest of the days on the calendar. The name of God is different than any other name. God’s word commands and invites us to regard it as such because God himself is different than us. He is absolutely and perfectly holy in every aspect of his being.

**Almighty God, maker of heaven and earth,
You alone are holy. May your name be praised
forever. Lead us, O Lord, every day to live lives that
bring honor and glory to you and encourage others.
Help me, Lord, to love you more. Work in me and
through me your will. Provide all my needs, dear God,
and forgive me when I fail you. Through the power of
the Holy Spirit, may I never bring dishonor on your
holy name. May you be praised forever.
Amen.**

- Prayer offered by Glenda Cochran

Twelve: Love – Dr. Andrews

It's almost impossible to attend a wedding without hearing The Apostle Paul's beautifully poetic thoughts in 1 Corinthians regarding the supremacy of sacrificial love:

1 Corinthians 13: 4-8: *“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 in the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails.”*

The line **“love never fails”** is quite radical. If love never fails, then why do we often feel like failures when attempting to express love? The answer perhaps lies within the Greek word used for love in verse 8: **“agape.”** Agape love is an unselfish, sacrificial, active love, different from romantic or brotherly love which use the terms “eros” and “phileo,” respectively.

When Paul writes that love never fails, it does not mean that humans will love perfectly, as Christ does. **But when we do choose to love selflessly and sacrificially, love will never fail to be effective.**

The other way in which love never fails is that it is eternal.

Selfless love continues in the Lord and in God's people forever. It is absolutely the way we will live in relationship with each other into eternity.

Dear God in heaven, holy are you. May I so order my life that you are glorified by it, that those around me will recognize your boundless love through my actions. Forgive my shortcomings and always guide in me a forgiving heart for others. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

- Prayer offered by a St. Luke's Member

Thirteen: Pause – Dr.. Andrews

Suggested reading: **Jonah 1: 17, I Kings 19: 9-8, Numbers 14: 11**

Have you noticed that God uses “time out” with His people? When Jonah refused to go to Nineveh and share a message of salvation to that corrupt city, God placed Him in the belly of a fish to marinate for three days. When Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal, but then feared retaliation, God allowed the prophet to hide in a cave until he could trust in God once again. When the Israelites were finally poised to cross over into the land promised to them, but then balked at the challenge of occupying their new world, God gave them another 40 years to wander in the wilderness.

No toddler has ever learned much from a time out, except that they should try a different course of action! And frankly, if that is all we learn when stalled put in life, we would make crucial progress in obeying God. During this season, you may notice moments when life stops and nothing is happening, or so it seems. **Use that nothingness. Let God create a “something-ness”** in your spirit that enables you to move forward in the direction God sets for you.

Dear God, parent and Father of us all, we submit to your discretion, your leading, your direction in our lives. In the moments when we are “stuck” and find ourselves paralyzed, create in us newness and obedience to the end that we might be participants in your Kingdom-building. Amen.

Fourteen: Restoration - S.G. Thompson

“For I will restore health to you, and your wounds I will heal,’ says the Lord... ‘And you shall be my people, and I will be your God.’” **Jeremiah 30:17, 22**

In this verse, we hear God’s words to the beleaguered Israelites who have been exiled to Babylon. Through Jeremiah, God had been continually warning the Israelites to stop worshiping other gods, but they failed to do so. Now, they’ve been cut off from Jerusalem, the very place God ordained for them to worship. These catastrophic events are still unfolding when God speaks words of hope through Jeremiah. The wounds God promises to heal are still fresh. The separation God promises to bridge still seems to be widening.

So often, we exile ourselves from our home, the church, in which we are called to worship. So often, we choose to worship gods—wealth, reputation, legacy, appearances, security, pleasure—other than the one true God. We create a rift between ourselves and the One who loves us most. And yet, our God is so merciful as to comfort us with the promise of restoration even as our backs are turned.

Dear Lord,

As we continue our Lenten disciplines, help us to see the ways we are separating ourselves from you. Help us to realize when we are worshiping idols, and turn our hearts back to you. Thank you for your promise of restoration through Christ.

Amen.

Fifteen: The Heavens -S.G. Thompson

“The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork.” Psalm 19:1

In every generation and every culture, human beings have marveled at the sky. We’ve told stories about the sun and stars, even reached out and touched the moon. No matter how old we are, the lights and colors that dance above us still provoke a childlike sense of wonder.

In this verse, the psalmist reminds us who created that seemingly unfathomable dome, and indeed everything in the universe—coral reefs and the bright-colored fish that dart around them; moons orbiting planets orbiting stars; delicate networks of fungi and bacteria that allow forests to flourish. All of God’s handiwork in the heavens and on earth testifies—even mountains sing and rivers clap their hands (Ps. 98:8).

