



Lent

2026

Grace Anglican Community



Journey to Jerusalem20261

Journey to Jerusalem

Dying is good for you. Sounds crazy, I know. But it is true. For followers of Jesus, death is the secret pathway to life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it this way, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die." Bonhoeffer was a German Lutheran pastor, theologian and author. Although he was executed for his resistance to Hitler, he is most noted for his writings which include his seminal work, *The Cost of Discipleship*. This book is a reminder that obedience to Jesus is not the pathway to a comfortable life.

Jesus himself said:

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. (Mark 8:34-35)

This dimension of our faith is counter intuitive. Abandoning personal ambition and desires does not come naturally. But paradoxically this is the way to find the unique kind of life that Jesus promised. He said, *I came that they [his sheep] may have life and have it abundantly.* (John 10:10)

Welcome to the season of Lent, sort of.

You see, I don't enjoy Lent. But I need Lent. Done properly, Lent is a time of intentional reflection and introspection. The goal of Lent, indeed, the goal of all discipleship, is Christlikeness. And that involves dying to some things. But when we remove from our lives things like pride, selfishness and unforgiveness, there is more room for love, joy, peace, patience and all the other life-giving fruit of the Spirit.

Essentially, Lent asks us to work on us. And it is hard work. But it is good work. I hope you will engage in that work with me.

One thing that might help is this daily devotional. It is designed to assist you in your personal reflection during this season. The authors include Henry Covert, Sue Dowell, me, Rita Lanham, Linda Lundquist, Ekene Ogbunamiri, Michael Popp, Frankie Rodriquez, and Bill Russell.

The author of each devotional remains anonymous so that you have more freedom to engage with the content. If you are blessed in some way, you may thank our publisher Bill Russell who makes this project possible.

On the journey together,



Ash Wednesday, February 18

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

¹ Blow a trumpet in Zion;
sound an alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
for the day of the Lord is coming; it is near;

² a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness there is spread upon the
mountains

a great and powerful people;
their like has never been before,
nor will be again after them
through the years of all generations.

¹² "Yet even now," declares the Lord,
"return to me with all your heart,
with fasting, with weeping, and with
mourning;

¹³ and rend your hearts and not your
garments."

Return to the Lord your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast
love;

and he relents over disaster.

¹⁴ Who knows whether he will not turn and

Happy Ash Wednesday, Church! Wait. **Happy** Ash Wednesday? How is Ash Wednesday "happy"? We are marked with ashes on our foreheads indicating our sorrow for our own sin (anything but happy), but we are also reminded that because of Jesus, our fate is not ashes but eternal life with Him.

So, yes, Happy Ash Wednesday, Church!

How will you spend this Lenten season? Lent is a season of fasting and repentance, a time to reflect on the great sacrifice of Jesus, *who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (Philippians 2:6-8).

Lent is a time to humble ourselves before God, to recognize how we – in so many different ways, big and small – rebel against God and His ways. In our personal sacrifices of giving up chocolate or coffee or social media or white lies or selfishness or ... , we open up that area of our lives to be filled – not with our own selfish ambition or desire – but to be filled with the glory of God. I pray that at the end of this Lenten season, we all look a little less like our broken, fallen selves, and more like our glorious Jesus.

So, yes, Happy Ash Wednesday, Church!

Yet, even now, O Lord, we return to You with all our heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning. According to Your great mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, bring us the blessing of new life and new hope in You.
Amen.



Thursday, February 19

Psalm 103:8-14

⁸ **The LORD is full of compassion and mercy,
long-suffering and of great goodness.**
⁹ **He will not always chide us,
neither will he keep his anger for ever.**
¹⁰ **He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
nor rewarded us according to our wickedness.**
¹¹ **For as the heavens are high above the earth,
so great is his mercy also toward those who fear him.**
¹² **As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he set our sins from us.**
¹³ **As a father pities his own children,
so is the LORD merciful to those who fear him.**
¹⁴ **For he knows whereof we are made;
he remembers that we are but dust.**

There are moments when the mercy of God feels too vast for my heart to grasp. When I pause and see my own weakness in the light of His holiness, I am overwhelmed. How can a God so perfect continue to pour compassion on someone who stumbles daily? How can His mercy still reach me when I struggle to forgive, when I wrestle with wounds others have caused, and when I fail to do the very things I know are right?

Yet even in these questions, His Word speaks gently to my soul. I hold onto the promise that as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. This is not a distant truth – it is a living promise for my life, and for yours.

