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Lent
devotional

ST. JOHN'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
BOYERTOWN



On behalf of the congregation of St. John's Lutheran Church in Boyertown, Pennsylvania, we offer this Lenten devotional as a gift of witness to all who may use it to read, reflect, and pray. In these heartfelt offerings, you'll hear about love, faithfulness, justice, mercy, and hope. We hope these messages stir something in you that helps focus how you pray, study Scripture, and engage in holy conversation with others during Lent.

How to use this devotional: Find what works best for you. We suggest setting aside quiet time and beginning with a prayer of discernment. Read the passage assigned for the day in your own Bible, and then read the devotion offered for it. Close with the prayer at the end. And if you have the time, sit still a bit longer and see what stirs in you and maybe even write that down.

Another option is to read it as you are able! That works, too!

One note: there are forty days in Lent – those Sundays in between Ash Wednesday and the resurrection of our Lord don't 'count' as Lent. Recall, every Sunday is a 'little Easter' because we commemorate the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ whenever we celebrate the sacrament of holy communion. That's why we offer the Gospel readings without commentary for each of the Sundays during the Lenten season.

Welcome to the 2026 Lenten journey.

As we enter into this season of preparation for Easter, we do so with a spirit of solemnity, beginning these forty days of penitent self-reflection. I cannot think of a Lenten season in my lifetime when I've ever felt collectively more broken, more in a Lenten "mood," when a season of focusing on dying to self and becoming more like Christ felt more essential. Matthew 6 begins with the words "Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven." The Gospel writer goes on to describe the hypocritical alms givers and public prayers and miserable fasters. Perhaps the 2026 version of this are those posting on social media about what they're giving up for Lent? Or those claiming to love Jesus while celebrating their neighbor's downfall behind closed doors? Do we dare call out the hypocrisy of claiming to be pro-life while truly only being pro-birth? I think about learning the Ten Commandments as a child and being taught to not take the Lord's name in vain. I think I understand that more than ever as I look around at people who claim the name of God and fail to love their neighbors not just by what they don't do, but by what they actively do. Lord have mercy on us all.

I look at the faces of my teenagers trying to understand what is happening in our country, how innocent people are being shot in the streets after dropping their babies off at school or trying to help their neighbor. I think about the conversations we've had about power carrying responsibility, and how they are to use their privilege to lift others. And now they see the cost of helping someone, of lifting another, as potentially their own life. I look at a country being torn apart, and I think how much we have to be penitent of. We are so very broken. If we say we didn't see this coming, it is only because our eyes were closed.

This passage concludes with reminding us that our true treasure is in heaven. When we live that every day, our hearts will be there also. With hearts softened toward the Lamb of God, may we love like Jesus, even when it's hard. May we reflect Christ more than self in this season of Lent and every day after.

Lord, forgive us for choosing not to see. Lord, forgive us for choosing our own power over love. Lord forgive us. And Lord, may this season of Lent truly change us from the inside. Give us new eyes, softened hearts, and may we love like you. Amen.

Amanda Ehst

I always love reading a passage in the bible where suddenly I go, “Oh, hey! I recognize those verses! We sing that at church!” And this happens to be one of them. What I didn’t know before reading the text was that this was David crying out to God to forgive him for his adultery with Bathseba and the murder of her husband.Oh, David! That’s pretty bad! God forgave his sins but I was NOT aware that was the context behind the sweet and short hymn I’ve been singing since I was a child (but this is a really, really beautiful thing about reading the Word — how it can change your perspective just like that).

But now that I DO know, I have a whole different perspective and meaning to an aspect of worship that I largely thought was done to say, “Hey, God! Help us to turn to you! Please don’t leave us! We love you!” Which is kind of silly, when of course we know God would never turn away from us. But at times, it really feels like you’ve sinned so badly, how could the Lord stay with you. But that’s where the Lord reveals himself so well — his mercy unto us. David deserved punishment. But he is forgiven, because God is a forgiving God.

Almighty God, help us to turn to you, especially when we feel our lowest - the most undeserving. Reveal your mercy unto us and grant us peace. For you are always with us, in our happiest and saddest of days. Amen.

Rachael Geary

In this passage Paul shows his gratitude to the Romans for their faith. He also expresses his yearning to visit the Romans and to preach his message to them. Paul believes it's his calling to preach to the Gentiles in Rome as well as to anyone who is present. Paul believes that the power of God is worth preaching to all people. This passage shows that Paul has the word of God in his heart. He is not silent in his faith, and he teaches us a lesson that we should continue to spread the word to everyone we meet.

Regardless of your personal challenges, it is our calling to keep the faith and spread the gospel. While life can continually create challenges, continue to have faith and spread the gospel message to everyone you meet.

Lord, thank You for the faith You've grown in me. Strengthen my desire to serve others and encourage their walk with You. Fill me with courage to share the hope of the gospel without hesitation. Teach me to live by faith each day, trusting in Your power and righteousness. Amen.

Matthew Robb

True Fasting

In this passage, Isaiah tells Israel that God sees that they are insincere and hypocritical about fasting. The people of Israel are complaining that, while they perform the fasting ritual; God doesn't seem to be with them, they don't feel His presence. They perform the ritual with great show, but they don't live as God wants them to - in humility and repentance. The fasting act and their behavior are not aligned.

Although there are some diets that prescribe fasting for its health effects, we generally no longer fast; but while this passage is about fasting, the lesson goes much deeper. How many times do we flaunt our piety and yet live differently? We sometimes enhance our lifestyle for everyone to see, but we don't follow the basics of godly obedience. We should be living, fasting and praying, not to prove we are godly, but to grow closer to God.

God desires us to help others—free the oppressed, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, and clothe those in need. We should strive to live as God wants, letting our actions reflect true devotion. Then we will feel the closeness of God.

Thank you, God, for your blessings. Help us to humbly do your work and guide our thoughts, words, and deeds so that they are pleasing to you. Amen.

Jim Kershner

Jesus experiences anew the temptations that Israel faced in the wilderness. As the Son of God, he endures the testing of the evil one.

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tested by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.' " Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' " Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory, and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' " Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Sympathy is appreciated when going through a rough time—to have others acknowledge your pain and suffering helps you to not feel invisible and to know that others care. However, empathy is even more important than sympathy. Those high in empathy tend to be more forgiving, more helpful, and more engaged in volunteer work. The world would be a better place if all were high in empathy. At an individual level, being the recipient of empathy is often much more powerful than sympathy. To know that you are not alone, to know that your suffering and pain are seen, heard and *understood* by another helps you feel connected in times you might otherwise feel isolated. To me, this is what makes Jesus' time on earth so profoundly important.

