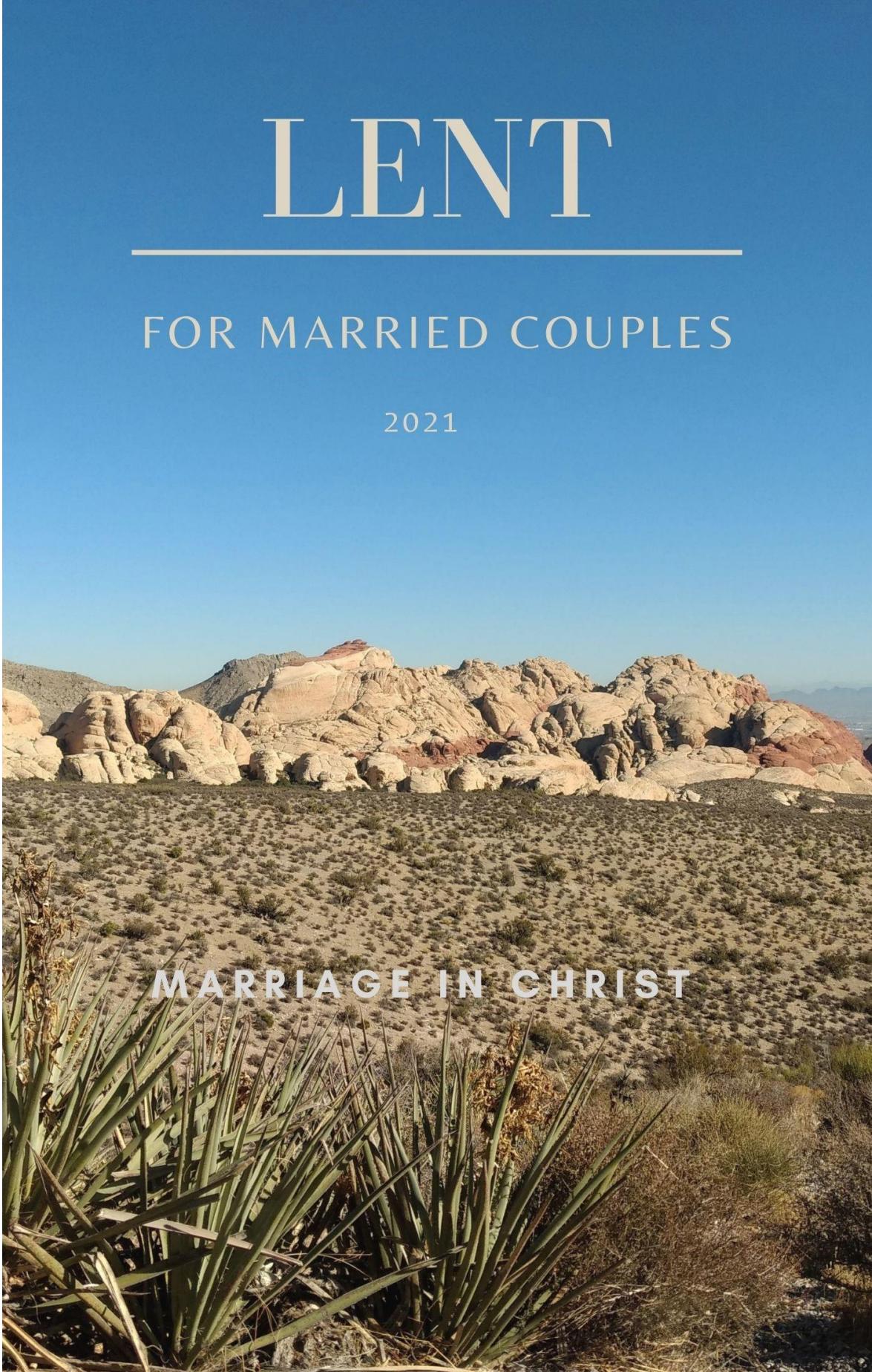


LENT

FOR MARRIED COUPLES

2021



MARRIAGE IN CHRIST



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Meditations by William C. Wacker, unless otherwise noted.

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Marriage in Christ
601 River Ridge Parkway
Eagan, MN 55121

Introduction

Lent is a penitential season. It is a good time to grow in love and holiness with our spouse. But it is not always easy for busy couples to find time to do Lenten practices together.

We offer this series to help you and your spouse stay connected during the holy season of Lent. All the Scripture readings are from the Catholic Lectionary for Lent. The daily readings in Lent do not change from year to year. However, since the feast of St. Joseph and the feast of the Annunciation fall on the same days each year (March 19 and March 25 respectively), they can show up at different places in the Lenten calendar. We will use the readings for those feast days when it is appropriate.

The Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle. We have listed all the readings for the current year (in 2021, we are in Year A). The gospel readings for the first two weeks of Lent recount the stories of the temptations in the desert and the Transfiguration of the Lord. The readings are from all three synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

We invite you to take a short time—about 20 minutes a day—to do something for your marriage. On Easter morning, you will find greater unity, an increased appreciation for learning more about each other, and a gratitude for the small ways you've chosen to show your love and affection.

How to Use This Series

Set yourself up for success! Pick a time of day you can be consistent with. Turn off your phones and other distractions. Light a candle. Sit close together and take turns reading the parts out loud.

Format

We've set up each day into three parts:

PRAY We have selected one of the daily readings for you to read. It is followed by a meditation, a time for quiet reflection and brief discussion, a blessing, and a prayer for unity.

TALK We provide one conversation starter each day. These are not necessarily related to the Scripture reading or the meditation. They are meant to help you get to know each other better. Getting to know each other is a lifelong process of revealing ourselves and listening to each other. And, the more we know about each other, the more we love. The more we love, the more we want to know!

ACT We offer two to three suggestions each day for ways you can choose to love each other better. Pick the one you like best and try it! These actions are designed to build friendship, deepen affection, and help you remain connected to each other.

YOU MIGHT BE THINKING...

“Pray together every day? Really?!”

If you miss a day or two, don’t worry! Start small—say, twice a week. Remember, each effort you make to pray and talk more with your spouse is a victory. Your marriage will grow stronger and you will be happier as a couple. You will begin to see God’s grace and the Holy Spirit at work in your relationship. Your example will bring hope to the world.

“We barely see each other; we are running around crazy most days. How do we make time for this?”

Doing something is better than nothing at all. Maybe you just say the Lord’s prayer together and offer up what’s on your heart that day. Or you can get creative. Take a break from work, set up a time to videochat and read through the Scripture and meditation together. Or you can set the alarm an extra 10 minutes early and squeeze in the PRAY part. Or you can save the TALK and one of the ACT suggestions for later in the day, or the next day. Again, any effort you make to spend meaningful moments together will help your marriage grow stronger.

“How will we know our efforts are working?”

At the end of a day or a week, think back to what happened. Was there a moment when you made the choice to withhold a negative comment? Did you choose to compliment your spouse, rather than tear him/her down? Did you smile when you thought about your spouse today? Have you seen an increase in your affection? Are you holding hands more? Are you laughing more? Are you willing to give each other the benefit of the doubt? Do you find yourself wanting to text each other more? These are all signs of the Holy Spirit at work in your marriage!

“How will we keep this up for all of Lent? How can we make it to Easter?”

Ask a friend to be there for you. Tell them what you intend to do. Give them permission to ask you how it’s going. Ask them to pray for you. Set reminders on your phone leading right up to Holy Week—something like “Have you connected with your spouse today?” Reward yourself! With your spouse, think about a fun thing you can look forward to at the end of each week if you pray 2–3 times together. A date night, a small gift, a massage, breakfast in bed . . . you get the idea.

Trust in the Lord and begin!



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen

Reading: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-18

"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. ² "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ⁵ "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ¹⁶ "And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.

Meditation

In Jesus' day, hypocrites were actors in the theater. They held masks in front of their faces. They spoke from behind them. They pretended to be someone they weren't in real life, just like actors today. As we begin Lent, Jesus reminds us not to pretend to be holy. But be truly holy. Real holiness comes from inside us, from the heart. The best thing that happens in Lent is a change of heart—to draw closer to the Lord and to love one another better. If we ask the Lord to help us pray, fast, and give alms, then people will see our kindness, generosity, and service. The best thing is we won't be pretending.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What did you like best about the town/city in which you grew up?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- If your church has an Ash Wednesday service, try to attend together.
- Plan this week's Lenten practices of prayer, fasting and almsgiving.