During Lent, I am reminded again of the cross – the place where mercy triumphed over judgment. Jesus extended grace to a thief who had nothing to offer, no righteousness to present, no time to make things right. Nevertheless, in his final moments, Mercy found him. Hope found him. Grace embraced him. And if grace could reach him, then surely it can reach me too.

So, when I feel unworthy, when shame whispers that I have failed too many times, I return to this extravagant gift. I remember that His love is not fragile. His mercy is not shallow. His compassion does not run out when I fall short. As I walk through this season and beyond, I choose to rest in this truth: His love runs deeper than my failures, His mercy is wider than my sin, and His grace is stronger than my unworthiness. I step forward not in my strength, but in the assurance that His heart toward me is always mercy.

May the Holy Spirit continually provide guidance so that any sense of unworthiness is diminished by an understanding of mercy. Let us approach with confidence, trusting we will find grace. May we learn to trust and believe in love, extending this principle to those around us now and in the future.
Amen.



Friday, February 20

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

¹ Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. ³ We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry;⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

When we give ourselves fully to Christ, we are intrinsically interwoven with Father, Son and Holy Spirit in all things and for his purposes. As ambassadors we are invited to stop acting as independent agents and start living as ambassadors of Christ.

As we venture forth in our efforts to live and spread the gospel, we often lack the boldness we envision as needed in spreading the Gospel. Our attempts may seem to fall flat or not be well received. It can be a process of avoidance and reengagement.

However, we should never feel ashamed or rejected as we are not alone and without hope. As we are never shamed in our efforts but loved and encouraged as Christ, who knows our human frailty, gently moves us forward.

There is no going back. As we follow the apostle Paul through his extensive journeys to spread the gospel, he is never sure of the impact of his preaching. But he is sure of his message and his heart for his mission of spreading the Gospel.

Paul and his team show a sense of urgency. There is no room for procrastination. Paul quotes Isaiah reminding us that there is a specific window for grace: *See now is the acceptable time, see, now is the day of salvation.!*

As ambassadors for reconciliation, we don't want to put off an opportunity not knowing what tomorrow will bring or letting past events distract us from wasting a present opportunity.

*Lord Jesus, only through your divine intervention can our fear be turned to faith; an active, living, responsive faith that keeps our attention on your purpose.
“Before you call, I will answer you.” Isaiah 65:24
Amen.*



Saturday, February 21

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

¹ **“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**

² **“Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

⁵ **“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when 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 when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**

¹⁹ **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

Discipleship can be tricky. Take this portion of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus is very clear. Give in secret. Pray in secret. Fast in secret. Clearly, your individual acts of devotion are to be done privately.

And yet, earlier in this same discourse, Jesus says, *You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* (Matthew 5:14-16)

Which is it? Do we do good stuff privately or do we do good stuff publicly? And the answer is — yes! Yes, we do good stuff privately AND we do good stuff publicly. See, I told you discipleship can be tricky.

While these teachings of Jesus might seem contradictory, they are not. The key involves who receives glory.

Maybe you have been to older churches with stained glass windows. Sometimes these windows have a section at the bottom that says something like:

Given to the glory of God and in loving memory of
JOHN SMITH

Who is being glorified here? Is it God or John Smith? To my eye, John Smith is getting more attention than God.

Contrast this with a compassion ministry like Hope Impacts. This is a ministry to Katy's homeless. When Christians do things like donating money or food or clothing, we are part of the equation. But it is not to draw attention to ourselves. It is to help the needy in our midst. And, in doing that, God is glorified through our compassion.

*Lord Jesus, may you be glorified in all I say and do.
Amen.*



Sunday, February 22

Genesis 2:4-9, 15-17

⁴ These are the generations
of the heavens and the earth when they were created,
in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵ When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, ⁶ and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—⁷ then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature. ⁸ And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. ⁹ And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁵ The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Genesis 2 tells us that the deity who brought the cosmos into existence is none other than *yahweh* 'elohim, “the LORD God” (v. 4). Elohim, the almighty creator, is also the covenant god who would liberate the Israelites from their enslavement in Egypt: Yahweh. The one true God who is infinite in power is also infinite in love. And so, when the Lord God forms the body of man, He breathes his own spirit into the man, making him “a living creature” (v. 7). As F. D. Kidner has observed, God’s self-giving act of breathing life into the nostrils of the man has “the face-to-face intimacy of a kiss.”