God cared for us so much that he sent his Son to live like us, to be tested and to suffer as we do, so that He could have true empathy for us. As it says in the text, “For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way...” God the Father always loved us, but then He sent us Jesus, who saw us as His brothers and sisters, so that we could have not only a loving God, but also an empathetic God. God knew how important empathy was, and how crucial it would be for His children to have a God that could empathize with their struggles. Because we know that God understands us, we are then able to turn to Him more readily for support. Additionally, because we love God and want to follow Him, we are called to show empathy for others.

Dear Lord, thank you for the gift of Jesus, who came to help us by living like us and alongside us. It is such a blessing to know that we are Your children, loved and understood by You. Please help us to cultivate empathy for others, and through that empathy, to show love and kindness for one another. Amen.

Chelsea Hersperger

The story of Cain and Abel is a familiar part of the Bible. The brothers each bring offerings to God. God is more pleased with Abel's offering because it is the best cuts of meat from his flock while Cain's offering is whatever fruit he happened to have. Cain's response to the situation is to kill Abel. God banishes Cain as a fugitive and a wanderer for his actions. Maybe the story of Cain and Abel is a little too familiar because we have heard it so often. If we look closer, the story of Cain and Abel is really our story too.

Let's play with the scenario. Think of the last situation that got you extremely upset. Maybe it was a harsh comment from a coworker. Maybe you got cut off in traffic. Maybe your sibling ate the last slice of pizza you had saved for yourself. What was your reaction? The goal is to always have a reaction that reflects the love of Jesus, but sometimes that doesn't happen. We say the first words that come to mind based on our strongest emotion. How did your scenario get resolved? In the situation of Cain and Abel, God punished Cain for his actions. Then God showed grace and mercy. Even in Cain's sin, God still loved him. He marked Cain to protect him so that anyone who killed him would "suffer sevenfold vengeance" (v. 15). The Bible doesn't say if Cain repented or asked for forgiveness, yet God made sure he was taken care of anyway.

God had every right to give Cain what he deserved, but he didn't. God grants us that same grace and mercy. We all have sinned. He wants us to come to him when we have sinned to repent, and to ask forgiveness of those we have sinned against. On the cross Jesus took on the sin of the world because God loved us that much.

Dear God, thank you for your endless love for us. Thank you for the abundant grace and mercy you extend to us when we sin. We need your grace and mercy every day. Amen.

Steph Krause

This is a reminder of all the things I need to remember DAILY and so do you.

- God loves us – each one of us, as individuals. He knows you and He loves you!
- God forgives sin – ALL sin. He does not want us to live in guilt. We are forgiven, not just today, but every day. Each day is a new day, the “slate wiped clean.”

So lay it all down, all that crap you’ve been hauling around, those chains that we drag from our pasts. Let them drop!

Let it out, speak it out, yell it out, scream it out. “Satan, you can no longer use this against me, I belong to my Lord, Jesus Christ and so do ALL my sins.” It is done! Then take a deep breath, close your eyes, focus on Jesus’ face and give thanks!

Praise His name, tell Him how much you love Him, how grateful you are that He’s your Savior, that He died and rose again, just for YOU. Our sins were left at the cross. Be free in Christ my friend!

Here’s a favorite song of praise, “Shout to the Lord” (Darlene Zschech). Give it a try, lift your voices, and sing out loud to our Lord and Savior.

Shout to the Lord
All the earth, let us sing
Power and majesty, praise to the King
Mountains bow down and the seas will roar
At the sound of Your name
I sing for joy at the work of Your hands
Forever I'll love You, forever I'll stand
Nothing compares to the promise I have in You

Holy Spirit, fill us to overflowing. Focus our minds and hearts on the goodness of Christ. Let us praise His name with shouts of joy, as we thank Him for all He blesses us with daily. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Ros Moatz

Paul wrote this passage to Timothy once they were separated during Paul's second imprisonment. Paul uses this letter to remind Timothy that he is in Paul's prayers and that his faith is present and mighty.

Timothy inherited his faith through his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice. Paul tells this to Timothy to show that his faith didn't appear out of nowhere, but it was practiced by his own family.

This letter is written to show that even in hard situations, you must remain proud and vocal about your faith. And your faith should not make you fearful but make you more powerful if you use your gifts from God.

Dear God, I pray that you reveal our gifts to each of us and give us opportunities to use them in professing our faith. Amen.

Camryn & Tatum Friz

This passage from Romans invites us into one of the most freeing truths of Lent: our worth before God is not something we achieve, but something we receive.

Paul speaks to people who knew the law well, people who tried hard to do the right thing, to live faithfully, to measure up. And then he says something startling: “But now.” A shift has happened. God’s righteousness has been revealed apart from the law. Not earned through obedience. Not secured by perfection. Given through grace.

Lent often exposes how deeply we rely on our own efforts. We fast. We try to be good enough, faithful enough, strong enough. We compare ourselves to others. We quietly keep score. Paul names the truth plainly: all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. That sentence levels the ground beneath our feet. No one stands above another. No one has room to boast.

And yet, this is not a passage meant to leave us discouraged. It leads us directly into hope. We are justified by God’s grace as a gift. Grace is not a consolation prize for those who failed. It is the foundation of our relationship with God. Lent reminds us that self-justification is exhausting, and ultimately impossible. God does not ask us to prove ourselves. God asks us to trust.

As you walk through Lent, this text invites you to loosen your grip on striving. To stop measuring yourself by success, productivity, or comparison. Faith is not about earning approval. It is about receiving grace and allowing it to change how we live.

As you reflect, consider:

- Where am I trying to justify myself instead of trusting God’s grace?
- What would it look like to rest in the truth that grace is a gift, not a reward?
- How might receiving grace reshape how I see myself and others?

Lent is not a season of proving our worth. It is a season of remembering who we belong to.

Faithful God, in this season of Lent, help me to release my striving to earn Your love. Teach me to trust in Your grace, given freely through Christ. Shape my heart by mercy, that I may live humbly and faithfully before You. Amen.

Sarah Eidle

The Faith of the Centurion

In these verses Luke tells of Jesus entering Capernaum. Some Jewish elders speak on the Centurion's behalf to ask Jesus to heal his servant. The elders spoke on the Centurion's behalf because they felt he was a good man and he had done things to help the Jewish community. The Centurion was a Gentile but he believed in Jesus – he had faith in him. However, after the elders had spoken to Jesus, the Centurion doubted that he deserved to have Jesus come to his house or to heal his servant. Even though the Centurion had power, he knew Jesus had been given something more. Jesus saw the Centurion trusted and believed in him, even more than the elders knew about God and how he worked.