Pray

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-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Deuteronomy 30:15-20

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess.¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them,¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live,²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Meditation

Our culture puts a huge premium on choice. We care, above all, about freedom, self-direction, and autonomy. It is all about our personal choice. However, in our culture we have so many choices that rather than bringing freedom, choice often brings paralysis. So, narrowing the options to two should be a great help. “Today, I have set before you, life and death.” But if that is so helpful, why then the command to “choose life?” Isn’t it self-evident? Unfortunately, the great lie, the false god, of our day that lures so many astray is that we are autonomous, that we can direct ourselves. The antidote to that lie is the truth that life is found in obedience to the Lord. It is found in holding fast to him and his commandments. The most fundamental and freeing choice is not “What do I want?” but rather, “What does God want?” That is to choose life!

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord’s Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What was your most successful experience of fasting? Was a prayer answered?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.
- Let the children see our affection.



Pray

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Reading: Matthew 9:14-15

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying, "Why do we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" ¹⁵ And Jesus said to them, "The wedding guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast."

Meditation

When our children got married we had great big parties. We bought expensive clothes, made lots of food and drank plenty of wine. We invited our friends and relatives from far away. The preparations took months and the festivities lasted for days. It was a lot of work and expense, but it was worth it. The joy of watching our children start a new life with a spouse who loved them was almost beyond description. I could not imagine doing anything other than celebrating with them. Jesus couldn't imagine his disciples fasting while he was there, any more than I could imagine fasting at my children's weddings. But Jesus says something strange. It appears that his wedding is a little different than that of my children. The party began when he was here, but the bridegroom has left for a time. We know that the party will be resumed in great glory and splendor at the end of the present evil age. The party is going on, but not in its full glory. The guests come and go, we suffer and die, but always in the hope of celebrating again with Jesus the bridegroom. In Lent we fast because we know that we live in a confusing and difficult time. It is a time when it looks like two ages have overlapped. A party begun, but not finished, a groom here, but not here fully. Lent acknowledges the ambiguity of this time, but celebrates the hope of promises fulfilled.

Quiet Reflection: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord out loud what are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- If I could have lived during a different time period, it would be...

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Take 15 to 30 minutes of "us time" with no distractions.
- Display an act of kindness toward your spouse.
- Fridays in Lent are good days to reflect on the way of the Cross. Many churches have special services on Fridays. Consider attending one together.



Pray

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Reading: Luke 5:25-32

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, "Follow me." 28 And he got up, left everything, and followed him. 29 Then Levi gave a great banquet for him in his house; and there was a large crowd of tax collectors and others sitting at the table with them. 30 The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" 31 Jesus answered, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; 32 I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.

Meditation

Tax collectors were despised by all the Jews, but especially by the zealously nationalistic Jews who lived in Galilee. Tax collectors were traitors and extortionists. They collected money for the hated Romans and the equally hated Herod. Roman soldiers and Herod's troops enforced not only the "lawful" tax, but the exorbitant collector's fees Levi and his collaborators would have charged. In addition, tax collectors dealt with gentiles. They were unclean and thoroughly despised. Jesus would have passed by Levi's booth on the main road to Capernaum frequently. It was not far from Jesus' headquarters. What about Levi would have caught Jesus' eye and moved him to love Levi so? What was Levi's response? He threw a big party and invited all of his friends – the only friends a tax collector had were other tax collectors. There in the midst of that great banquet, sitting at the table as an intimate friend was Jesus. What is it about sinners that moves Jesus to take such a great risk? What moves Jesus to love without limits? Lent is the season in which we have to make a choice. Are we like Levi and his friends at the banquet with Jesus or are we like the Pharisees and the scribes standing outside the banquet room, unwilling to enter?

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What is one thing you have witnessed in other marriages that you would like to replicate in your marriage?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Listen attentively to your spouse.
- Do something for your spouse that they normally do i.e. take out the trash, fill the car, empty the dishwasher, make dinner.
- Leave a note of encouragement for your spouse in an unexpected place.



Pray

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Reading: Mark 1:12-15

And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.¹³ He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.¹⁴ Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news¹ of God,¹⁵ and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Meditation

The hiker set up camp for the night in a little clearing near a cave just off one of the paths that pilgrims and hikers take as they explore the harsh Judean wilderness between Jericho and Jerusalem. The low flat spots that are ideal for camping are off limits because they are dry river beds that could flood without warning, if it rains in Jerusalem about 10 miles away. The caves present other dangers. The hiker was a little disturbed by the foul smell in the area, but he had decided that he could tolerate it for one night. As he was getting settled, a park ranger came by and said, "You might want to find another spot to camp tonight." "Why?" the hiker asked. "That smell is the remnants of a leopard's kill, and we think that cave is his den." In Jesus' day leopards were only one of the many wild beasts he would have encountered in the dangerous wilderness. The caves were also the hideouts of bandits who preyed on travelers and hideouts for violent revolutionaries. Jesus would have suffered from the temperature extremes, lack of food, threat of floods, encounters with dangerous wild animals and humans. He went into the wilderness as Israel's king, in Israel's place and as Israel, he was tempted. This time Israel, in the person of her king, was faithful to the call of the Father. In Lent we hear Jesus invite us to join him in the wilderness for a time. We need not fear. Because Jesus has been faithful and poured his Holy Spirit out on us, we too can be faithful. That is Good News!

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try these conversation starters.

- Have you ever spent the night in the wilderness?
- Is there a wilderness even in the city?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Consider volunteering together for a date night.
- Take a moment together and share a fond memory.
- Give your spouse an unexpected break from their daily routine.



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Reading: Matthew 25:31-40 (excerpt)

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory.³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another. . .³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world;³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.'³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink?³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing?³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.'

Meditation

Christians invented hospitals and other social services. Even before medicines were discovered, the first Christians learned that food, water, a bath, clean clothes and a warm place helped people get well and stay alive. All around them, people without Christian friends or family were dying. Those first believers did these kindnesses because Jesus said that to do them for the least of these was to do them for Jesus himself. Sometimes the Christians caught the disease and died. But they did not fear death because they believed in the resurrection and life after death. Eventually, hospitals and other social services became an organized way to put into practice our Lord's command to love one another. Today, think of some simple actions you can do as a couple to improve the lives of your neighbors, family members and friends.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- If we could just drop what we are doing and go do something fun, what would it be?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Stick to a Lenten resolution that won't be easy to do today.
- Be humble and apologize quickly when your spouse is hurt by your words, actions or omissions.
- Simplify your life by choosing a drawer or closet in your house to clean out.



Pray

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Reading: Matthew 6:7-15

“When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words.⁸ Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.⁹ “Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.¹⁰ Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.¹¹ Give us this day our daily bread.¹² And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.¹³ And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.¹⁴ For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you;¹⁵ but if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

Meditation

The Gentiles are aware of at least 12 major gods, not counting the “divine Caesar,” and over 150 minor gods that have some responsibility for every aspect of their life, from birth to death. After death there is even a god responsible for separating their soul and body. There are at least two gods for their thresholds and one for their door hinges! It is hard to manage that many gods and to keep track of how to please them or cajole them to help out. So it’s not surprising that it takes a lot of words, said over and over, louder and louder. The Gentiles are never sure if the gods are even paying attention. The gods can be like unruly children that need to be bribed and treated just so. One has to use just the right words and just the right sacrifices. But that’s the problem. There aren’t many gods. There is only one, and he can’t be managed. Rather he is like a father who loves us very much and listens to us when we pray. He knows that we need bread each day, forgiveness for our debts and our sins. He knows that to be free we need to forgive those who hurt us and that we need protection from the evil one. He knows too that we will be happiest if we live in his kingdom and make his will our will. Lent is the time we approach Our Father as one of his children not as one of the Gentiles who are trying to control a batch of unruly children.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord’s Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What do you do when a homeless person asks you for money?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Hold hands and say the Lord’s Prayer together before you go to bed.
- Go to a mid-week church service together.
- Cook a meal together.



Pray

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Reading: Luke 11:29-32

When the crowds were increasing, he began to say, "This generation is an evil generation; it asks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.³⁰ For just as Jonah became a sign to the people of Nineveh, so the Son of Man will be to this generation.³¹ The queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the people of this generation and condemn them, because she came from the ends of the earth to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, and see, something greater than Solomon is here!³² The people of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the proclamation of Jonah, and see, something greater than Jonah is here!

Meditation

Ouch! Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the nation that destroyed the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 B.C and nearly destroyed Jerusalem. They were a truly hated enemy, yet even they repented when Jonah, the reluctant prophet, a man who had made the whale sick, preached to them. The Queen of the South, another foreigner, will experience the resurrection on the Day of Judgment because she came to listen to Solomon and get wisdom from him. Foreigners repented and listened to Jonah and Solomon. Jesus own people would not listen to someone much greater than either Jonah or Solomon, ouch! Lent is the time when we decide what role we are playing in this little drama. Do we listen to the one greater than Jonah and Solomon or not?