Today, take a look at the sky. Perhaps you’ll catch a sunrise or sunset. Perhaps you’ll observe a cloud. Perhaps, after nightfall, you’ll be blessed with a view of the moon and the stars. In any case, allow yourself a moment of awe. The Creator of this vast and marvelous universe loves you.

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the gifts of creation. Give us the patience and wisdom to listen when the firmament testifies. May we use the minds and lips and hands you’ve given us to praise you, as you created us to do. Amen.

Sixteen: God's Ordinances -S.G. Thompson

"The ordinances of the Lord are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb."

Psalm 19:9-10

We don't often think of laws, rules, or "ordinances" as treasures, let alone sweet. We might see many of the rules we follow each day as necessary, reasonable, even helpful—but we rarely think about them that much. In fact, when we really think about rules, it's usually because we're chafing against them. Some rules just annoy us, but others may really be unfair, leaving a bad taste in our mouths.

But Psalm 19 reminds us that God's rules are different. They are precious, bringing wisdom and delight. Why? Because through them, we can better see God's will for us—who God is and what God designed us to be. Indeed, Jesus, our Redeemer, is the fulfillment of the law. He comforts us not by abolishing God's ordinances, but by freeing us to live into them fully and without fear. What could be sweeter than that?

Dear Lord,

We praise you for the gift of the law, which you gave to the Hebrews after leading them out of slavery in Egypt. We thank you also for setting us free from slavery to sin and death. Grant us the strength to heed your commandments, written in scripture and on our hearts.

Amen.

Seventeen: Hidden Faults - S.G. Thompson

"But who can detect one's own errors? Clear me from hidden faults." Psalm 19:12

Let's face it—no one likes to be wrong. So many squabbles could be avoided, or at least ended much more quickly, if the parties involved were willing and able to admit their own errors. But it's such a galling feeling, isn't it, to face your own mistakes? We are trained from a young age to avoid the appearance of incorrectness at all costs.

Sometimes, we see where we've faltered, but refuse to own up to it. But sometimes, we are so afraid of being wrong that we blind ourselves—becoming, as the psalm says, unable to detect our own errors. We know from Scripture that "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves" (1 John 1:8), but comfortable self-deception is an awfully hard thing to let go.

Lent is a time to reflect on the patterns of our lives that otherwise go unexamined, asking if they conform to God's will. What is our attitude toward our neighbor? Toward our enemy? Are our priorities aligned with God's? Let us undertake such reflection prayerfully, trusting God to forgive us for sins known and unknown, things done and left undone.

Dear Lord,

Help us to see our own errors and hidden faults.

**Strengthen us to admit wrongdoing, break bad habits,
mend relationships, and grow ever closer to you.**

Amen.

Eighteen: God's Temple - S.G. Thompson

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

The Book of Kings tells us that the temple built by Solomon in Jerusalem was magnificent. It was constructed painstakingly with cedar, cypress, and stone; it was decorated with gold. But the temple was not, like many of our buildings and monuments, a testament to human wealth or skill. It was made to glorify the Lord. This temple was destroyed when Babylon conquered Jerusalem, but was rebuilt when God brought the Israelites out of exile and restored them to their homeland. Jesus preached in this temple, drove corrupt merchants out of it, and called it the house of his Father.

In our verse for today, Paul tells the Corinthians—and, by extension, us—that we are God's temple. Isn't that a good word? We as individuals and we as the Church are made with care to glorify the Lord! We are the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit! What would it look like if we treated ourselves, each other, and our communities as temples?

Dear Lord,

We thank you for making us, individually and together, temples for your Spirit. When we are torn down, build us back up. When we are beset by corruption and greed, cleanse us. Help us to glorify you with our bodies and minds, and to love each other as you have taught us.

Amen.

Nineteen: Cleaning House - S.G. Thompson

“Hezekiah said to them, ‘Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and carry out the filth from the holy place.’”

2 Chronicles 29:5

Throughout the books of Kings and Chronicles, Israel sees many rulers, both righteous and unrighteous. Some promote the worship of God, and others promote the worship of false gods and idols. Often, when a righteous king takes over, he has to clean house—and that’s what King Hezekiah is doing. He instructs the Levites to get themselves and the temple in order and dispose of anything not conducive to the worship of God.

Lent is a time for us to do exactly what Hezekiah is asking of the Levites: sanctify ourselves. Praise the Lord, we have Jesus to help with that! As Hebrews 9 tells us, priests purified the temple with animal blood each year, but Christ the Great High Priest purifies us with his own blood once and for all. Hallelujah! But this doesn’t mean we don’t have work to do. It is our privilege and calling to purify our lives in partnership with Christ. So let us, with His help, get rid of those things that tempt us to worship false gods.