It doesn't matter who you are, how much money you have, what job you have, or where you live, it's about believing and having faith. Do you have that kind of faith? Many times when we pray for something – healing, a job, a good grade on a test, guidance – it is not always fulfilled the way we wanted it. But God always provides. Sometimes we just need to listen, look, and find the good. We just need to have faith.

Heavenly Father, thank you for our many blessings. Help us to see where we can help and serve. You gave your only Son to die for us, to save us and to grant us everlasting life. Help us to have the faith and devotion that the Centurion had in you. Amen.

Mary Kay Heimbach

A curious Pharisee visits Jesus by night to learn from the teacher his friends reject. Jesus speaks to him about life in the Spirit and the kingdom of God.

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with that person." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"

"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen, yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Complaints

This story tells us of Moses and the Israelites' journey to the Red Sea. Moses, under God's direction, heard constant complaints from the people about the length of the trip and the lack of food and water. Even though they were given manna for food and water from a rock, the people grew tired of them. The people denied Moses and God saying they were not helping them. As a result, God was so displeased that He sent poisonous snakes among them. Some became ill and some died from their bites. After complaining about the snakes, they asked Moses to pray that the snakes be removed. God told Moses to make a metal snake and attach it to a pole so that anyone who looked at the snake and confessed their sins would be healed and forgiven.

On our life journey, we all tend to complain about what God has provided for us. It could be that what He provided is too late [for our liking] or not what we expected. We need to remember this story and have a grateful attitude for the blessings that we receive.

Heavenly Father, thank you for all our blessings. Remind us of your greatest blessing of all, your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Phyllis Kershner

The passage emphasizes justification by faith. Abraham's righteousness is by faith not works. Faith is not only for a certain group. It is for all who believe in the power of God's promise. The promise made to Abraham and his descendants was the understanding he had with God through faith. Faith acceptance is what brings forgiveness and righteousness.

It is faith that is related to grace in the same way works is related to law. Fundamentals are grace and law. Faith and works are the means by which we follow principles for our relationship with God. It is by God's grace we are saved. Faith and grace are consistent.

The righteousness of Abraham is a central biblical theme. It is a model for believers. Righteousness is more than absence of evil and guilt. Righteousness is a positive good and shows that God declares us righteous.

These verses are reminders of the power of faith and the promise of salvation through faith. Believers are encouraged to trust in God and share the message with others. It is hoped that barriers that often divide can be broken down.

Lord God, Heavenly Father, as we go through Lent quiet our hearts when we rush ahead and slow our steps. Help us to be thankful for so many blessings. In faith, we thank and praise you. Amen.

Dave Long

Let us remember that Lent is not the time to do, but the time to sit in the stillness of God. It is the time to look at ourselves deeply and recognize if we are aligning with God and his name. Sometimes a child of God loses the path of God. Discipline or repentance is not a cure to our sins. Quietly sitting in our faith and embodying being a child of God is our way to forgiveness of sins. When we lose sight of God, God will act and cleanse us. This is what God did with the Israelites. Instead of leaving Israel in turmoil and despair, God acted. God enlightened people with faith which allowed the people to prosper. This passage reminds us that during Lent, we should sit with the solitude of life and God will send his message. In those moments of stillness and reflection, we will see the beauty of God and be replenished with the name of God.

Gracious God, during this time of Lent, draw us into your stillness. Quiet our hearts so we may see ourselves honestly and recognize where we need your guiding light. Teach us that forgiveness is not found in striving, but in resting in You and remembering who we are as Your children. When we lose our way, cleanse us with Your mercy and restore our faith. Help us trust in silence and in solitude, You are present, speaking, and renewing us by your Holy name, Amen.

Abbe Grofe

Who's your #1?

In our modern society, the phrase, "Your #1" (or You're #1) is often used to express being the best, favorite, or top choice. Usually, it references a business, employee, client/customer, sports team, or singer/band/song: "Top of the charts!" We have become so focused on "being #1" and "looking out for #1." Popular slang also refers to a "Plus 1," as in, you may bring a significant other to a wedding, for instance. Then, there's your "Day 1," meaning a very close, loyal friend who has been there for you from the very beginning, through good times and bad.

Clearly, in Paul's witness to the Colossians, Christ is #1. He was made first, before anything else. Jesus is the first born from the dead. He is first in everything. And, through His death on the cross, we have received His grace. A path was cleared for all creation to come to God and be sanctified. All we need to do is just believe and trust Jesus to save us.

Just as Paul told of the Good News, so should we spread the Gospel about how our #1 died for us on the cross, trusting in His salvation. Put Christ first. Is He your #1, Day 1, or just your Plus 1?

Almighty Savior, Creator of the universe, thank you for being there for us since the beginning. You are the first to be resurrected. May we show our joy and thanksgiving for your salvation, offering our first fruits and putting you first in our lives. Forgive us for our prideful ways. Amen.

Lori Shoemaker

When I read this passage, I am reminded of our most important unifying characteristic as human beings: We are all children of God.

Have you ever stopped to think about how amazing it is that there are over 8 billion people on the planet, and no two are exactly alike? That is pretty amazing. How do you make 8 billion of anything and not have some repeats? If that isn't a miracle, I don't know what is!

But flip that script for a minute. Not only does the world have 8 billion people who are all uniquely different, but we all have one thing in common, too – We are all children of God. That's a miracle, too! Over 8 BILLION people who are ALL children of God!

That means wherever you may go in this world, no matter who you meet, you all have that common thread – You are brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul reminds us that if we focus on what unifies us instead of what divides us, we can become a community.

Dear Heavenly Father, as we move through the Lenten season, let us remember that we all share a common thread – We are all born out of Your love, in Your image. We are sisters and brothers in Christ. Help us to build on this community – our community of faith – so we can shine our collective light of Jesus' love in the world. Amen.

Angie Berkosky

The passage begins with the Israelites showing disobedience when they fail to observe the Sabbath. Earlier in the chapter, the Israelites were instructed from Moses to gather manna every day except the Sabbath, but when it came to the day of rest, some were disobedient and continued to hunt for manna. After all that time working under Pharaoh's control, why wouldn't they rest? Did they fear they wouldn't have enough food? How often do we lack trust in God and disobey because of fear?

Moses must feel like the frustrated oldest sibling, left to watch over younger ones, with strict instructions from their parents, instructions which the children refuse or are incapable of following. But God shows patience, by instructing the Israelites (younger siblings) through Moses, to preserve the manna and that remains a Jewish tradition to this day.