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What is the best way for me to encourage you today/this week?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Remember to touch—hold hands, hug, back rubs.
- Tell your spouse something that makes you proud of them.
- Tell your spouse that you appreciate his/her creativity, gentleness, friendship, etc.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

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-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 7:7-12

"Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. ⁸ For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. ⁹ Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? ¹⁰ Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? ¹¹ If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him! ¹² "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Meditation

She and her husband had risked everything to start a business. It started very slowly and finally grew into a very successful company. They were very generous, even when things were difficult. Unfortunately, he passed away and she was left to manage the business and eventually sell it. When she sold the company, she became a very wealthy widow. She had always been very generous, but she had never been asked for a really large gift. That was until she was out for lunch with the headmaster of the school she and her husband had supported over the years. The school was just beginning a capital campaign and she expected to be asked for about \$50,000 – a large gift by anyone's standards. But the headmaster instead asked her to consider making the lead donation for their campaign. He asked her for a gift of \$3,000,000. After she recovered from her surprise, she said she would think about the request. A few days later, they were at lunch again and she agreed to make the lead gift. Just before they left the restaurant, she said to the headmaster, "Thank you for not asking for \$50,000, this is much better." Our Father in heaven is like that too.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- Has there been a time in the past year or two when God seemed especially real or close to you?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Be sure to say, "Good morning" and "Good night."
- Text an uplifting, loving message to your spouse during the day today.
- Take your spouse to lunch (Impromptu!). (This year it may need to be lunch via a drive thru and driving to a nearby park and eat lunch in your car.)



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 5:20-26

“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.²¹ You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, 'You shall not murder'; and 'whoever murders shall be liable to judgment.'²² But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, 'You fool,' you will be liable to the hell of fire.²³ So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you,²⁴ leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.²⁵ Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are on the way to court with him, or your accuser may hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you will be thrown into prison.²⁶ Truly I tell you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny.

Meditation

You are on one of the natural amphitheaters that are on the north side of the Sea of Galilee. You have made the trip to Jerusalem many times in your life and you know that it takes about three days to get there. Why is that important? Well Jesus has just said that the next time you are in the courts of the Temple with the live animal you have just purchased for the sacrifice, and you remember that you have an issue with your brother that needs to be settled, you are to leave the animal there for the next week while you return to Galilee and reconcile. You may return to Jerusalem after you reconcile. Really? Does he mean that? Or is it a bit of an exaggeration that demonstrates how important and radical his teaching is? In either case, it would be best and easiest, if you were to nip your anger in the bud before it causes damage to your relationships.

Little hurts become big hurts and if an entire people can't manage their anger, it leads nations to war. Lent is a time for us to repent, that is, change the way we think about anger. It is a time to root it out of our lives before it does damage.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- I would so enjoy reading out loud together...

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Exercise together.
- Do one special act of service for the other. (Get the COVID-19 vaccination together.)



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 5:43-48

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Meditation

What is God really like and how would we know it? It appears that God the creator of the whole world loves all human beings enough that he sends sun and rain on all of them – good and bad alike. He is unconditional in pouring out his love. How might the world know that about God? Well, first they could see it in Jesus. He turned the other cheek and refused to be angry, he carried the Roman cross an extra mile, he forgave those who crucified him with his last breaths. The world would know that about God, if they were to watch God's children do the same things that Jesus did. Then we would be perfect like our Father is perfect. I know, can't be perfect either. So what does perfect mean? The Greek word here is related to the word that describes God's work in creation. Genesis 2:1 says that creation was finished, complete or whole. We are to be like the creator, whole and complete, shining our light on the good and bad just like he does. That is how the world will know him.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- Describe your relationship with God the Father.

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Call or text your spouse and say, "I'm thinking of you," or "I love you."
- Flirt with each other.
- Leave a love note in an unexpected spot, like the microwave.



Second Sunday of Lent

Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18; Romans 8:31b-34; Mark 9:2-10

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Mark 9:2-10

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them,³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one¹ on earth could bleach them.⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.⁵ Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus.⁹ As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.

Mediation

Imagine not saying anything about the most unbelievable experience of your life. Before your very eyes you saw Jesus transfigured. His clothes were dazzling white. Elijah and Moses were there talking to him. Peter mistook this for a fantastic version of the festival of booths and wanted to erect three huts right there. Then you heard the voice, from the cloud say, "this is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him." Who is Jesus? The voice from the cloud, had to be the God of Israel, and his Son is surely the messiah/the king; but this Son of God is more than an ordinary king. Next to him are Moses and Elijah who represent the law and the prophets; this king/messiah is the fulfillment of both. This Messiah will rise from the dead well ahead of the general resurrection and then they will tell people about this fantastic experience.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What would you do if you were present at the Transfiguration?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Volunteer together.
- Get out in nature together.
- Play a game together.



Second Week of Lent: Monday

Daniel 9:4b-10; Luke 6:36-38

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 6:36-38

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.³⁷ "Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven;³⁸ give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

Meditation

Look at the cross. That is how merciful your Father is. Look at the cross and be honest with yourself, do you deserve to be forgiven? No, it is a gift, unlooked for, unwarranted, undeserved. Can you be like the Father? Can you possibly out give him? Try it and see what happens. I'll bet that what you get back will be what you gave plus so much more. It will be like a giant waffle cone filled with your favorite ice cream, pressed all the way down and with so many scoops on top that the ice cream falls on to the table and into your lap as you laugh with pure delight. Don't worry about your outfit; he is planning to give you new clothes! That is what you might see and who you might become, if you look at the cross through the Father's eyes.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What was the most memorable moment of mercy you have ever experienced?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try this today:

- Let each spouse have some alone time.
- Begin the *Praying with the Bible as a couple: Marriage in the Bible*, a new series provided by Marriage in Christ. [February 2021 Newsletter](#)
- Do something for your spouse that you know that they enjoy but you are less enthusiastic about.



Second Week of Lent: Tuesday

Isaiah 1:10, 16-20; Matthew 23:1-12

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 23:1-12

Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples,² "The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat;³ therefore, do whatever they teach you and follow it; but do not do as they do, for they do not practice what they teach.⁴ They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on the shoulders of others; but they themselves are unwilling to lift a finger to move them.⁵ They do all their deeds to be seen by others; for they make their phylacteries broad and their fringes long.⁶ They love to have the place of honor at banquets and the best seats in the synagogues,⁷ and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces, and to have people call them rabbi...¹¹ The greatest among you will be your servant.¹² All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted.

Meditation

My wife and I had stowed our carryon luggage in the overhead bins and under the seat in front of us – all our luggage for a three-week trip to the Holy Land. We settled in for the 10.5-hour flight from New York to Tel Aviv. One of the last passengers to board the plane was the man sitting right behind us. He had a small backpack and a small plastic bag from a store in NY. When he discovered that the overhead bins were full, he became very indignant and complained very loudly to the flight attendant that she find the people who had taken his bin space and make them move it right away. She graciously found some space for his belongings across the aisle. Of course, we could hear all of this and were quite uncomfortable. Since we were in the emergency exit row, the flight attendant asked if we understood what our duties would be in case of an emergency and would we be willing to help others. The gentleman behind us said very loudly, "I'll help anyone except those (*insert an unkind word*) people who took my carryon space. Again, we were embarrassed and even more uncomfortable. As we headed east toward Israel, the sun rose. Several men began standing in the aisles covering their heads with prayer shawls and wrapping their phylacteries around their wrists, arms and heads – including the gentleman sitting behind us. They rocked and swayed gently as they recited their morning prayers in Hebrew. I wondered how often my external actions of piety did not match what was going on inside me. I was humbled to think how often I was the man sitting behind me on the plane. Lent is a time to honestly ask how often I have tied heavy burdens on others and then change my behavior and attitude.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- If I could spend 24 hours doing anything in the world, it would be...

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Go to bed at the same time.
- Go for a long walk.



Second Week of Lent: Wednesday

Jeremiah 18:18-20; Matthew 20:17-28

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 20:17-28

While Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside by themselves, and said to them on the way,¹⁸ "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn him to death;¹⁹ then they will hand him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified; and on the third day he will be raised."²⁰ Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to him with her sons, and kneeling before him, she asked a favor of him.²¹ And he said to her, "What do you want?" She said to him, "Declare that these two sons of mine will sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom."²² But Jesus answered, "You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to him, "We are able."²³ He said to them, "You will indeed drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left, this is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father."²⁴ When the ten heard it, they were angry with the two brothers.²⁵ But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them.²⁶ It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant,²⁷ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave;²⁸ just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Meditation

James and John must not have recognized that Jesus was speaking in riddles. With the benefit of hindsight, we know that Jesus meant that his throne was the cross! He was going to be handed over to the chief priests and scribes who would condemn him to death. Then he would be mocked, flogged, and crucified, but on the third day he would rise. Perhaps James and John thought it was simply a grizzly metaphor for how difficult it would be for him to accomplish his takeover of Jerusalem and the defeat of the Romans. Why else would their mother ask for them to have places of honor when he came into his kingdom? What was she thinking? What were the other ten thinking when they were angry at the brothers? Were they hoping for those spots themselves? We so want power and places of honor. Lent is the season in which we come to understand that real power flows from self-emptying love. That is not a riddle, but it is a great paradox.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Did you have pets when you were growing up? Which one was your favorite?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Go on a special date, such as a concert, the theater, or a romantic dinner or try a virtual event.
- Experience something new or different.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 16:19-31

"There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day.²⁰ And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores,²¹ who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores.²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.²³ In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.²⁴ He called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in these flames.'²⁵ But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony.²⁶ Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.'²⁷ He said, 'Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father's house--²⁸ for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.'²⁹ Abraham replied, 'They have Moses and the prophets; they should listen to them.'³⁰ He said, 'No, father Abraham; but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'³¹ He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.'"