Dear Lord,

We thank you for sanctifying us through your work on the cross. Help us to see the instruments of our idolatry and rid our lives and hearts of filth so that we may better worship you.

Amen.

Twenty: Turning Tables - S.G. Thompson

“He entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves.” **Mark 11:15**

In this passage, Jesus performs a startling deed. It might even seem out of character. Where is the gentle Prince of Peace who blesses children and lauds the meek? When he’s being arrested and brought to his death, he keeps his cool...but somehow the money changers at the temple provoke a rampage? It doesn’t seem to add up. And yet, this story—recorded in all four gospels—has an important lesson to teach us: there are some things worth getting angry about.

Jesus’s actions don’t harm others, but they are direct and decisive. The merchants and money changers are likely taking advantage of the temple-goers, especially the poor and vulnerable, for their own gain. Jesus won’t allow this in His Father’s house. We must ask ourselves, what are we doing to resist the greed and cynicism of our world? If we meet injustice with indifference, we are not following Jesus.

Dear Lord,

Empower us always to recognize the wrongs of this world—especially those carried out in sacred spaces—and to resist them. Open us to the ways that Jesus wants to turn the tables on sin in our own lives as well.

Amen.

Twenty-one: The Flood - S.G. Thompson

"I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth." **Genesis 9:13**

The story of Noah's ark is a beautiful one, one we put in children's Bibles and even paint on nursery walls. God saves Noah and his family, and two of each kind of animal, from a great flood. God preserves life and renews the world. But it's also a terrifying story! The flood wipes out the vast majority of life on Earth in one fell swoop.

There are times in our lives when we feel flooded, when the sprinkle of life's difficulties turns into a downpour. We may face storms so severe that we see much of ourselves being washed away. But God often picks those very times to do something new in us. When disaster washes away all the detritus of daily life, all the excesses and the posturing, we can see the essential promise that's been made to us. God is in covenant with us. We will not be destroyed or wiped out. Even in suffering, we are preserved; even in death, we are resurrected.

Dear Lord,

You made a promise that floods would never again destroy the earth. Through Jesus, you assured us that even death would not be the end, but the beginning of new life. When we face earthly storms, remind us of your promise and bring us to the solid ground of your resurrected Christ. Amen.

Twenty-two: The Riches of His Grace - S.G. Thompson
"In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us." **Ephesians 1:7-8**

In this season of Lent, we are journeying with Jesus to the cross. We are examining our lives, recognizing our sins, humbling ourselves, asking for forgiveness. Why? Because we believe that through his death and resurrection, Jesus accomplishes our salvation.

We are so used to seeing the image of the cross that it's easy to forget how gory it truly is. The Latin root of the word "excruciating" is *crux*: cross. To be crucified was not just painful but shameful—in fact, a Jewish tract on mourning practices in Jesus's time instructed the immediate family of the crucified to move to another city. Physically and socially, this is the worst death imaginable. And yet, Paul speaks of the blood shed on the cross and "the riches of grace" that Christ "lavished on us" in the same sentence! Somehow, through his shameful, cruel, and undeserved death, Christ is showering us with precious, tender, and undeserved mercy.

Dear Lord,

**We thank you for the incredible riches of your grace.
As we walk with Jesus toward the cross, help us feel
the gravity of our salvation, the value of your grace,
and the greatness of your love.**

Amen.

Twenty-three: He Is Good - S.G. Thompson

“O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.” Psalm 107:1

There are countless reasons to give thanks to God. Some are individual: the roof over your head, the food in your stomach, your friends and family, the very fact of being alive. Some are shared: the beauty of nature, the goodness of community, the gifts of knowledge and reason. It’s so easy to forget how precious these things are. Still, we sometimes manage to recognize and thank God for these blessings. But how often do we thank God simply for being Godself?

This psalm of praise calls us to **thank God not because of what God has done for us lately, but because of who God is eternally**. God’s steadfast love—also translated as “mercy” or “lovingkindness”—is part of God’s character. No matter what, God loves us, and nothing in existence can separate us from that love. When we really receive God’s steadfast love and understand how remarkable it is, we can’t help but praise God for it. And when we live in gratitude for God’s abundant gifts, we are better able to show mercy and kindness to the rest of God’s beloved creation.

Dear Lord,

**We praise you for your goodness, mercy,
lovingkindness, and steadfast love. Help us to
respond to your abundance by loving our neighbors
as Jesus taught us.**

Amen.