And for His beloved image-bearing creature, He plants a veritable paradise of alluring and nourishing flora in which they may dwell together. The Gardener-God commissions man to “work” and “keep” this Eden (v. 15), thereby imitating His own nurturing care of creation.

But as we know, this God-imaging vocation was not intended to usurp Yahweh’s lordship. The man was given the guidance: *of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die* (v. 17). And while the consequences of humanity’s decision to pursue autonomy from God would usher in the curse of sin, its reversal would likewise begin in a garden: Gethsemane. Like Adam and Eve, we, too, are presented with the opportunity to embrace our purpose of imitating the triune God in His love for all that He has made.

May we follow the Lord Jesus Christ in cultivating the love of God in all the earth.

*Father God, You sow the seeds of Your life-giving presence in the soil our hearts. Help us to scatter those same seeds wherever we may go.
Amen.*



²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

This passage of scripture is so heart-breaking. Preceding it, God completes his work of creation by placing in it a creature that resembles him, a creature he endowed with the capacity to receive the splendor of his project, a creature he made for relationship with him and that he wants to develop further, a creature possessing personhood as he does. It seems God desires to share Being with another outside of his Being who can participate in his love for being who he is: the God who is love.

Development requires time for distinctions to become, as the earlier narratives portray – light from darkness, heaven from earth, land from water. God's last creature is last for a reason. Its development will enable it to *comprehend* creation's development whereas everything else in God's creation simply is creation's development.

The key distinction in this last creature, its preeminence, is that it can choose to refuse to comprehend. This creature can create its own narratives about the creation and development and itself. And it has the power to rearrange the elements within the creation in novel ways.

But it cannot create. Only God has the power to create. And this last creature can either use its gifts to recognize God's goodness from what God has done and trust God to develop it further or die trying to be what it can never be: the God who alone creates everything new.

*My Lord and my God, thank you for my being. Forgive me for trying to do without you. Help me desire what you desire for me: my participation in you in your creation so all may comprehend your glory!
Amen.*

Tuesday, February 24

Psalm 51:1-6

¹ Have mercy upon me, O God, in your great goodness;
according to the multitude of your mercies wipe away my offences.
² Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness
and cleanse me from my sin.
³ For I acknowledge my faults,
and my sin is ever before me.
⁴ Against you only have I sinned, and done this evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence, and blameless in your judgment.
⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in wickedness,
and in sin my mother conceived me.
⁶ But behold, you desire truth in the inward parts
and shall make me understand wisdom secretly.

Lent is a time of reflection of course, and a part of that reflection is sin. We all have some sin that has a stranglehold on our heart.

This Psalm is iconic for this exact thing. The context of this Psalm is David just had his affair with Bathsheba and sent her husband, Uriah, out to die in battle. He was confronted by best friend and prophet, Nathan.

This was David's response to lust and essentially murder. He asked for mercy from God, appealing to His goodness. More so he asked for cleansing from God, to be washed clean. David takes accountability instead of hiding in guilt and shame or standing tall in pride.

What are you doing with your own sin? Are you hiding in guilt and shame or standing tall in pride? Are you willing to come to your Lord and your God asking for mercy? Ask to be made clean? To be made whole?

How we respond to sin says a lot about ourselves. David goes on in the Psalm, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

How will you respond as you reflect on your own sin?

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Amen.*



Wednesday, February 25

Psalm 51:7-12

**⁷ You shall purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
you shall wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**

**⁸ You shall make me hear of joy and gladness,
that the bones which you have broken may rejoice.**

**⁹ Turn your face from my sins,
and blot out all my misdeeds.**

**¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**

**¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your holy Spirit from me.**

**¹² O give me the comfort of your help again,
and sustain me with your willing Spirit.**

From God's perspective, do you think any of us actually grow out of the "terrible two's"? I mean, don't we spend our entire lives asserting our independence? We have our own thoughts, opinions, and desires which do not always align with the ways of God. And, like David, when we let those thoughts and desires take hold of us, we are led to situations which tempt us, and the temptation, when acted upon, leads us to sin.

But thanks be to God that He is our perfect Father and knows how to handle our "terrible two's." Through the blood of Christ, He has turned His face from our sins and blotted out all our misdeeds. He gives us the comfort of His help again, and sustains us with His willing Spirit, who convicts us of our sin and leads us to repentance.

As we humbly come before Him, confessing our sin and turning from it, He creates clean hearts in us and renews a right spirit within us. He redeems our acts of rebellion and draws us still closer to Him. He recognizes that with our repentance is the opportunity for spiritual growth and He delights when we turn to Him for help.