Heavenly Father, grow our faith, teach us to trust in you even when we're afraid. Give us the strength and courage to share our faith with others as a witness to your glory. Amen.

Jen Friz

Jesus defies convention to engage a Samaritan woman in conversation. Her testimony, in turn, leads many others to faith.

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband,' for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When

he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you want?” or, “Why are you speaking with her?” Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?” They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, “Rabbi, eat something.” But he said to them, “I have food to eat that you do not know about.” So the disciples said to one another, “Surely no one has brought him something to eat?” Jesus said to them, “My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, ‘Four months more, then comes the harvest’? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, ‘One sows and another reaps.’ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor.”

Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me everything I have ever done.” So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.”

Many of us feel the strain of division these days, not just in our country, but in our own families. Politics, values, and strong opinions have created distance at dinner tables and silence between people who once felt close. John reminds us that following Jesus means walking in truth and love, even when it is hard.

John says truth is something we should live out, not something we use as a weapon. During this Lenten season we should look closely at how we speak to one another, especially to those closest to us. Do our words, posts, and conversations reflect Christ? Truth matters, but it is meant to be carried with love.

John also warns us to be careful about the voices we follow. When outside voices begin to shape our relationships more than our faith does, Lent is meant to call us back to Jesus, who came in love and humility.

Finally, John points toward the joy that comes from real connection, “face to face”. Lent reminds us that healing personally and nationally will not come from winning arguments, but from walking daily in humility, repentance, and love.

God, bring your truth and love into our families and our communities. Heal what is broken, soften our hearts, and lead us in the way of Christ. Amen.

Jason Friz

This passage reminds me of the current state of the country and how people are treating other people. In current times, there is division. Instead of looking at everyone as human and as a child of God, people treat others poorly based on the appearance of another person or the cultural background of a person. This passage reminds us that we are ALL children of God. When the Israelite people were walking across the sea, all were accepted. As said in the passage, they all drank the same drink and ate the same food. No matter the difference between each person. They were all following God and walking under the same clouds, just like us. I think that this is something that we all should remind ourselves of everyday. Even though there might be differences between people, at the end of the day, we all drink the same water and eat the same foods. We all are under the clouds of God and should treat people like sisters and brothers in Christ.

Dear Lord, thank you for reminding us that we are all Your children, called to walk under your care. Forgive us for the ways we judge, divide, or turn away from one another based on appearances or differences. Help us to see every person as You see them, worthy of love, dignity, and grace. Make our hearts come together so that we may treat one another as sisters and brothers in Christ by sharing the same hope, the same nourishment, and faith in your loving name, Amen.

Abbe Grofe

Be appalled, be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD in verse 12. What situation merits such a visceral reaction? God's people have forsaken him and the living water that he offers. Not only that, but they have made pitiful attempts at creating a substitution. In place of the clean, fresh, sustaining fountain that God sets forth, the people are trying to slurp muddy droplets out of filthy, cracked cisterns. Yuck.

Jeremiah is a prophet, so his job is to pass God's messages to the people. As Jeremiah begins his long, exhausting career, God's people have spent generations breaking their covenant relationship with God and pursuing their own ends. God is getting ready to make good on his promised judgment—exile. In fact, that exile will come during Jeremiah's lifetime. Jeremiah is delivering desperate final warnings.

Where did the people go wrong? They *did not* say "Where is the LORD?" They responded to God's good acts (bringing them out of Egypt, leading them safely through the rough and complicated wilderness, providing them a land of plenty) with careless disregard. Twice this passage notes that they "went after things that did not profit," or worthless things. But the bottom line, according to God, is this: They did not KNOW ME.

Even in this solid denunciation, there is good news. "Therefore I still contend with you," declares the LORD (verse 9). Another version says, "I bring charges against you." A parent correcting a child is committed to improving the child's path. The parent remains lovingly engaged with the child, despite the rocky feel of discipline. God does not mirror Israel's abandonment and abandon them. Rather, God takes the time to correct them—and we know that ultimately, God's goal is restoration.

Thank you, LORD, that you contend with us when we go wrong. We read about Israel's mistakes, and we don't want to mimic them. Instead, we ask: Where are you, LORD? We want to know you and follow you, accepting no substitutions. Amen.

Bethany Calderwood

Oh look! A list! Do good stuff, don't do bad stuff.

Lists like this can be easy to affirm and hard to remember. Let's put this list in context. Paul (writer of this letter) has been talking to his readers about their thinking. He tells them not to engage in futile thinking, but to get a new attitude of their minds. The mind is a powerful tool. How are we supposed to flip from futile thinking to a new attitude, like God's attitude?

1. **Truth:** Remove falsehood, replacing it with truthful speech. Output counts—what you say or present to others should be true. Input counts—think about true things! If you know a source (digital, print, media) is regularly full of lies, choose something else to chew on.
2. **Anger:** Note, this text does not forbid anger. Two questions: What do you do when or because you're angry? How long do you stay angry?
3. **Contribution:** No stealing. Work hard and share what you rightfully earn. Note that productive work can be a helpful antidote to futile thinking.
4. **Talk:** How many speech-related admonitions can you name in one minute? What we say matters greatly. "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth (verse 29)." Think. Before. You. Speak. (Or text. Or post. . .)
5. **Attitude:** Say no to bitterness and rage; say yes to kindness and compassion. This sounds so obvious, but it is such an easy trap to fall into. Kindness and compassion will naturally improve your ability to address the rest of this list.
6. **Forgiveness:** Paul's list wraps up with a tough one. Forgiveness can be incredibly heavy, in ways that are beyond the scope of a brief devotional. If that's on your heart, pursue the topic. But think, also, of the sneaky, petty instances of socially acceptable unforgiveness that permeate our days. Small-scale unforgiveness stops you from acting and thinking rightly. Are you holding on to a buildup of tiny unforgiveness

events, probably calling it something else? How can you move past unforgiveness?

There is more to say about each of these points. Take the time to dig deeper if you can. First, today, read Paul's list (not mine) a few more times. Where do you need to adjust your heart and mind?

Father, renew my mind today. Show me where I need to adjust my thinking, speaking, and actions to be more like you. Thank you that you help me and meet me where I am. Amen.

Bethany Calderwood

In Sunday School as a child, I had to memorize the 23rd Psalm. While my teachers made sure I knew the words, I'm sure they also explained the meaning of them to me, but I doubt that I really understood it. As an adult, I hear it at almost every funeral and read it on the little funeral folder. But now it's different.