Twenty-four: Liberation - S.G. Thompson

“Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds apart.” Psalm 107:13-14

One of the most persistent themes in the Bible is that of liberation. Luke 3 tells us that Jesus quotes Isaiah at the beginning of His ministry: “He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” The Old Testament is laden with references to how God freed the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt; Paul’s letters are full of reminders that Christ has freed us from slavery to sin and death. In Psalm 107, we hear how God “cuts in two the bars of iron” (v. 16) to free even those who were imprisoned for disobeying God’s commands.

There are so many things in our lives that we are shackled to. **Sometimes we are bound unjustly; sometimes we choose our own chains.** But no matter what imprisons us, God is greater! Indeed, we worship a God who loves to liberate. So as we continue our walk through Lent, let us meditate on what God may be freeing us from, and freeing us to.

Dear Lord,

**Thank you for being a liberating God. Help us, we pray, to recognize whatever bonds are holding us, turn them over to you, and marvel as you break them.
Amen.**

Twenty-five: Common - S.G. Thompson

“So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone.”

1 Corinthians 10:12-13

In this section of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, he is discussing the trials and tribulations faced by the Hebrews wandering in the desert. During those forty long years, they had plenty of opportunity to mess up—and they did. They complained, quarreled, gossiped, and even worshiped idols. Yes, God’s chosen people showed such scorn...and so do we.

Paul is giving us two very important messages here. The first is not to get complacent when we feel we’re doing well. The second is not to despair when we realize we’ve messed up. There are times in our spiritual lives when it is all too easy to take our relationship with God for granted. But when we aren’t overwhelmed by challenges or temptation, that’s exactly the time to ask more of ourselves! Those joyful seasons are times to reflect, to grow, and to give what we can to others. And when, inevitably, we face times of sorrow and strain, we can take comfort in the fact that our ancestors in the faith faced such times as well.

Dear Lord,

Help us to stay vigilant in the fight against sin. We thank you for the fact that we are all part of the communion of saints—imperfect, forgiven, and victorious in Christ.

Amen.

Twenty-six: Light - S.G. Thompson

“The sun shall no longer be your light by day, nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night, but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.”

Isaiah 60:19

Isaiah 60 contains a beautiful description of the redeemed Zion. We Christians might associate it with the New Jerusalem promised in the book of Revelation. Here, the scourges of violence, slavery, destruction, poverty, and sin are all gone, and we are free to bask in the glory of God.

Believe it or not, fasting can be a foretaste of heaven! And by fasting, I don't just mean abstaining from food—that's one way to fast, but not the only one. We all have something we hang onto for comfort, distraction...or light. Whether it's the light of a phone screen, a TV, a cigarette lighter, a refrigerator, or the glint of a shiny new credit card, we are always looking for something to illuminate our days. When we give one of those things up, even just temporarily, we create an opportunity to turn to the True Light. Fasting is the practice of living like angels: needing only the light of God.

Dear Lord,

You have created a world full of beauty, creativity, and joy, but we have used these resources to turn away from you. Strengthen us to fast from our earthly distractions so that we may instead feast at your heavenly table.

Amen.

Twenty-seven: Create - S.G. Thompson

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.” Psalm 51:10

The Bible begins with the story of creation—and rightly so. God’s mighty act of making the universe sets the stage for any other story that we as humankind could grasp. If we read the Bible from Genesis on, or even if we just observe the intricate beauty of nature, creativeness is the first thing we learn about God.

Sadly, as we grow up and our sense of wonder fades, we start to think of creation as a singular event in the past. Yes, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth,” but God didn’t stop there! Flowers bloom, tectonic plates mash together, generations beget generations, and so on. **God is doing creation work all the time, and just as God is not finished with this world, God is also not finished with you.**

That’s the beauty of our verse today. The psalmist is aching with guilt; he feels his bones are crushed (v. 8). Yet, by praying for a clean heart and new spirit, he demonstrates his faith in an eternally creative God. Nothing is exempt from God’s power to transform—not even sinners like us.

Dear Lord,

We come to you aware of our brokenness, weighed down by our sins. Re-form us, we pray, through the creative power of your grace, to better reflect your image in the world.

Amen.

Twenty-eight: Approach the Throne - S.G. Thompson
“Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:16

In this passage, the author of Hebrews describes Jesus as our Great High Priest, who gives us access to the very throne of God. Through His death and resurrection, Christ reconciles us to, and enables us to be in relationship with, God. For this reason, we can and should approach the Lord with boldness.

Of course, the primary way in which we approach God is through prayer. During Lent, we are invited to revitalize our prayer life and dedicate more time than usual to prayer. You may find, as I have, that there are so many things we forget to talk to God about! We may tend to pray about things we can't control—like war and disasters around the world—and fail to pray about things going on in our own lives, as if we could take care of those ourselves. At other times, we might pray about our own needs, but forget those of others. Very often, we neglect confession, praise, and thanksgiving. I invite you to think about what's missing in your prayer life, and approach the throne of grace with boldness!