Don't let your sin, your guilt, or your shame keep you from receiving God's mercy and grace. He is waiting for you with open arms, a forgiving heart, and comfort that is beyond our understanding. That's how our faithful, loving God handles our lifelong "terrible two's."

*Lord, I am so grateful for the perfect Father that You are. Help me to turn from my rebellious ways. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Amen.*



Thursday, February 26

Romans 5:12-17

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.

¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

It's encouraging to learn that 84% of Americans believe sin exists. Yet only half believe that everyone is a sinner, and a third believe the problem lies somewhere else. Even more surprising, 25% of Christians in America do not believe that all people are sinners. Seven out of ten place their confidence in their own goodness.

Wherever you stand on this, Scripture leaves no room for confusion: all have sinned. The stain of Adam's fall runs through every human life. None of us is born innocent, not even a newborn child. And before a holy God, all sin carries the same weight. In His justice, sin demands a penalty, and that penalty is death.

But in His mercy, God made a way of redemption through His Son, Jesus Christ. We who deserved condemnation received justification – treated as though we had never sinned.

Picture a courtroom where God is the Judge and we stand guilty. The verdict has been read. The sentence is clear. Yet an Intercessor steps forward, pleads our case, and willingly accepts the punishment meant for us. Every charge, every failure, every unrighteous act is placed on Him. The guilty are declared innocent. The record wiped clean. Nothing remains against us. This is the miracle of the cross.

This is the gift Jesus gave. And what better moment than now to reflect on such a profound, sacrificial love? This grace – this righteousness freely offered – is so powerful that all who receive it can walk in triumph over sin and death. What a gift. What a Savior. What a reason to live in gratitude and hope.

*Thank you, Lord, for the precious gift of Your Son, given freely to redeem us from the penalty of sin. May the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit continue to break sin's power in our lives, shaping us into who You desire us to be. In Jesus' name.
Amen.*



Friday, February 27

Romans 5:18-21

¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

During the season of Lent, we take a deep dive into the 40 days of deepening our relationship with Christ through reflection on scripture and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is an opportunity to shut out the cacophony of noise chasing and distracting us from our true purpose of Christ centeredness. The passage above describes how one trespass, one sin, Adam's sin leads humanity into condemnation. That is the power of sin. We cannot overcome sin and evil on our own.

In this passage, Paul contrasts the effects between Adam's disobedience and Christ's obedience. The impact of Christ's sacrificial death on the Cross followed by his resurrection brings the possibility of justification and life everlasting to all people. Adam's disobedience brought sin and death to mankind. While sin increased through Adam, God's grace increases even more through Christ.

Sin will never outrun Christ's love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. When we accept God's unconditional love, we are brought to our knees in gratitude that our sins are forgiven and forgotten. Once we are released from the power of sin and death, we are a new creation of living for Christ and our neighbor. This is the intensity of being born again in the spirit. Being "born again" completes and elevates our human birth fulfilling what God has in store for us.

God gave us the power of free will and personal choice. How will we use it?

*Heavenly Father, bring us closer to you and keep us in the understanding that you are always with us, strengthening and delivering us in all circumstances knowing that we are saved by your abundant love and care.
Amen.*



Saturday, February 28

Matthew 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

"Man shall not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,'
and

"On their hands they will bear you up,
lest you strike your foot against a stone."

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."

¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, "Be gone, Satan! For it is written,

"You shall worship the Lord your God
and him only shall you serve."

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

Not many people like to think about spiritual warfare. But it is real. It was real for Jesus, and it is real for us.

Here is how it started for Jesus. Immediately after He was baptized, Jesus was led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit. There, alone, weak from fasting, Jesus seemed vulnerable. That is when Satan attacked again and again. Had Jesus succumbed to any of Satan's temptations, it would have undermined Jesus's entire mission. But Jesus resisted. More than that, Jesus volleyed back. With each temptation, Jesus fired scripture back at Satan, who ultimately was repelled.

It is worth noting that Luke's account adds more insight: *And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time.* (Luke 4:13)

Satan is a relentless enemy. He does not give up. He didn't with Jesus. And he won't with us. Peter warns us, *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.* (1 Peter 5:8)

Obviously, Satan won't eat us. But he is quite happy to wreck our lives by enticing us to sin. The problem, of course, is that temptation is always attractive. It always fulfills a need or a want. Such was the case with Jesus. All of Satan's temptations would have enabled Jesus to avoid crucifixion. These were powerful, nearly irresistible offers. But Jesus refused to take a shortcut or compromise.