Meditation

Did you notice that Jesus didn't mention the rich man's name? But the poor man has a name. He is Lazarus. Lazarus was very hungry and wanted only a few scraps of food. He sat outside the rich man's home, hoping that the rich man would give him something. But the rich man walked around or stepped over the poor man every day. Do you suppose that the rich man pretended that he didn't see him? The rich man stands for anyone who doesn't see the poor, even us. Jesus wants us to think about how often have we walked around or driven past the Lazaruses around us? Lent is the season when we hear Jesus say that the poor have names, and we should see and help them.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How does our marriage invite others to love God more deeply?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Put your phone away when you are talking to each other.
- Text an uplifting, loving message to your spouse during the day today.
- Leave a love note for your spouse today.



Second Week of Lent: Friday

Genesis 37:3-4, 12-13a, 17b-28a; Matthew 21:33-43, 45-46

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 21:33-46

"Listen to another parable. There was a landowner who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a wine press in it, and built a watchtower. Then he leased it to tenants and went to another country.³⁴ When the harvest time had come, he sent his slaves to the tenants to collect his produce.³⁵ But the tenants seized his slaves and beat one, killed another, and stoned another.³⁶ Again he sent other slaves, more than the first; and they treated them in the same way.³⁷ Finally he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son!'³⁸ But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him and get his inheritance.'³⁹ So they seized him, threw him out of the vineyard, and killed him.⁴⁰ Now when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?"⁴¹ They said to him, "He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and lease the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the produce at the harvest time."⁴² Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the scriptures: 'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes'?"⁴³ Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people that produces the fruits of the kingdom.⁴⁴ The one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and it will crush anyone on whom it falls."⁴⁵ When the chief priests and the Pharisees heard his parables, they realized that he was speaking about them.⁴⁶ They wanted to arrest him, but they feared the crowds, because they regarded him as a prophet.

Meditation

I must confess that I have never read the Scriptures as well as Jesus. He presumed that his audience was familiar with Isaiah 5; Psalm 118:22-23 and the allusions to Daniel 2:45 and Jeremiah 6:21. He presumed that they were so familiar with the story of Israel that they would recognize that the version of the story of Israel he was telling had a startling and unexpected ending. The vineyard was being given to outsiders (Gentiles). The rejected stone was Jesus. **He** was the new Temple, the place where Israel's God dwelt. Finally, **they** were unfaithful Israel. **They** were the enemies of the kingdom of God. No wonder the chief priests and Pharisees made common cause to arrest him. In Lent we are invited to read the Scriptures and find ourselves in the story. What part are we playing?

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- If you could completely get rid of one part of your daily routine what would it be?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Say "Good-bye, I love you" when leaving for the day, even if it is only in the next room.
- Greet your spouse with a hug and a kiss when you see him/her.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 15:11-24 (an excerpt)

¹¹Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. ¹³ A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. ¹⁴ When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. ¹⁶ He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. ¹⁷ But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! ¹⁸ I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ²⁰ So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. ²¹ Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' ²² But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe-- the best one-- and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; ²⁴ for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

Meditation

Jesus is having a meal with all the “wrong people.” The tax collectors were collaborators and traitors! Sinners were the law breakers and people of low moral character. This would include adulterers, gentiles and anyone considered unclean: including the blind, deaf, lame, lepers and anyone unfortunate enough to have a physical deformity that made them unclean and thus outcast. So, the traitors and unclean were drawn to Jesus and he welcomed them. To eat with a person is to invite them into fellowship and accept them as a friend. So, Jesus was eating with these people as if they were his friends. The Pharisees and Scribes stood outside, like the elder brother. So, Jesus told them this parable about a Father’s broken heart and his incredible love for his two sons.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord’s Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

- What is the most heroic thing you have ever witnessed someone do?

Act: Regardless this conversation starter.

of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Hide a note and flower under your wife’s pillow.
- Give your spouse a neck rub.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 2:13-25

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵ Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. ²³ When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴ But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

Meditation

The Temple was the unique dwelling place of God on earth. It was a central symbol in the life of every Jew of Jesus' day. But it had become corrupt and its leaders were wicked. In one of the most disruptive actions of Jesus' public life, he bought the sacrificial system to a temporary halt. It was a prophetic action that announced the end of the sacrificial system that would happen when the Temple was destroyed. More than that, Jesus was replacing the Temple, as the unique dwelling place of God on earth, with himself. In his own death and resurrection, Jesus would do for Israel and the world what only God could do, that is rescue humanity as he had promised long ago. Lent reminds us that our symbols are important, but not as important as the one toward whom those symbols point!

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- I feel you love me the most when you...

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Do a fun activity together.
- Find a hobby that you can do together.



Third Week of Lent: Monday

2 Kings 5:1-15a; Luke 4:24-30

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 4:24-30

And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown.²⁵ But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land;²⁶ yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon.²⁷ There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian."²⁸ When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage.²⁹ They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff.³⁰ But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Meditation

Nazareth was a small settlement in a hostile environment. Jews had moved in to take back the land from the hated Gentiles. They believed that God would act and when he did, he would bless Israel and take vengeance on the Gentiles – he would smite the unclean and all of their enemies. But Jesus had skipped that line when he quoted Isaiah 61. He omitted “a day of vengeance for our God.” They shouted, “Isn’t he Joseph’s son? Didn’t he grow up here? Doesn’t he know how we think here in Nazareth?” Jesus had indicated that not only will God not smite the Gentiles, but he came for them and no the true believers in Nazareth! “Grab him,” they shouted, “throw him off the cliff!” Not yet. It was not time for Jesus to die at their hands, but it was a dark foreshadowing of the type of reception he would receive from the equally zealous Jews in Jerusalem at a Passover in the near future. Lent is the season in which we try to grasp the extraordinary love of Jesus for all human beings – even the ones we are at odds with.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord’s Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord’s Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- When you were a child, what career/job did you dream of having?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Empty the dishwasher or do another small task.
- Occasionally run errands together. Resist the temptation to always save time. Love is willing to spend time extravagantly!



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 18:21-35

Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times." ²³ "For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves." ²⁴ When he began the reckoning, one who owed him ten thousand talents was brought to him; ²⁵ and, as he could not pay, his lord ordered him to be sold, together with his wife and children and all his possessions, and payment to be made. ²⁶ So the slave fell on his knees before him, saying, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.' ²⁷ And out of pity for him, the lord of that slave released him and forgave him the debt. ²⁸ But that same slave, as he went out, came upon one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii; and seizing him by the throat, he said, 'Pay what you owe!' ²⁹ Then his fellow slave fell down and pleaded with him, 'Have patience with me, and I will pay you.' ³⁰ But he refused; then he went and threw him into prison until he would pay the debt. ³¹ When his fellow slaves saw what had happened, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their lord all that had taken place. ³² Then his lord summoned him and said to him, 'You wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me.' ³³ Should you not have had mercy on your fellow slave, as I had mercy on you?' ³⁴ And in anger his lord handed him over to be tortured until he would pay his entire debt. ³⁵ So my heavenly Father will also do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother or sister from your heart."

Meditation

A typical day's wage for a servant was one denarius. Subtracting for holidays, festivals and sabbaths, he would earn about 300 denarii each year. If he gave it all to repay his debt, in twenty years he would have paid back about 6,000 denarii which would equal 1 talent. He would only owe 9,999 more talents and at this rate would be free of his debt in a mere 200,000 years! The scandal is that the ungrateful servant who was owed by his fellow servant 100 denarii, was unwilling to forgive a debt worth four-month's wages. If we are to forgive according to the measure we have been forgiven, compare 200,000 years' worth of wages to four months' worth of wages. Lent is the season when we are humbled by the debt we have been forgiven and encouraged to forgive those who owe us much less.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How or where did you see God working today?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Send a note to a sick friend or relative.
- Silence your phone during all meals.