Dear Lord,

We thank you for your precious Son, Jesus, who has empowered us to speak to you as your children.

Help us to remember this privilege and pray without ceasing.

Amen.

Twenty-nine: Anointing - S.G. Thompson

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’s feet, and wiped them with her hair.” John 12:3

Mary of Bethany is an interesting character. In the Gospel of Luke, we find her listening to Jesus while her sister Martha fusses about household duties. In John, she weeps over the death of her brother Lazarus, and her grief moves Jesus to tears. Then, in the next chapter—after Jesus has raised Lazarus from the dead and the chief priests have begun plotting his death—she anoints Jesus’s feet with an unseemly amount of perfume. Why? She knows he’s going to die.

You see, in Jesus’s time and place, nard was used to prepare bodies for burial. Mary understands what the twelve apostles, at this point, do not: Jesus is a dead man walking. She knows there’s not much time left, and she is lavishing care on him while she can. This is an act of worship.

What if we, the people redeemed by Jesus’s death and resurrection, worshiped like this? What if we poured our whole selves out on Jesus’s feet, acutely aware of his preciousness?

Dear Lord,

We thank you for the example of Mary. Give us eyes to see our own impermanence, and help us to value the time we spend with our Savior as fervently as she did.

Amen.

Thirty: Meditation - S.G Thompson

"I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word."

Psalm 119:15-16

In addition to prayer and fasting, another spiritual discipline that we practice during Lent is reading scripture. As we read in the beginning of this booklet, we do not live on bread alone, but every word that comes from the mouth of God! But what exactly is the right way to read scripture?

Of course, there are many beneficial approaches: hearing the Word proclaimed together as a congregation during worship, discussing scripture with other Christians in a Bible study, or even memorizing verses. But, as our psalm says, it is also important to meditate on scripture. Meditation can look a lot of different ways, but one way to start is by focusing on one Bible verse or passage and letting everything else go. In our daily lives, our thoughts and our bodies race to and fro; in meditation, we dismiss each distraction and follow only the path on which the scripture invites us. I know it's easier said than done...but try to find a quiet moment each day and allow yourself to delight in the precious Word of God.

Blessed Lord, who caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning: Grant us so to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

- From the 1979 Book of Common Prayer (pg. 236)

Thirty-one: The Spirit - S.G. Thompson

“In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.” Acts 2:17 (see also Joel 2:28)

In this passage, the disciples have just received the Holy Spirit. There are tongues of fire on their heads, they are speaking foreign languages...they are making quite a scene! Peter explains that this moment fulfills a prophecy: God is pouring out the Holy Spirit on all flesh. The Spirit gives everyone—men and women, young and old—the ability to testify to God’s glory. The next verse goes on to say that even slaves, the lowest of the low, will receive the power to prophesy.

Believe it or not, there are many reasons to contemplate the outpouring of the Spirit as we walk with Jesus to the cross. It was through the power of the Spirit that Jesus was conceived. The Spirit descended like a dove at Jesus’s baptism. Indeed, it was the Spirit who drew Jesus out into the wilderness for the forty days of fasting that Lent imitates! The Spirit moves the Jesus story—and now the same Spirit has been given to us. During Lent, let us be upheld in our discipline by the Spirit. Let us explore the gifts that the Spirit has given us for the upbuilding of God’s Kingdom. And let us, like Christ, allow ourselves to be led wherever the Spirit wills us to go.

Dear Lord,

We thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Help us, in this contemplative season, to better hear the Spirit’s voice in our hearts and honor the outpouring of your love upon all people.

Amen.

Thirty-two: Hard To Believe - S.G. Thompson

“Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it...for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God.”

John 12:42-43

It can be hard to believe in Jesus. I’m not just talking about the fact that some elements of our faith—the virgin birth, the resurrection, and so on—are beyond human reason. I’m talking about following a first-century Jew who wanders around preaching unpopular opinions and dining with unpopular people, bucking imperial and religious authority, and winds up dying a slave’s death on a cross. Now, that’s a tough one. But that’s exactly what we’re up to: we’re wandering with the Son of Man, Son of God, Jesus Christ.

Giving to the poor is not a great way to get ahead. Being meek, being a peacemaker, loving your enemies—that’s not how you win a fight. And, as the synagogue leaders realized, confessing that Jesus is the highest authority won’t make you popular. But we go on believing in Jesus, because we know he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. As Peter put it when Jesus asked the disciples if they wanted to leave, “Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

Dear Lord,

We thank you for the divine and difficult message of Jesus. Help us to delight in the humble path of the cross, knowing that the glory that comes from you is the only worthy prize.

Amen.