As I knew Dad's days on this earth were quickly coming to an end, the words of this Psalm became more powerful than ever before. *"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:"* There was nothing to be afraid of! God was with Dad. He was protecting him. Dad trusted *"for thou art with me;"* Dad knew he wasn't walking alone. That gave me comfort, too. I knew that God was with us in that hospital room.

Verse two says, *"He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul."* This gave me peace. I could be still; calm. I could take in his every breath as I hoped he could feel my constant presence. And then my oldest son and I heard it – his last breath on earth and his first one in heaven. I knew then that Dad was going to his heavenly home where he could be assured that *"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."* And that gave me great comfort.

This Psalm reminds us that as our shepherd, God has used *his rod and his staff* when we went astray. Just as a shepherd does, he brought us back into the flock. There, we shall never want (*my cup runneth over*) and always have his peace and protection, even when surrounded by adversaries. The Lord is my Shepherd! How blessed I am!

Heavenly Father, thank you for being our shepherd; for loving us; for protecting us; for giving us peace; and for showering us with an abundance of blessings. Amen.

Mel Roth

Knowing that Jesus is the light, always was the light, and that the light is life, gives us much to contemplate. Later in his teaching Christ tells us not to look outside of ourselves for God's presence, but to look inward. The light of life then becomes a very personal journey for each of us. For me it becomes an opportunity to become aware of that light within myself, and it can be the same for you.

Experiencing the light, feeling it, knowing its presence, seeing or hearing it in your mind, and allowing it to shine through you is possible with patience and practice.

Instead of a dissertation I want to share a meditation I use to help expand my awareness of the Light of Christ. The light we are talking about is a subtle energy that is at a frequency we cannot see. We can feel it: the light and the presence of Christ that is within all hearts.

So for the next few minutes, sit or recline comfortably. Slowly read through the meditation below. It may be helpful to have an instrumental version of your favorite hymn or meditative music playing. I'll put a short list of good ones to use at the bottom.

Breathe 3 deep breaths

- Energy follows thought.
- Think of the energy flowing from Christ and ask to align this golden ray with your soul and into your heart.
- Ask to attune with Christ by asking for his presence in the meditation.
- Allow the light to flow through your full body.

Sit quietly for a moment and be aware of any sensation you may have - it could be a warmth throughout your body, a tingling in your forehead, the top of your head, or your hands; just notice whatever comes to your awareness.

Ask to become aware of the light within and visualize it flowing to your heart, or being surrounded by a golden or white light.

Ask to be a mirror of that light and to let the glow shine through you.

Then stay still for as long as you can trying not to think, but to listen.

End the meditation by thanking Jesus for being the light within you.

May Peace be with you.

Possible play List:

“It Is Well With My Soul” The Eden Symphony Orchestra (used in the meditation)

“Sheep May Safely Graze” Pachelbel Chamber Orchestra

“Panis Angelicus” Pachelbel Chamber Orchestra

“Barber: Adagio” Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

May the light of Christ within you shine brightly. May you be and live peace. May you be love. May you know and experience the presence of Christ within you. Amen.

Jaime Fivecoat

Jesus heals a man born blind, provoking a hostile reaction that he regards as spiritual blindness to the things of God.

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am he." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."

They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the Sabbath." Others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son and that he was born blind, but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed that

anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees who were with him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

Acts 9 tells of Saul's walking along the road to Damascus when he is blinded and then is converted to be a Christian. Saul was on his way to persecute Christians when he was blinded with a light from Jesus and heard Jesus' voice. Ananias is guided by Jesus to go to Saul and counsel him. Ananias had faith the he was being lead by Jesus to do this because Ananias knew of Saul and how he had persecuted Christians. Ananias told Saul that he had been picked by Jesus and Saul immediately believed and was baptized. His name was changed to Paul and he immediately began to preach to the people. They were surprised at his change of character.

This scripture shows us that no one is beyond God's saving reach. An unexpected divine intervention happened to Saul when he was walking. The same is true for us today: we are called to surrender our own plans to do God's will.

Martin Luther taught that all Lutherans were called to serve God and spread His word through their daily occupation. People that Saul encountered after his conversion were confused: could this be the same person? Do we treat people in our work place the same way that we treat others away from work?

Heavenly Father, help us to spread your word where ever we are and whatever we are doing. Help us not to be Saul and persecute people. Help us to show your love to everyone. Amen.

Betty Long

Paul writes to the people of Colossae that since learning of their faith in Jesus Christ he has not stopped praying for them. He prayed for their continuing growth in faith and their bearing fruit in every good work.

Like Paul praying for the Colossians, we should be praying for all people of God: praying that we grow deeper in our faith in Jesus Christ together as a community and work towards a closer relationship with Jesus Christ.

We should also be praying and helping each other to bear fruit in our everyday lives. We want to be a faithful community that responds to the needs of our neighbors while reflecting Jesus Christ's love in all we do.

We should be not just "talking the talk" but "walking the walk".

We must also remember that these actions are not to earn our salvation but to strengthen the kingdom of God. Salvation has already been given to us by the grace of God.

Dear God, I pray for the continuing spiritual growth for all God's people so we may live lives that please God, walking worthily in our everyday lives and bearing fruit in every good work. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

John Gheer

In the verses of Isaiah we get a feeling of how God is at work within us and for us. In the verses it is noted that he will provide us with peace, salvation, and praise. God will be your glory. I feel that this comes to us in our everyday lives and is sometimes missed, such as the peace that you feel during prayer and the thought that God is with you. To me this is not the only time that God is with you but if you really think about it he is always with you and providing. I feel he is with you to help take away the not so good times (sorrow) and also during the good times (peace). We must take the time to recognize it. God's presence is with you through all moments of life, as the verses of Isaiah express.

I pray that you open up your hearts and feel the wonderful glory of God as discusses in the versus of Isaiah. Take the time to recognize and feel the peace, salvation, and glory. Know that God is always with you whatever you encounter. Amen.

Dave Eidle

Does a **person** ever feel lower than when they are feeling overwhelmed by their own sin, their own guilt, their own recognition of all their failings? When the darkness surrounds them? Does a **people** ever feel lower than when they are overwhelmed by their own sin, their own, guilt, by the recognition of all their failings? When the darkness surrounds them?

We may visit, but we shouldn't dwell in the darkness.

That goes for us as individuals, and us as a people.

This powerful psalm begins at the lowest point, the depths of despair. Each couplet of verses gives a reason to rise out of darkness. Despite all of our sins, there is forgiveness. In our waiting and longing, there is hope. And hope in the Lord means love and redemption!

Read this psalm of ascent to help you acknowledge your visit with darkness, to find the way out of it and to our true dwelling place with God.