Third Week of Lent: Wednesday

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Matthew 5:17-19

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 5:17-19

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill.¹⁸ For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.¹⁹ Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Meditation

Jesus summed up the story of Israel when he said, "the Law and the Prophets." Peter, James and John saw Jesus transfigured and standing with Moses and Elijah. The disciples were given a glimpse of who Jesus really was and the vital importance of the whole story of Israel. That story included the promises made to Abraham and the covenant God made with Moses (the Law) and the heartfelt, passionate love of God for Israel, along with his fierce demands for justice, his unwavering commitment to his promises and the stupidity of idolatry (all in the Prophets). That was the story in which Jesus was living and that was the story that he was fulfilling in his own person. The law and the prophets, Moses and Elijah all point to Jesus the messiah and fulfillment of God's promises. We live in that same story.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is your funniest memory from our dating days?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Listen to your spouse without interrupting or having a phone in the room.
- Ask each other how you might serve him/her today.
- Pray for each other.



Third Week of Lent: Thursday

Jeremiah 7:23-28; Luke 11:14-23

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 11:14-23

Now he was casting out a demon that was mute; when the demon had gone out, the one who had been mute spoke, and the crowds were amazed.¹⁵ But some of them said, "He casts out demons by Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons."¹⁶ Others, to test him, kept demanding from him a sign from heaven.¹⁷ But he knew what they were thinking and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself becomes a desert, and house falls on house."¹⁸ If Satan also is divided against himself, how will his kingdom stand?-- for you say that I cast out the demons by Beelzebul.¹⁹ Now if I cast out the demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your exorcists cast them out? Therefore they will be your judges.²⁰ But if it is by the finger of God that I cast out the demons, then the kingdom of God has come to you.²¹ When a strong man, fully armed, guards his castle, his property is safe.²² But when one stronger than he attacks him and overpowers him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and divides his plunder.²³ Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Meditation

There is a beautiful mosaic on the ceiling of the baptistery of the main church in Florence, Italy. Of the many images that are depicted, one of the most striking is a hideous picture of the devil with the legs of a man sticking out of his mouth. It evokes 1 Peter 5:8, "Like a roaring lion your adversary the devil prowls around, looking for someone to devour." I was looking at it with a friend who was doing doctoral work in moral theology at one of the prestigious universities in Rome. He turned to me and said, "I'm glad we don't think like that anymore." I said, "Like what?" He replied, "You know, the devil devouring people. No one believes there is a devil anymore." I felt a little old fashioned because I did and do believe that he exists. What is at stake? If there is no devil, then Jesus is very mistaken about the real enemy of humankind. And if Jesus is casting out demons by the power of the devil, then he is in league with our mortal enemy. But believing that Jesus has defeated our enemy and established his kingdom means that we are saved. It also means we must change to enter his kingdom. The really good news is that change is possible because Jesus has defeated our enemy.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What are your hopes for this Lenten season? How are you/we doing? Remember look for the "bright spots".

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Call your spouse just to say, "I love, you are important to me".
- Go on a walk together, look for signs of spring.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Mark 12:28-34

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" ²⁹ Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' ³¹ The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." ³² Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other'; ³³ and 'to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the strength,' and 'to love one's neighbor as oneself,'-- this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices." ³⁴ When Jesus saw that he answered wisely, he said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." After that no one dared to ask him any question.

Meditation

Imagine what it would look like if we lived and acted like the most important thing in our lives was the love of God. Let's reread that sentence with a couple of small changes. Imagine what it would look like, if the most important thing in our life was our love **for** God. Now imagine the second most important thing in our life is our love **for** our spouse. That would look like the kingdom of God had burst into this world. Jesus seems to think that it is possible for this to happen. Lent is the season in which we turn that wonderful thought into practical action. It is the season in which we consciously invite the Holy Spirit to deepen our friendship with God and our friendship with our spouse

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Who was your favorite saint/holy person growing up?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Surprise your spouse with a gift.
- Write a love note.
- Develop your own couple sign language.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and regarded others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ The Pharisee, standing by himself, was praying thus, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people: thieves, rogues, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² I fast twice a week; I give a tenth of all my income.' ¹³ But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even look up to heaven, but was beating his breast and saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' ¹⁴ I tell you, this man went down to his home justified rather than the other; for all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted."

Meditation

My home town had the second biggest stockyard in the country – it was just a little less busy than the stockyards in Chicago. My father was a college educated engineer and inventor. He worked for one of the major meat producing companies in the country. His father, my grandfather, was the superintendent of the other major meat producer in town. So, I thought of my dad as important and well connected. One of the perks of working at the yards was getting meat at a reasonable cost. Since we had nine children that was quite a perk! Every Friday he would come home with big package wrapped in brown butcher paper. In the package were roasts, hamburger and sometimes steaks. One day I heard my friend, whose father worked for the same company, say that my dad always got the best cuts of meat. He went on to say that the butchers really took care of my dad. I thought it was because they felt sorry for him having so many kids. I asked him one day why they gave him the best cuts of meat. My dad said that it was because he believed and always acted like the butchers, the janitors and secretaries were as important as the engineers and superintendents. All who humble themselves will be exalted!

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What was the funniest thing you heard or did this week?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Pray for your spouse during your break at work today.
- Do a service project together.
- Send your spouse an encouraging email.



Fourth Week of Lent: Sunday

2 Chronicles 36:14-16, 19-23; Ephesians 2:4-19; John 3:14-21

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.¹⁶ "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.¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Meditation

The story of the serpent being lifted up can be found in Numbers 21:5-9. God's own people had rebelled against him and as punishment, poisonous snakes slithered into their camp and many died from their bites. In response to their cries and Moses' prayer for help, God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. If a serpent bit someone, and that person looked at the bronze serpent on the pole he or she would live. The story John is telling is not only about Israel's rebellion and salvation. It is a story about the rescue of all humanity. It is not a bronze serpent that is to be "lifted up." It is God's own son, lifted up on a cross for all to see and believe. Lent is the time when we think deeply about what it means to look at Jesus lifted up on the cross. In this great sacrifice we see the full measure of God's saving love. To trust him, to believe in him is to come into the light, to be saved.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- If you could redo Mount Rushmore, which faces would you carve on it?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Consider skipping a meal and donating that money or food to a food shelf.
- Offer a simple prayer of committing your marriage to Christ this season.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 4:43-54

When the two days were over, he went from that place to Galilee⁴⁴ (for Jesus himself had testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet's own country).⁴⁵ When he came to Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him, since they had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the festival; for they too had gone to the festival.⁴⁶ Then he came again to Cana in Galilee where he had changed the water into wine. Now there was a royal official whose son lay ill in Capernaum.⁴⁷ When he heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went and begged him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe."⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my little boy dies."⁵⁰ Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started on his way.⁵¹ As he was going down, his slaves met him and told him that his child was alive.⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to recover, and they said to him, "Yesterday at one in the afternoon the fever left him."⁵³ The father realized that this was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he himself believed, along with his whole household.⁵⁴ Now this was the second sign that Jesus did after coming from Judea to Galilee.

Meditation

At a brisk pace, it probably took Herod's official a little less than five hours to walk from Capernaum to Cana. He was walking quickly because his little boy was very sick and near death. He found Jesus in the little village where Jesus had changed the water into wine not that long ago. But Jesus was concerned that his friends and family in Galilee were only looking for miracles. They didn't recognize the manifestation of God's limitless love – that is his glory. However, this official is not like the others. He does not need to see the miracle; he does not even have to have Jesus make the long trek back down to the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He believes Jesus' word that his son will be healed. It is interesting to note that his return trip was much more leisurely than his brisk walk from Capernaum. As a matter of fact, he must have spent the night somewhere and resumed his trip later in the day. How do we know? His servants met him at about 1:00 the next day and reported that his son was well – it was the exact same time that Jesus had said, his son would live. He and his family believed in Jesus from that point on.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is the most difficult/hardest thing for you about sharing our resources with others?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Double date with another couple. Virtually if needed.
- Brag about your spouse to someone else.



Fourth Week of Lent: Tuesday

Ezekiel 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-3a, 5-16

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: (excerpt) John 5:1-9

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes.³ In these lay many invalids-- blind, lame, and paralyzed.⁵ One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"⁷ The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me."⁸ Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk."⁹ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath.

Meditation

Not far from the Temple was a pool that people believed had magical healing powers. If you were the first one in the pool when the water was stirred, you would be healed. It was like winning the lottery – it happened but not often. The poor man in this story was waiting there for thirty-eight years. Then something better than winning the lottery happened. Jesus came into his life. "Do you want to be healed?" he asked. Jesus told the man to stand up and walk and he did! Jesus spoke, and the man was healed, it was not magical power, but the power of love.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What gesture of hospitality would we like to extend as a couple? Whom should we reach out to?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- List the positive things your spouse did for you this week.
- Say "thank you."
- Invite your spouse to join you when doing a household chore. Celebrate when it is completed.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 5:17-23 (excerpt)

But Jesus answered them, "My Father is still working, and I also am working."¹⁸ For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.¹⁹ Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, the Son can do nothing on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise.²⁰ The Father loves the Son and shows him all that he himself is doing; and he will show him greater works than these, so that you will be astonished.²¹ Indeed, just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes.²² The Father judges no one but has given all judgment to the Son,²³ so that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father. Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him.