Thirty-three: The Interests of Others

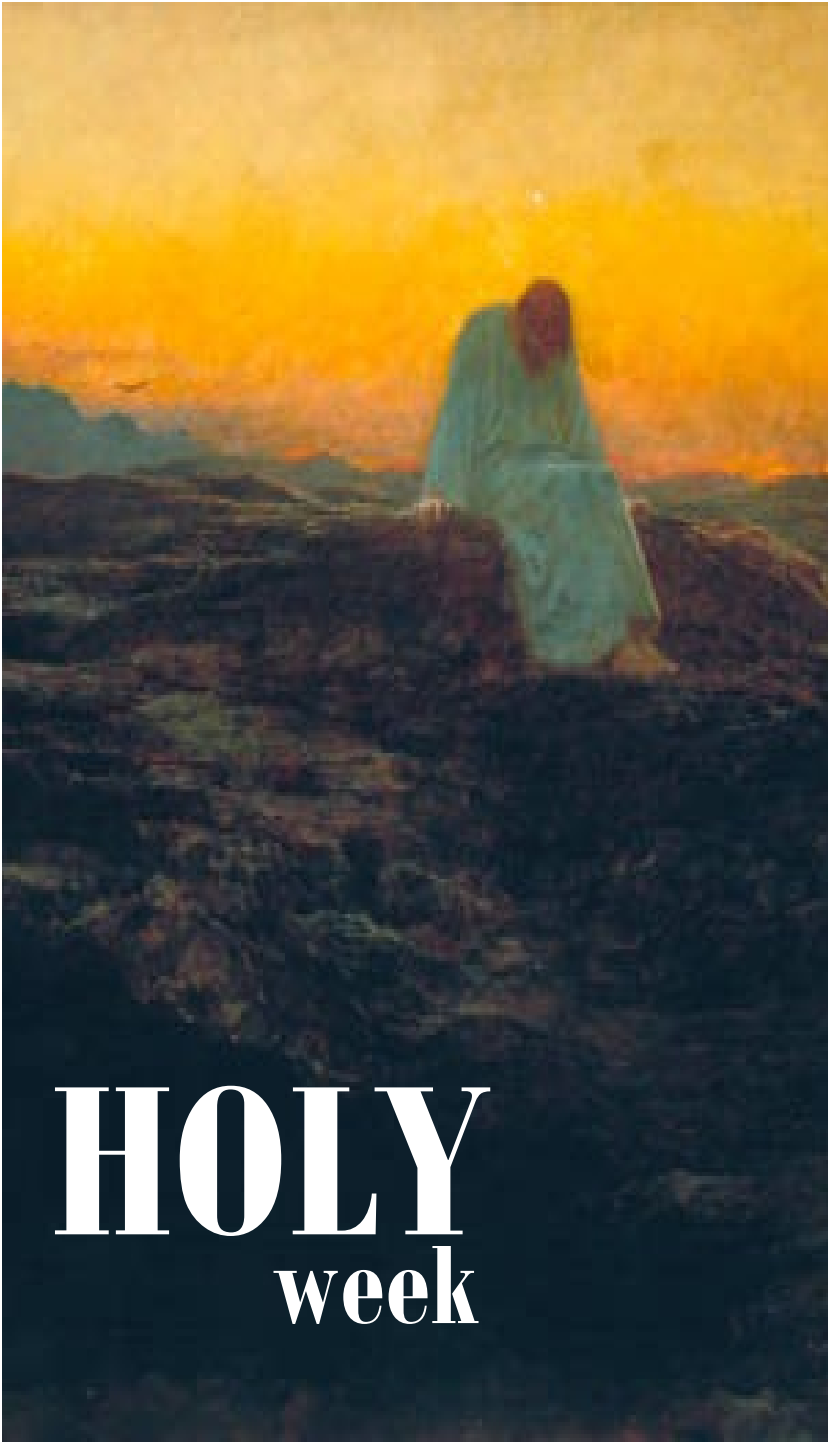
- S.G. Thompson

“Let each of you look not to your own interests but to the interests of others.” **Philippians 2:4**

One of the spiritual disciplines often practiced during Lent is almsgiving, or giving to those in need. Not everyone has financial resources to give, but whether it's time, talent, or treasure, there's always something we can offer to others. It's especially appropriate to do so as we remember how Christ gave everything for us!

The spirit of serving others applies not just to almsgiving, but to all of our relationships. In this passage, Paul calls upon the Philippians to put aside “selfish ambition” and “empty conceit” (v. 3) and instead prioritize the good of their fellow community members. Even in communities less troubled than that of the Philippians seems to have been, that isn't always easy! But Paul reminds us that the posture of humility is the posture of Christ. As we seek to give of ourselves to those we know and those we don't, let us meditate on the words of this prayer attributed to St. Francis:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.