Rise up out of the darkness, O people of God, and turn to the Lord!

Out of the depths we cry, O God, and you hear us every time. We thank you for the forgiveness of our sins offered through your redeeming love for us in you Son, Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

Anonymous

Do you or did you have small children? Children are so special – especially when they are young and just learning. Every child needs discipline, and sometimes punishment. As a parent, I did not take pleasure in meting out punishment. That, however, did not change my love for the child. By providing punishment, my goal was to teach the child proper behavior. Sometimes they learned. Sometimes the punishment needed to be repeated. (Our son became really good at estimating 5 minutes without a watch to end his time-outs.)

Our Lord takes no pleasure in punishing his children. The Israelites needed frequent discipline. Good people began to sin, thinking that their good works would save them despite their sinning. Not so, said the Lord. Wicked people who stopped being wicked and started being good will be saved. This is fair said the Lord. "The first shall be last and the last shall be first." (Matthew 19:30)

The Lord told Ezekiel to be his watchman. A watchman is someone who keeps guard and issues warnings. (Parents give warnings, too, before punishments.) Ezekiel's warning to the Israelites and to us is: If you want to live, stop sinning and return to God. Obey God's Law and live; past sins will be forgiven when God's Law is obeyed and kept. This is not easy, but we are not promised easy. Lent is a season of repentance and reflection. We sing: Return to the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Psalm 103:8). This is our promise and we know that God does not go back on his word.

O Lord, mercifully forgive us our sins, and even though we continually sin and merit your punishments, be gracious to us. Grant that the judgment that we deserve may be turned from us and overlooked. We acknowledge Jesus' work on the cross on our behalf and put our faith in him. Amen.

Cathy Krause

It feels a little odd to be reading about Jesus ascending into heaven in the middle of Lent – for those of us who like orderly timelines, this is just a bit off!

Maybe that's why I got caught by the 45th verse of Luke 24: "Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures" (NRSV); "Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scripture" (NIV).

Jesus opened the disciples' minds. Surely their eyes were open to see the resurrected Lord. Surely their ears were open to hear what he had to say, including the Father's promise to send the Holy Spirit. But how *on earth* could they make sense of it all when Jesus was departing for *heaven*?

And that's the point – Jesus opened their minds so that they could go and do without him *on earth as it is in heaven* as Jesus taught! The Holy Spirit was on the way to baptize and equip the disciples to become apostles and go out to all the world to preach the gospel. And in sharing the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, the commandment to Love God and Love People, the world would be made right, reconciled with the triune God *on earth as it is in heaven*.

Dear God, creator of the heaven and the earth, open our minds to truly understand the depth of your love for us made known in Jesus. Help us each feel the guidance of the Holy Spirit so we can use our spiritual gifts to do our part to reconcile all to you, on earth as it is in heaven. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Jennifer Schlegel

Jesus is moved to sorrow when his friend Lazarus falls ill and dies. Then, in a dramatic scene, he calls his friend out of the tomb and restores him to life.

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather, it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to

him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house consoling her saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him.

This passage deals with the miracle of restoration of life.

It begins at the port city of Troas in Asia Minor now part of modern Turkey. Paul was on his third missionary journey. Paul stopped there to break bread and to speak with and encourage local believers. Because Paul intended to leave the next day, he kept speaking until midnight.

As Paul was speaking, a young man named Eutychus {pronounced Yoo-TIK-us} was sitting on a windowsill and becoming extremely sleepy. Overcome by sleep, he fell from the third story to the ground and was found lifeless. Paul went to where Eutychus was and threw himself upon him and embraced him. Paul then announced “Do not be alarmed! He is still alive! Everyone was relieved that Eutychus was alive. Paul returned upstairs, broke bread and ate. He resumed speaking until daybreak, then departed. Meanwhile, Eutychus was taken home unhurt.

With the Holy Spirit’s assistance, Paul was able to revive Eutychus. This is one example of how the Holy Spirit’s divine power could work through Christ’s apostles.

This remarkable event not only demonstrated the power and compassion present in early Christian ministry, but it also strengthened the faith of the believers gathered at Troas. The restoration of Eutychus served as a vivid reminder that God has the divine power to restore life. This was certified with Christ’s resurrection and validated Christ’s identity and message. Eutychus was not chastised for falling asleep but was shown divine mercy.

Dear Heavenly Father, you are the only one who can give life and take it away. Help and guide Your servants to be attentive to Your word with a mind to ponder you, ears to listen to your word, a heart to love you and to announce you through the power of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Amen.

Jerry Krause

In Paul's letter to the Christian Ephesians, who lived in an area which was the third largest city in the Roman Empire and which Paul had been directly involved with for a few years, he affirmed his belief that even though many had previously worshipped the goddess Artemis (the Roman goddess of motherhood and magic) and would have been considered to be following the ways of the world and the Roman kingdom and thus would be deserving of God's wrath. He assured them that through God's gift of mercy and grace, they were saved through their faith. And the gift didn't come with a price tag or a list of good deeds that needed to be performed. But like with many gifts, the recipient had a choice. They could keep the gift for themselves or, as grateful recipients, they could share the good news with others as God had shown them how to do through his son, Jesus Christ.

So, in today's world, where wealth and power are the false gods that are seemingly worshiped, we continue to be the recipients of God's mercy and grace when we have faith. Are we to choose to hoard that precious gift or to share the good news of God's grace and mercy with others and Love God and Love Others as Jesus taught us to do?

Heavenly Father, help us to appreciate the gifts of your mercy and grace and to love our neighbors by sharing that gift. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Becky Erb

David humble shepherd, friend of God, conqueror of Goliath, anointed King of Israel - spent much of his life running. First from lions and bears, then from King Saul and later from his own son, Absalom. We may not literally be running for our lives in this way, but we only need to look at the world around us to know there's a lot that really doesn't feel good. This Psalm feels like an appropriate cry for this season of Lent and for 2026.

Lord, hear my prayer, listen to my cry for mercy; in your faithfulness and righteousness come to my relief.

Lord, we cry out to you for mercy. We have looked away from our neighbors in need for far too long, and now we beg you to not give us what we deserve, but because You alone are faithful and righteous, come near to us.

So my spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed.

I remember the days of long ago;

I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done.

I spread out my hands to you; I thirst for you like a parched land.

Some days, it is all too much. Our hearts are weary from so much. We remember your goodness and kindness and faithfulness throughout our lives, and we long to see You act once again. We are thirsty for the Living Water.

Lord, come quickly. Lord, we cannot carry the weight of fear and anxiety and worry and feeling powerless and helpless.

Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you.

Show me the way I should go, for to you I entrust my life.

Father, your mercies are new every morning. May we awake to hope and peace, even in the midst of trouble. Lord, may we run hard after you, following your example, trusting you, even when it feels hard to keep going. Amen.

Amanda Ehst

In verses 9-10 David is in a grief so deep that it's affecting his soul and is taking all the strength from his body. David feels the grief has taken hold of him and he is slowly dying from within.

David is feeling truly alone in verses 11-13. Not only do his enemies scorn him, but his neighbors and friends don't want to be near him. They are ignoring him and making him feel like he is dead. He hears the rumors about himself and he hears his enemies plotting his death and he is terrified.

David, however, has faith in his GOD. In verses 14-16 he talks to his God telling him that he is leaving his future in his Lord's hands he asks to be rescued from those that are trying to hunt him down. David will let God's unfailing love rescue him.

Heavenly Father, we ask in this time of uncertainty that you wrap us in your unfailing love and keep us safe from those that may want to cause us harm. May we see your love in everything we do. Amen.

Melissa Eidle

Paul is speaking to us from prison.

I hear him say: a relationship with Christ is a necessity.

Remember, He chose you, you didn't choose Him.

He loves you! You are His child and He wants to be in conversation with you daily.

As we read in the 21st verse it's a win-win situation: Alive, you are His messenger; dead, you gain eternal life with Him.

Paul shares that he knows life can be really tough, and death might not sound so bad when it's with Christ. But we need to stick it out, because we have things that need to be done for Christ. Christ's authority picks the day of our birth and the day of our death.

Paul asks us to live in a way that honors Christ. We should stand firm, in unity with other believers. In one spirit, we are to collaborate together, not letting the opposition divide us.

So read your Bible and know his Word.

When we stand shoulder to shoulder with others, fighting for what we know Christ stood for, we can have victory in unity. Not because of us, but because of Christ.

When we trust in Christ, we have a foundation to stand on. And when we stand in unity with other believers, we are confident and can stand firm, together.

Some will suffer in their faith, just as Christ did. But Paul encourages us to trust Christ, even if we go through suffering, just as Paul shares his sufferings in these passages.

A life centered on Christ enables us to find joy in adversity and to remain steadfast, knowing our struggles are not in vain.

Heavenly Father, with full hearts of gratitude, we thank You for the gift of community with other believers. As we walk side by side with brothers and sisters who love Christ, let us share our burdens and support each other. Let us be unified in love and purpose, reflecting Your light in a dark world. Thank you for the assurance that where two or three are gathered in Your name, You are there among us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Ros Moatz

Jeremiah's words in Lamentations come after his home city of Jerusalem had been destroyed - the people captured or killed. The atrocities committed were overwhelming. In addition to this destruction, Jeremiah had prophesied what would happen. And so, after the Babylonians took over the city, many of the remaining people projected their grief and anger onto Jeremiah, despite it being misplaced.

Jeremiah took his anguish over this projection to the Lord. He expressed his lament in a very public way. Writing it and seeking God's justice. He did not seek vengeance with his own hands for their mocking and insults. This passage reflects the raw emotion of someone who has witnessed and experienced devastation and longs for God to intervene.

Jeremiah describes himself as praying from “the depths of the pit,” a place where hope seemed buried under grief, fear, and exhaustion. Yet even from there, he testifies to something remarkable: God heard him.

We can rely on this passage to remind us:

God takes our story seriously—every wound, every loss, every injustice.

He is the One who stands with us, for us, and before us.

Pain is not the end of the story—God acts.

Where do you need to let God be your defender rather than carrying the burden alone?

Heavenly Father, when I feel low and overwhelmed, hear my cry. Thank you for drawing near to me even in my darkest moments. Fight the battles I cannot fight myself. Restore what feels broken. I trust you with my story. Amen.

Shannon Omlor

In fulfillment of scripture and obedience to God's will, Jesus goes to the cross so that a new covenant in his blood may bring forgiveness of sins. Even the soldiers who crucify him recognize him to be the Son of God.

Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You say so." But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he did not answer. Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

Now at the festival the governor was accustomed to release a prisoner for the crowd, anyone whom they wanted. At that time they had a notorious prisoner called Jesus Barabbas. So after they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that they had handed him over. While he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed. The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." Pilate said to them, "Then what should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?" All of them said, "Let him be crucified!" Then he asked, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing but rather that a riot was beginning, he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Then the people as a whole answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" So he released Barabbas for them, and after flogging Jesus he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him and took the reed and struck him on

the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.

As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."

Then two rebels were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to, for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" The rebels who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.

From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last. At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split. The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. After his resurrection they came out of the tombs and entered the holy city and appeared to many. Now when the centurion and those with him, who were keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were terrified and said, "Truly this man was God's Son!"

The author of Hebrews has drawn us into the history and meaning of the way in which the first covenant attempted to bring the gift of redemption to the people. It was not a perfect system, but it foreshadows the perfect redemption of the blood of the cross in Jesus' redeeming and atoning death.

Our text brings us to a resounding conclusion: "For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God" (9:13-14).

What is present in these words stands through all eternity! The imperfection of previous sacrifices is past. There is no more meaning to all things previous. They have had their place in the history of God's salvation for the people, but now all things are new. The blood of Christ is the complete sacrifice. In Christ Jesus redemption is accomplished.

Jesus' final word from the cross in the gospel of John is the word of fulfillment: "It is completed" (John 19:30). It is finished!

If you really want an accurate translation know that the Greek verb (*tetelestai*) is in the perfect passive tense. This means Christ's redemption has been made for all times. It is completed/accomplished/finished in the past and it remains completed/accomplished/finished into eternity.

Thank you, God. It is finished! What is finished – the plan of redemption. We are Yours and You are ours. Amen.

Pastor Bob Machamer

I love the equalizing message of this passage. In our secular world, we're often taught to value the three Ps: power, property, and prestige. They are certainly beneficial in a capitalist society like ours! But God calls us to a different type of community, not built on status or wealth, but on communal love of neighbor.

Verses 27-30 really hit home: "But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, in order that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'" (NRSV).

Jesus' teachings demonstrate that power, property and prestige are often barriers to living as we are called to live when we rely on them rather than God! When we rely on God, we more readily understand that Jesus became wisdom from God, teaching us that those who exalt themselves will be humbled (Luke 14:11) and that those who serve wealth cannot serve God (Matthew 6:24).

No one needs power, property, or prestige for salvation. Salvation is a gift from God available to all people. Now that's something to boast about!