Meditation

There is a wire that circles Jerusalem today. It is called an *eruv* wire. An *eruv* is a ritual enclosure that traditionally observant Jewish communities construct in their neighborhoods. The *eruv* permits traditionally observant Jews to, among other things, carry keys, tissues, medicines, or babies with them, and to use strollers and canes. The presence or absence of an *eruv* thus especially affects the lives of people with limited mobility and those responsible for taking care of babies and young children. By enclosing the whole city, mothers can carry their babies outside for a walk in the city. That is how seriously the Jews take and took the command to not work on the Sabbath. Both the formerly lame man and Jesus "worked" on the Sabbath. Jesus got into even more serious trouble when he said that he was just doing what he saw his father doing. If God the Father causes children to be born on Sabbath or if he calls them home in death, then the Father is working on Sabbath. Jesus is simply acting like a good son doing what his father is doing. They understood what he was saying and wanted to kill him.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- A "bright spot" is a sign that God is at work in your marriage and things are changing. What "bright spots" have you seen recently?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Plan a date night—either out or at home.
- Do the dishes by hand together (no dishwasher).



Fourth Week of Lent: Thursday

Exodus 32:7-14; John 5:31-47

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 5:31-47

"If I testify about myself, my testimony is not true.³² There is another who testifies on my behalf, and I know that his testimony to me is true.³³ You sent messengers to John, and he testified to the truth.³⁴ Not that I accept such human testimony, but I say these things so that you may be saved.³⁵ He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.³⁶ But I have a testimony greater than John's. The works that the Father has given me to complete, the very works that I am doing, testify on my behalf that the Father has sent me.³⁷ And the Father who sent me has himself testified on my behalf. You have never heard his voice or seen his form,³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, because you do not believe him whom he has sent.³⁹ "You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf.⁴⁰ Yet you refuse to come to me to have life.⁴¹ I do not accept glory from human beings.⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God in you.⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; if another comes in his own name, you will accept him.⁴⁴ How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; your accuser is Moses, on whom you have set your hope.⁴⁶ If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me.⁴⁷ But if you do not believe what he wrote, how will you believe what I say?"

Meditation

According to Jewish law and practice it was not permitted to charge someone with a capital crime without at least two witnesses (Numbers 35:30, Deuteronomy 17:6). Two or three witnesses were required for any criminal accusation for that matter (Deuteronomy 19:15). One need two or three witnesses to the signing of a deed (Jeremiah 33:10) or to verify a prophetic action (Isaiah 8:1). So, it is not surprising that Jesus said, in essence, "don't take my word for it, but I have witnesses." Who were Jesus' witnesses? John the Baptist, his Father in heaven and the Scriptures, including Moses. But as it said in the prologue to this Gospel (John 1:11) "He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." In Lent we like the Jews are confronted with the testimony of three witnesses. What will we do?

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- When you think about Lent, is it harder to give something up or to add a new practice?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Make a list and thank the Lord for the blessings in your life.
- Take time for the two of you to sit and talk calmly.



Fourth Week of Lent: Friday

2 Samuel 7:4-5a, 12-14a, 16; Romans 4:13, 16-18, 22; Matthew 1:16, 18-21,24a
Feast of St. Joseph

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 1:16, 18-21,24a

Jacob was the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.¹⁸ Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.¹⁹ Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly.²⁰ But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.²¹ She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."²⁴ When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him.

Meditation

It seems a bit out of place to be recalling the Christmas story in Lent. However, the feast of St. Joseph today and the feast of the Annunciation on Saturday give us a chance to reflect on the dignity of marriage and family. When God was free to do anything he wanted, what he chose to do is revelatory. In this case, he chose to become a human being and entered the world by becoming part of a human family. He underscored for all time the importance of having a father and a mother. The complementarity of husband and wife provided two indispensable ingredients in the human life of the incarnate son of God. While his conception was out of the ordinary, Jesus, the human child needed to be brought up by a loving father and mother. Let the blending of the two seasons, Lent and Christmas, cause us to marvel at the complementarity of Joseph and Mary. Only a man could do what Joseph did. Only a man could be the human stepfather of Jesus. Only a woman could do what Mary did. Only a woman could be the mother of God. God told Joseph that was what he wanted for Jesus, and Joseph said, "yes!"

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- Visit a museum together in person or virtually. Share your impressions with your spouse.

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Plan a date night—either out or at home.
- Have your own art date. Paint or color pictures together.
- Do the dishes by hand together (no dishwasher).



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 7:40-53

When they heard these words, some in the crowd said, "This is really the prophet."⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Messiah." But some asked, "Surely the Messiah does not come from Galilee, does he?"⁴² Has not the scripture said that the Messiah is descended from David and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David lived?"⁴³ So there was a division in the crowd because of him.⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.⁴⁵ Then the temple police went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who asked them, "Why did you not arrest him?"⁴⁶ The police answered, "Never has anyone spoken like this!"⁴⁷ Then the Pharisees replied, "Surely you have not been deceived too, have you?"⁴⁸ Has any one of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?⁴⁹ But this crowd, which does not know the law-- they are accursed."⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked,⁵¹ "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it?"⁵² They replied, "Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee."⁵³ Then each of them went home,

Meditation

"But this crowd, which does not know the law – well they are accursed." If there was not a life at stake this would be uproariously funny. We have special knowledge that Jesus was actually born in Bethlehem and from the line of David, so we can smile. But the reaction of the Pharisees who took great pride in their knowledge of the law and took every opportunity to flaunt their superiority was, as the commercial says, "priceless." They have just disses everyone from Galilee as imbecilic, backward country bumpkins because they don't know the law. You have to picture the whole scene. They were loud and obnoxious and self-righteous. Nicodemus, who was from Judea as they well knew, pointed out that anyone who knows that much about the law surely knows that "Our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing." Rather than admitting their mistake, they say, "You must be from Galilee too!" Then they add, "Search the Scripture and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee." Their collection of Scriptures must not have included Jonah or Hosea!

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What is your most powerful Holy Spirit moment?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- If it is safe, find a charming coffee shop in a small town and get away for breakfast.
- Find a scenic overlook and spend time enjoying the beauty together.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 3:14-21

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.¹⁶ "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.¹⁷ "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.¹⁸ Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God.¹⁹ And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.²⁰ For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed.²¹ But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

Meditation

The story of the serpent being lifted up can be found in Numbers 21:5-9. God's own people had rebelled against him and as punishment, poisonous snakes slithered into their camp and many died from their bites. In response to their cries and Moses' prayer for help, God instructed Moses to make a bronze serpent and put it on a pole. If a serpent bit someone, and that person looked at the bronze serpent on the pole he or she would live. The story John is telling is not only about Israel's rebellion and salvation. It is a story about the rescue of all humanity. It is not a bronze serpent that is to be "lifted up." It is God's own son, lifted up on a cross for all to see and believe. Lent is the time when we think deeply about what it means to look at Jesus lifted up on the cross. In this great sacrifice we see the full measure of God's saving love. To trust him, to believe in him is to come into the light, to be saved.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- Describe your favorite Easter traditions and if there are any "can't miss" activities for you.

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Go to a park and bird watch together.
- Read a Psalm together.
- Wink at your spouse from across the room.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 8:1-11

Early in the morning Jesus came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them.³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them,⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery.⁵ Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?"⁶ They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground.⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her."⁸ And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground.⁹ When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him.¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"¹¹ She said, "No one, sir." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

Meditation

The scribes and Pharisees do not really want justice. They want to trap Jesus into either breaking the law of Moses or inciting such a commotion that the Roman authorities would be forced to arrest him. If this were about justice, the other person who was involved in this adulterous act—the man—would be there as well. Jesus does not fall into their trap. Rather, he gives them and us a lesson in justice and mercy. Isaiah described the Suffering Servant this way. "I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.² He will not cry or lift up his voice or make it heard in the street;³ a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice."^{42:1-3} The poor woman, alone and humiliated, was the bruised reed that Jesus would not break, the dimly burning wick that he would not quench. Jesus did not come to condemn sinners, but to rescue them. The Law of Moses is not fulfilled in punishment of sin, but in the mercy of the law giver.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- Which act of mercy is the most challenging for you to implement in your daily life?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Make sure your kisses last at least six seconds. Every now and then go for a full minute.
- Stick a love note in a lunch box, purse or pocket.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 8:21-30

Again he said to them, "I am going away, and you will search for me, but you will die in your sin. Where I am going, you cannot come."²² Then the Jews said, "Is he going to kill himself? Is that what he means by saying, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?"²³ He said to them, "You are from below, I am from above; you are of this world, I am not of this world.²⁴ I told you that you would die in your sins, for you will die in your sins unless you believe that I am he."²⁵ They said to him, "Who are you?" Jesus said to them, "Why do I speak to you at all?²⁶ I have much to say about you and much to condemn; but the one who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him."²⁷ They did not understand that he was speaking to them about the Father.²⁸ So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will realize that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own, but I speak these things as the Father instructed me.²⁹ And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him."³⁰ As he was saying these things, many believed in him.