HOLY
week

Thirty-four: He Is Calling You - S.G. Thompson

“Jesus stood still and said, ‘Call him here.’ And they called the blind man, saying to him, ‘Take heart; get up, he is calling you.’”

Mark 10:49

In Mark 10, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus calls out to Jesus asking for mercy. As often happens in such stories, folks tell him to be quiet...but he persists. He knows who Jesus is, and what Jesus can do. This is his chance at a new life.

Instead of going over to Bartimaeus, Jesus stays still and has His disciples call the man over. The blind man has to abandon what was probably a pretty good begging spot and make his way through the crowd to Jesus. Some would be discouraged by this, but not Bartimaeus! He not only leaves his spot, but throws off his cloak in his eagerness to meet the Son of David. Jesus heals his blindness, giving him a new life.

The words of the disciples to Bartimaeus are also words to us: “Take heart; get up, he is calling you.” Every day, Christ calls to us, offers healing, and even gives us the courage we need to answer. But it’s up to us. We have to take action, to respond with enthusiasm. What are we willing to give up to answer the call, to meet Jesus, and to gain from Him a new life?

Dear Lord,

We thank you for so persistently and mercifully calling to us. Give us strength, we pray, not only to leave our old lives behind, but to leap up with joy to meet you.

Amen.

Thirty-five: The Eternal Imprint – Dr. Andrews

The new ink says it all: a simple cross and “into the light” tattooed across the abdomen of three-time Olympic swimming champion, Adam Peaty.

After his well-publicized battles with depression and alcohol, Peaty has come to know Jesus and found in his faith the strength and peace he needs:

“A gold medal is the coldest thing you wear... I really didn’t have a community outside of sport,” he admits. “For me, the only fulfillment and the only peace is every Sunday at church. It is those everyday prayers that keep me inspired, but also keep me on the right track.”

Our world is dismissive of such practices as corporate worship and disciplined prayer. During Lent, we are reminded that we follow the disciplines of God (regardless of the pull of our surroundings) in order to be connected with our Holy God. Nothing mundane in the world can provide for our deepest needs; only the permanent and indwelling presence of our Creator, Sustainer, and Redeemer will take us to victory.

Hebrews 1:3: *“He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...”*

Prayer Reflection: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full on his wonderful face. Let the things of earth grow strangely dim by the light of His glory and grace.”

- Adapted from the hymn by Helen Howarth Lemmel

Thirty-six: Journeys – Dr. Andrews

We feel like our trek through life is often happenstance, or perhaps insignificant. Each morning brings similar routines and requirements, along with unwanted responsibilities. In low moments, most of us question if our life will “add up to anything” significant, as it were. “Am I just like a hamster on a wheel?” we ask ourselves.

Hear this: the significance of “showing up” and offering ourselves in service to God each day cannot be overestimated! Even in our flaws, our walk with God will amount to unimagined significance. Our life is never futile within God’s grip. That little mustard seed Jesus talks about reminds us we have everything we need to “live big and go far” in the Kingdom of God.

My friend got a Fitbit 11 years ago. This year, just before the beginning of Lent, he realized he had walked 50,244,000 steps, about the amount needed to walk around the world!

Matthew 17:20: *“Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you.”*

Prayer: Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you, Praised for you or criticized for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service.

- Taken from John Wesley’s Covenant Prayer

Thirty-seven: Disaster Relief – Dr. Andrews

I really love Tom Papa, the stand up comedian. He has a “bit” on Youtube in which he says, “When your kid gets sick in the middle of the night, you do more chores in 10 minutes than you did the four years you were in college. Bagging stuff up, carrying bodies, doing laundry, It’s like you are working for FEMA in the middle of the night!” (This is so true. Anyone with children knows the horror of a little one struck with a stomach virus.)

As the comedian unfurls this scenario in his routine, he comments that his wife produces an all natural cleaner, called Orange Peel Mist, for handling the mess. (Tom Papa comments that his wife wants to save the planet with all-natural cleaners.) “It really works,” she says. “No it doesn’t!” he insists, continuing on to say, “They wouldn’t have invented all those other products if orange juice did the trick.” Tom Papa continues on to extol the virtues of good ole “Mr. Clean.” Yes, we all know that Mr. Clean is “the man” for the job.

Here’s the thing about Lent: the closer we get to Good Friday, the more we realize that the only one powerful enough to overcome the horrific mess of our failings and sin is The Man, God incarnate, who brings power and redemption not found in the natural world.

Strap on your seatbelt. Holy Week is a disaster, and human sin and hatred is the headliner. But there is One who cleans our rotted souls and gives us a new life and breath. He gives us relief from ourselves.