And yet, this week, this most Holy Week, I wonder about Pilate, Judas, and Caiaphas. I look at what power did for Pontius Pilate. I look at what property did for Judas. I look at what prestige did for Caiaphas. And by looking at them I am sent to me knees, praying, "not I, Lord!" and "Lord, have mercy on me!"

Merciful God, restore us to you each and every day so that we live our lives relying on you and your promises fulfilled in your Son Jesus Christ. Help us be most grateful for the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit has endowed in us. And when we do find ourselves with power, property, or prestige, deliver us away from the temptation to use them for our own glory and lead us to use them for your glory, building your kingdom in service to and love for others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Jennifer Schlegel

Lent is often characterized by quiet contemplation, but Psalm 70 is anything but quiet. It is a frantic shout. God, I/we need your help, now! This is the prayer of someone in the middle of a crisis, feeling the weight of fear and desperation. Psalm 70 shows David is being hunted, mocked, and pushed to the absolute edge. He doesn't have time for a long, drawn-out prayer; he simply cries out, "Make Haste" (NKJV).

When we read these words through the lens of Lent and Holy Week, they take on a haunting new depth. We can imagine Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he knows Judas is coming with soldiers, just moments from betrayal. Maybe he was reciting this Psalm. Ultimately, we know Jesus surrendered with, "Thy will be done." Later, as He was flogged or hanging on the cross, His enemies derided Him with the same "Aha!" found in this Psalm. They mocked Him, saying, "Aha, aha, here is the King of the Jews!" or "Aha, aha, save yourself! Come down from the cross!" In that moment, the King of the Universe became the ultimate "poor and needy" man.

The "miracle" of Psalm 70 in Lent is that Jesus did not receive the "haste" He asked for. He waited. He stayed on the Cross. He allowed the "delay" of God so that our salvation would be permanent.

When you feel like God is moving too slowly in your own life, when you are shouting "make haste!" at the top of your lungs, to the point of breathlessness, remember that you are praying with Christ. He knows the weight of the "not yet." He is not just watching your struggle; He has lived it.

Lord, when my life feels like an emergency, remind me that You are my help and my deliverer. Thank You for the "delay" of the Cross that secured my salvation for all of eternity. Give me the grace to wait on Your timing while being honest about my need. Amen.

Tom Engle

Maundy Thursday is the end of our Lenten season when we remember Jesus's last meal with his disciples. This scripture marks the familiar words spoken in our worship service before every Communion, when Jesus broke the bread saying "This is my body, which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me;" and "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Christ's words spoken at the Last Supper serve as a tangible act of remembering the sacrifice Jesus made when he died on the cross, and also remembering the new covenant established through Jesus with the cup. In the New Living Translation, Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people – an agreement confirmed with my blood."

Not only is communion a time of remembrance, it is also a time to proclaim Jesus' death on the cross – until he comes again. We look forward to his return. When we come to the table together in unity and fellowship, we are remembering Jesus' words to us and proclaiming our anticipation of his return.

I can't think of a better way to be filled up with the Holy Spirit, renewing this covenant every time we take the cup, and living out our faithful life as best we can until he comes again.

And in the meantime, we will be filled with Hope and Strength until we commune again...

Heavenly Father, thank you for sending your Son to live among our people on this earth. The stories have been written and told over and over for years and this story is one of most personal stories of all, giving us a sense of unity with each other as we remember Jesus then, and wait with Hope for his return. Thank you for loving us! Your love is so great and is a constant reminder for us to love each other. In your precious son's name, Amen.

Bonnie Moatz

Hebrews was written for early Christians who were questioning their faith in Christ and considering going back to Judaism and it lays out the case for choosing a Christian faith. This passage reminds us that Jesus became fully human to fulfill the law and the prophets and that through the life and death of Jesus all people may move into the presence of God. We no longer have to offer sacrifices, the curtain has been removed, and we are in the presence of God, forgiven and cleansed and washed by pure, ever-flowing water. We can have unwavering hope, because our God is a faithful and loving God who has forgiven us. And this is available to everyone!

This passage doesn't just focus on the individual's relationship with God but ends with encouragement on how to work together in community: "let us consider how we may spur one another on to good deeds." We are reminded that a vibrant faith is not just a personal relationship with God, but one that connects to others through a community of faith and works performed together for good.

God, our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, draw us closer to you and to others who share our faith so that we can live out the greatest commandments, Love God and Love All People! Amen.

Jen Friz

In this passage in Romans, Paul explains the connection between Baptism and Grace.

The last words of a person are important. In Matthew 28:19-20, Jesus's last words to His disciples were "go everywhere, make disciples, baptize them and teach them to obey what I have taught you." So, Jesus considered baptism important. It is your public commitment to God that you will obey what Jesus said.

One of the things that Jesus taught was "Go, and sin no more (John 8:11)." But we are human and humans sin a lot! Pretty much every day in some thought or deed.

There is a phrase in the hymn Amazing Grace: "Twas GRACE that taught my heart to fear, and GRACE my fears relieved." Christ knows we cannot stop sinning by ourselves, so when we committed to Jesus in Baptism, God placed His GRACE inside of us.

The first thing that GRACE does is make us aware of our sin. We have broken our commitment to obey Jesus. This should upset us and perhaps make us fearful. But if we acknowledge our sin and confess that we have disobeyed, that same GRACE is able to change our character to reflect Christ's character. God describes Himself as compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, forgiving wickedness, sin and rebellion (Exodus 34: 6-7).

It is not done instantly. It is a gradual process. But Christ's GRACE inside us reminds us when the same temptation arises, and Christ's GRACE gives us the strength to resist that temptation, if we remember to ask Christ to help us. We are never strong enough without this GRACE.

And so, gradually, Christ's GRACE transforms us to be like Him. How wonderful to live a new life with all the characteristics attributed to God!

Lord, We want to be like you, but we are powerless and do not know what to do without your grace. Please give us this grace in abundance as we grow closer to you. Amen.

Martha Bentley

Sorrow gives way to “fear and great joy” when two women are sent by an angel to proclaim the good news: Jesus is risen!

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, ‘He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.’ This is my message for you.” So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, “Greetings!” And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers and sisters to go to Galilee; there they will see me.”



ASH WEDNESDAY

Wednesday, February 18
7:00 pm

UNFAILING LIGHT - MIDWEEK SERVICE

Wednesday,
February 25, March 4, 11, 18, 25
7:00 pm

PALM SUNDAY

Sunday, March 29
9:30 am

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Thursday, April 2
7:00 pm

GOOD FRIDAY

Friday, April 3
7:00 pm

EASTER

Sunday, April 5
9:30 am



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