Meditation

Over the next three days (in the Lenten readings from John 8) the tensions will escalate to the point where the Jews will attempt to kill Jesus. But before we get to the end of chapter 8, imagine the pain and disappointment that Jesus must be experiencing. He has come to his own people. He has come to rescue them. He pleads, "You will die in your sins if you don't believe that **"I am."** Oops, what did he just say? All they need to do is believe that he is **"I am?"** That sounds suspiciously like a short form of the name of Israel's God. Hear the challenge from the crowd, this time louder, "Who are you?" "When you see the Son of Man lifted up, then you will realize that **I am.**" On the cross, God who is total self-giving love will be fully revealed in all of his glory. Amazingly some of the crowd believed him. But the tension is only building.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What changes have you observed in yourself since we started this Lenten series?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Give each other a funny and/or romantic card.
- Learn how to give a great foot massage.
- Read a novel together.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 8:31-42

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."³³ They answered him, "We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, 'You will be made free'?"³⁴ Jesus answered them, "Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin.³⁵ The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever.³⁶ So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.³⁷ I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me, because there is no place in you for my word.³⁸ I declare what I have seen in the Father's presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father."³⁹ They answered him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did,⁴⁰ but now you are trying to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did.⁴¹ You are indeed doing what your father does." They said to him, "We are not illegitimate children; we have one father, God himself."⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now I am here. I did not come on my own, but he sent me.

Meditation

Ethnic identity, that is being a child of Abraham, was one of the most important Jewish symbols after Temple and Torah and now we hear Jesus challenge that central symbol. Again, this scene would be laughable if it didn't end in attempted murder. Hear the angry crowd shout, "We are not illegitimate. We know who are father is, do you Jesus? We've heard the rumors about Joseph and Mary." "Abraham is our father. We have one father, God himself." Oh, the irony. They are talking to the only begotten Son of the Father and calling him illegitimate. Jesus responds that if God were really their father, they would welcome him because they would be brothers. Alas, their father is not Abraham or God, rather their father is the devil himself, as Jesus will point out in the next few verses of this chapter. Jesus is challenging their ethnic identity. If they were legitimate children of Abraham they would be doing what their father did – they would believe in Jesus. But they are acting like their real father – the devil. This can't possibly end well for Jesus.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- Was there a time in your childhood when you remember God answering a prayer for you?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Hike around a lake together.
- Have a quiet dinner.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Luke 1:26-38

²⁶ In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, ²⁷ to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. ²⁸ And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." ²⁹ But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. ³⁰ The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹ And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. ³² He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. ³³ He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end." ³⁴ Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" ³⁵ The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." ³⁶ And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. ³⁷ For nothing will be impossible with God." ³⁸ Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

Meditation

We have a familiar passage from the Christmas season set in the midst of Lent. It should cause a bit of disruption in our Lenten journey. Like an unexpected chord in a piece of music. In the big story of God's rescue of the world, the entry of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity as a small child is itself a disconcerting note. It is profoundly surprising. Now in Lent we are reminded that there are some darker moments ahead for this child before he is finally revealed in all his glory on the Cross and in his resurrection from the dead, on Easter morning. Today we also reflect on the role Mary played when she said yes and allowed the Holy Spirit to come upon her, and the power of the Most High to overshadow her. We are invited to play a similar role and allow the Holy Spirit to fill us and our marriage with the power of the Most High!

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- How can we be more involved in our church?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Make a special breakfast for your spouse.
- Plan an outing to a spring flower show or garden center.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 10:31-42

The Jews took up stones again to stone him.³² Jesus replied, "I have shown you many good works from the Father. For which of these are you going to stone me?"³³ The Jews answered, "It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you, but for blasphemy, because you, though only a human being, are making yourself God."³⁴ Jesus answered, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, you are gods'?"³⁵ If those to whom the word of God came were called 'gods'-- and the scripture cannot be annulled--³⁶ can you say that the one whom the Father has sanctified and sent into the world is blaspheming because I said, 'I am God's Son'?³⁷ If I am not doing the works of my Father, then do not believe me.³⁸ But if I do them, even though you do not believe me, believe the works, so that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father."³⁹ Then they tried to arrest him again, but he escaped from their hands.⁴⁰ He went away again across the Jordan to the place where John had been baptizing earlier, and he remained there.⁴¹ Many came to him, and they were saying, "John performed no sign, but everything that John said about this man was true."⁴² And many believed in him there.

Meditation

It is winter now. This scene follows what Jesus said about being the good shepherd. He was co-opting another of their great national festivals – Hanukkah the festival that celebrates the cleansing of the Temple at the time of the Maccabean revolt. Why were they trying to kill him this time? Well, he had just said that he and the Father are one. The central prayer of Judaism, the prayer they would have said every day is, "Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is **One**." Jesus has said, before Abraham was, **I am**. And now he says that the Father and I are **One**. With his word and actions Jesus is saying that the temple is corrupt, and Yahweh has returned to make things right. Only the Temple is not a building. The Temple, the unique dwelling place of God on earth, is a person. It is Jesus. The Temple building will be judged and destroyed, but he will be vindicated as the true Temple.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is the most sacrificial act you have ever witnessed?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Consider donating your alms and volunteering at a food shelf or local shelter.
- Attend a Lenten service together.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 11:45-56

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done.⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council, and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs.⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all!⁵⁰ You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed."⁵¹ He did not say this on his own, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus was about to die for the nation,⁵² and not for the nation only, but to gather into one the dispersed children of God.⁵³ So from that day on they planned to put him to death.⁵⁴ Jesus therefore no longer walked about openly among the Jews, but went from there to a town called Ephraim in the region near the wilderness; and he remained there with the disciples.⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was near, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves.⁵⁶ They were looking for Jesus and were asking one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? Surely he will not come to the festival, will he?"

Meditation

Prophecy is not really about revealing the future. The prophets of Israel did much more than that. They delivered God's word to their own people. It is appropriate that the high priest would prophecy. Again, the irony is that Caiaphas, the man, meant one thing and Caiaphas, the high priest/prophet, meant something else entirely. What did Caiaphas, the man, mean? He meant that Jesus had become a political nuisance and therefore he must go. Revolution was in the air and the people were expecting a Messiah. They longed for a king to lead them in a battle that would overthrow the hated Romans. The Romans were nervous because the city was being flooded by pilgrims, whose hopes for deliverance were well known to them. Whether Jesus posed a real threat to Rome was not Caiaphas' concern. He was afraid that the Romans would react as they usually do to would-be kings, with great violence. The Romans were brutal in putting down insurrection. He knew that it would be better for one man to die than to provoke the Romans' brutal reaction. He was right, but for the wrong reason. Jesus and his Father had something else entirely in mind.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- Lent is nearing its climax. Are we ready for Easter?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try this today:

- Look through your wedding album and talk about the marriage sacrament. (or the special ways you experienced God's blessing on your wedding day).