Pray the scripture from Isaiah 50 and Psalm 70:

It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty? Be pleased, O God, to deliver me. O LORD, make haste to help me! Let those be put to shame and confusion who seek my life.

Maundy Thursday: A New Commandment

– Dr. Andrews

On this day, most Christians think about the Passover meal containing two piercing moments: the washing of the disciples' feet by Jesus and the betrayal of Jesus by Judas. With regard to the former, Jesus reveals to an embarrassed group of disciples that they have yet again missed the big picture. Rather than being treated as the guest of honor at the Passover meal, he is ignored while the disciples scramble for a prime spot at the table, neglecting the ritual of cleaning up for supper. Demonstrating once again his servant mission of love, Christ wraps a towel around his waist and cleans the feet of his followers.

Could we fairly assert that the eleven, obtuse disciples are any better than Judas, the betrayer, who also misunderstood Christ and struggled with his own self-interest? Regardless, we have a dinner, a last supper, bookended with two moments highlighting grubby and insecure disciples. And if we do not see ourselves with similar or identical flaws, then we are frankly not seeing ourselves at all!

The pivotal moment in that fateful evening was not the mistakes of the disciples, however, but rather something quite wonderful: the commandment entrusted to them by Christ, flawed as they were. In this new mandate, Jesus offers a key steppingstone over the troubled waters of human selfishness: love. It is always love. Unselfishly love each other and everyone else. Let it be a reflection of Christ's love for them. This is the New Mandate, "The Great Mandatum." It is to be practiced as often as breathing and eating.

John 13:34-35: *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."*

What's so good about Good Friday? – Dr. Andrews

Suggested Reading: **John chapters 18-19**

Growing up, my perception of the Easter season encompassed Palm Sunday and the joy of waving branches in church linked with the celebration of a resurrection on Easter Sunday. Included was the excitement of getting an Easter dress and new church shoes to wear through the summer. (Mary Janes from Collin's Orthopedic Store).

I'm embarrassed to admit how old I was before the horror of Good Friday really affected me. Reading the account of Christ's betrayal in Garden, the conversation with Pontius Pilate, the dastardly intentions of Caiaphas and Annas, the fickle crowd who chose Barabbas over Jesus, the cowardice of Christ's own disciples, the brutality of a Roman crucifixion, the utter insensitivity of soldiers casting lots for Jesus's tunic, mousy Nicodemus who could have used his reputation to help Christ, and the touching gesture of Joseph of Arimathea who donated a family tomb for a pauper king. Where is the good in all of this? Where is the sense in Christ offering the cup of forgiveness to his disciples on Thursday and then declaring his intention to drink of the cup of death and sacrifice not 24 hours later?

It is ALL too inconceivably terrible, but it needs to be tragic so that no platitudes or quick and easy theologies can explain it away. Jesus died a terrible, painful death. There was no good...only God.

Good Friday should make us desperate for divine goodness/ God-ness. Only then can we move on to the rest of the story with sincerity and desperate gratitude.

One man sleeps while another prays,
one man schemes while,
while another betrays,
Many souls watch while others meanly march behind the innocent
God man.
Who is guilty and who is spared?
All of us, both...

Holy Saturday – Rev. Andrew Thompson

Suggested Reading: **Job 14:1-14**

We call this day “Holy Saturday,” commemorating not only the burial of Jesus, but also his descent to death. Frankly, it feels anything but holy at this point in the passion story—Jesus is quite literally in the dirt and grime of humanity. He’s deader than dead. The G-d we said created the world and will save it, has now died. Yes, he will rise on Easter, but we’re not at that point yet. He is dead. Period.

At the death of Jesus, we lost our hope. The carpet has been pulled out from underneath us. Jesus is experiencing and sharing in the hopelessness that we may so often face in this life.

Job reminisces, “Mortals die and are laid low; humans expire, and where are they? As waters fail from a lake, and a river wastes away and dries up, so mortals lie down and do not rise again; until the heavens are no more, they will not awake or be roused out of their sleep.” (Job 14:10-12)

It’s so important not only to realize that Jesus had died, but that he shared and experienced the hopelessness that death reminds us of. Life can be painful. Life is killing us. It’s so tragic, so awful. Luckily, Jesus is right there with us, knowing what we feel and feeling it with us.

Oh Lord, how can we cope?

Life is killing us,

Our sin overwhelms us.

So often, we shout, “Where is God in this mess?”

Help us, oh Lord, to look over to the crucifix next to ours, that we may see you’re going through it with us. Amen.



OUR MISSION

"The mission of the church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."

OUR VISION

"We invite people to participate in deeper relationships with God, a faith community of all ages, and a world in need."

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