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Mark 11:1-10

When they were approaching Jerusalem, at Bethphage and Bethany, near the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples² and said to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately as you enter it, you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden; untie it and bring it.³ If anyone says to you, 'Why are you doing this?' just say this, 'The Lord needs it and will send it back here immediately.'⁴ They went away and found a colt tied near a door, outside in the street. As they were untying it,⁵ some of the bystanders said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?"⁶ They told them what Jesus had said; and they allowed them to take it.⁷ Then they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it; and he sat on it.⁸ Many people spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut in the fields.⁹ Then those who went ahead and those who followed were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!¹⁰ Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

Meditation

Over 175 years before that first Palm Sunday, the Maccabees had entered the newly cleansed temple amid waving palm branches, shouts of praise, hymns and songs because a great enemy had been crushed and removed from Israel (1 Maccabees 13:50-51). The prophet Zechariah (9:9) had proclaimed long ago that the King would arrive triumphant and victorious riding on the back of a colt. All of Israel's great hopes were expressed in and culminating in this dramatic entry into Jerusalem. As we had hoped and prayed, David was returning to the throne, and their enemies would be defeated. Can you imagine the hope, the expectation that was being lived out in that moment, in that prophetic action? We know that Jesus was acting like he is the king! More than that, in this action, God, himself, is riding into Jerusalem to claim his rightful title as king, and to defeat the great enemy of humanity, death. He is riding in to establish his kingdom on earth.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- If you could spend only \$10 for a date, what would you do?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Finish Lent well: pray and read Scripture together.
- Prepare for your Holy Week celebrations together.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him.³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said,⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?"⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.)⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead.¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well,¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Meditation

Jesus did not have to come to Jerusalem to restore his friend Lazarus to life, he could have healed him from afar as he did for the royal official's son. He did not have to stay in the vicinity after he restored Lazarus' life. He could have gone back to the relative safety of the land on the other side of the Jordan River. Yet here he is, eating with his dearest friends, only a couple of miles and a few days from his death. Jesus knows what will happen and he has chosen to provoke the issue now. This is the feast where God will once again act to rescue his people from slavery. This time the blood on the door post will be that of the true Lamb of God. But today he is eating with friends. Intimate friends and one of them will betray him. Did Jesus not know about Judas? He must have. But there is one more meal with Jesus. There is one more opportunity to get to know him. Mary sees him and anoints him with perfume that is worth about a year's wage – what a gift. Judas was a thief and squandered his last chance. Jesus must have loved Judas even to the end.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What does Jesus' great sacrifice mean to you?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Plan your Easter menu and begin preparing the food together.
- Consider having a Seder meal with the washing of feet.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

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Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 13:21-33, 36-38

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³ One of his disciples-- the one whom Jesus loved-- was reclining next to him; ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "Do quickly what you are going to do." ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, "Buy what we need for the festival"; or, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. ³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him." ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, where are you going?" Jesus answered, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward." ³⁵ Peter said to him, "Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." ³⁶ Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

Meditation

"And it was night." Three little words in Greek bring us back to the first chapter of the John. The light shines in darkness, but the darkness has not overcome/arrested/understood the light. But now it is night. Satan has had his way with Judas. Judas an intimate companion of Jesus will betray him. The darkness will do its best to extinguish the light. But darkness will not win in the end. In this holiest of weeks, we suffer with Jesus, but we are full of hope in the resurrection. Good Friday is part of the story, but it is not the end.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- What do you love most about the transition from Winter to Spring, which parallels the journey from Lent to Easter?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Pray together.
- Read Scripture together.



Wednesday of Holy Week

Isaiah 50:4-9a; Matthew 26:14-25

Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 26:14-25

Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests ¹⁵ and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. ¹⁶ And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. ¹⁷ On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal. ²⁰ When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; ²¹ and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." ²² And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" ²³ He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me." ²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." ²⁵ Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."

Meditation

We know he was a thief, but is 3 months' pay enough money to betray a friend? Judas would probably have had to move out of town, perhaps to a foreign land and start all over. 3 months' pay is not a lot of money. If it was not for the money, what could cause Judas to betray a friend? Was he angry that Jesus would really not be the kind of messiah he had hoped for? It's possible that Judas was expecting to manage the king's treasury – where he could certainly have skimmed a lot of money. Did that anger and disappointment lead to betrayal? Did Judas have nationalistic hopes that were clearly going to be disappointed? We are left with the story, greed, shattered dreams, spite and betrayal of a friend. All of which would lead to despair and two deaths, Jesus' and his own.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- If you could possess any extraordinary talent in one of the arts, what would you choose?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Remember what it was like when you were courting and wink at your spouse across a crowded room.
- Leave little love notes for your spouse to find.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 13:1-15

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God,⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself.⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him.⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?"⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand."⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!"¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you."¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord-- and you are right, for that is what I am.¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.

Meditation

We often take our shoes off when we visit someone's house because we don't want to track mud and dirt into our friend's home. Now imagine a time when you must walk everywhere because there are no cars or trucks. You have open sandals instead of shoes and socks. There are horses, donkeys, oxen and sheep all over the place. The roads must have had a lot of icky stuff on them and it would be hard not to step in it! When you arrive at your friend's house, they would make sure that there was water for you to wash your feet. If they were a really good host, one of their slaves would do the unpleasant job of washing your feet for you. But the host would **never** wash your feet. What was Jesus saying about himself when he did the lowly work of a slave? What does he say about us, when he invites us to imitate him?

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- What is the hardest thing you ever did for someone else?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love.

Try one of these today:

- Tell your spouse that you are in love with him/her.
- When your spouse enters the room, greet him or her like you did when you were first dating.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: (excerpt) John 19:5, 14-22

So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "**Here is the man!**" ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "**Here is your King!**" ¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." ¹⁶ Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus; ¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" ²² Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

Meditation

The chief priest had been prophetic but did not know it. Now Pontius Pilate is prophetic, but he doesn't know it either. John began his gospel by deliberately echoing Genesis 1:1, "in the beginning..." Now on the sixth day of the old creation Pilate announces that Jesus is the true Man bringing to a conclusion God's act of rescuing his creation and establishing a new creation. Pilate, who is ironically the cruel representative of Caesar – the enemy king, announces to the Jews that the one they had longed for all these centuries is here. "Here is your King!" Only the Jews couldn't see it. They rejected their king and opted for Barabbas, which means "son of the father." They could have had their king, who was the true Son of the Father. We too can have the son of the Father as our true king.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know.

Try this conversation starter.

- As you think about the passion story listen to the words of the song, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Were you?

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Take time to quietly read the passion of Jesus together.
- Watch a Holy Week movie and discuss it.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: Matthew 28:1-10

After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb.² 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.³ His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow.⁴ For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men.⁵ But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified.⁶ He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.⁷ 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."⁸ So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples.⁹ Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him.¹⁰ Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

Meditation

What a strange story. This is not at all what we expected. Jesus was not a bright light. He was not shining like the radiant heavenly being we expected from Daniel 12 or Wisdom 3. He was not even dressed in the brilliant white clothes of the transfiguration story. We could not have made up the story this way. And we certainly would not have had women (sorry sisters) be the first witnesses. Why you ask? Because women did not have legal standing in court. In this strange story, Jesus is embodied but different – like a normal person, he ate fish and was solid, but not like a normal person at the same time, because he appeared in rooms as if he could walk through walls. He appeared and disappeared – not like a normal person! He was solidly physical, recognized and yet not recognized. It is like he belonged to two dimensions at once (heaven and earth) the human and divine dimensions of reality. We have the whole Easter season to contemplate the great mystery. But today, the tomb is empty! He is risen! Alleluia!

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk: The more we know about each other, the more we love, the more we love the more we want to know. Try this conversation starter.

- Talk about the fact that because of the resurrection, everything we do matters!

Act: Regardless of the feelings of the moment, we have the power to do acts of love that will become habits of love. Try one of these today:

- Honor your spouse in front of your children today.
- Take your spouse in your arms and dance with him/her, even if there is no music playing! Then laugh if it doesn't go so well.



Pray

God, come to our assistance.

-Lord, make haste to help us.

Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit

-As it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen.

Reading: John 20:1-9

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb.² So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Meditation

By resurrection, what the Scriptures mean is our dead physical bodies will no longer be dead. We will come out of our tombs; our bodies will be transformed, and we will never die again. The Jews at the time of Jesus believed that the general resurrection for all the righteous would happen at the end of the present evil age. God would act in a definitive way to set the world to rights. He would defeat his enemies, establish his kingdom and transform all of creation. Resurrection did not mean finally escaping this evil world. It did not mean escaping this evil physical body that is holding me back from real communion with God. It did not mean being with God in eternal bliss as a disembodied spirit – which, quite honestly, is the prevailing belief in much of modern America. To return as a disembodied spirit is to be a ghost or an angel (see Acts 12) but that is not resurrection. Resurrection is defined as the transformation of this body, never to die again. And it is as integral to the doctrine of the Incarnation as the line in John 1:14, "the word became flesh." If there is no resurrection of the body and he is somehow alive only spiritually, then Jesus did not become a real human being. The tomb has to be empty or it's not a resurrection. That was why the unlikely alliance of the Chief priests and Pharisees, risked violating Sabbath to ask Pilate to put a guard on the tomb. They knew it wasn't about ghosts and disembodied spirits, it was about the body. But, people had to see him alive or it was only a cruel story. Empty tomb and appearances of the risen Jesus go together.

Quiet meditation: Reflect on one or two ideas that came to mind in the reading or the meditation. Share one idea with your spouse.

Prayers and Intentions: As if you were talking to a friend, tell the Lord what and who are on your mind.

Lord's Prayer: Conclude your intentions by praying the Lord's Prayer together.

Blessing: May the Lord bless us, protect us from all evil and bring us to everlasting life. Amen.

Unity Prayer: God, make our hearts one. Amen.

Talk and Act!

Celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior!

The Tomb is Empty

He is Risen!!!