That is the key to defeating temptation. We have the capacity to rationalize anything. But don't. Knowing the scriptures (as Jesus did) and remaining steadfast in doing life God's way (as Jesus did), that is the only way we can defend ourselves from a sneaky, lying devil who wants to destroy us.

Spiritual warfare: it's a real thing.

*Heavenly Father, incline our hearts to your ways and give us power to overcome temptation.
Amen.*



Sunday, March 1

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

The Call of Abram can be said to be one of the most pivotal moments in the unfolding of God's design for the salvation of the world. Of all the individuals alive upon the earth, Yahweh chooses a moon-worshipping, seventy-five-year-old man with no children to receive His divine favor. Abram is promised a land, a nation, a name that will be renowned, and the protection of Yahweh Himself. Abram is chosen for blessing and salvation by the God of the Universe.

And while divine election is a gift to be received with joyful thanksgiving, it is also a purpose, a vocation to be *lived into* at all times. The election of Abram and the Israelite nation that descended from him, as well as the election of the church of Jesus Christ, which has been grafted into the covenant community of God's family, is a calling to universal beneficence.

The divine favor of Yahweh is intended to empower the chosen people to "be a blessing" to the world. Far from encouraging moral hubris or religious bigotry, the Call of Abram is a summons to a life of servanthood that shares in the mission of drawing the nations into communion with God.

As Saint Peter writes, the people of God are chosen *for obedience to Jesus Christ* (1 Peter 1:2). Such obedience calls us to the imitation of Christ in every dimension of life for the sake of the world. It is the *Christoformity* of the covenant people of God that participates in the fulfillment of Yahweh's decree to Abram, *in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed* (v. 3).

*Father God, we offer You all thanks and praise for adopting us into Your family. May we labor diligently to
bless the nations with the love that You have shown to us.
Amen.*



Monday, March 2

Genesis 12:4-9

⁴ So Abram went, as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran. ⁵ And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their possessions that they had gathered, and the people that they had acquired in Haran, and they set out to go to the land of Canaan. When they came to the land of Canaan, ⁶ Abram passed through the land to the place at Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. ⁷ Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "To your offspring I will give this land." So he built there an altar to the Lord, who had appeared to him. ⁸ From there he moved to the hill country on the east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. And there he built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord. ⁹ And Abram journeyed on, still going toward the Negeb.

We all begin life as pagans. None are born knowing there is One True God. The creation declares there is something greater, but knowing nothing more we develop our own narratives about what or who that greater is. And we love to create stories about things we sense but can't see, hemmed naturally by what we can.

Abram was no different. Yes, God spoke to him, but others' tales had too. So, God was both abrupt and insistent: he issued Abram a command.

Just imagine that! A voice out of nowhere suddenly orders you to discard much of what constitutes your sense of belonging and go somewhere until the voice tells you to stop. If you told someone that happened to you today, they would think you're crazy, crazier still if you did it.

We all experience life as *transactional*. We learn early that our behavior brings gain and loss. It's tricky: crying can get you fed or slapped. But eventually we get the hang of it, so well so we might conclude we act only to get.

God knows this about us, hence his offer to Abram: give up this and I will give you something better.

So, the greatest story ever told begins as just another simple tale about gain and loss, people and places – until you think it over. We have heard it said that God is *gracious*. God does not give to get; everything is his. Rather God gives without expecting anything in return. God knows this about himself, wants us to know this too, and *wants us to be like him*.

Abram accepted God's offer, and God kept his end of the transaction. But Abram didn't get the land – his offspring did. Abram was *gracious* about the land. God was too, about himself. He gave Abram, and us, the One True God.

Father God, everything is yours. Someday we will share in that for we are your children and you are gracious. Help us to become like you and graciously give you to all we encounter along the Way.
Amen.



Tuesday, March 3

Psalm 33:12-21

¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is the
LORD,
and blessed are the people he has chosen for
himself
to be his inheritance.
¹³ The LORD looks down from heaven and
beholds all the
children of men;
from the habitation of his dwelling he
considers all those
who dwell on the earth.
¹⁴ He fashions all the hearts of them
and understands all their works.
¹⁵ There is no king who can be saved by a
mighty host;
neither is any mighty man delivered by great
strength.

¹⁶ A horse is considered a vain hope to save a
man;
neither shall it deliver anyone by its great
strength.
¹⁷ Behold, the eye of the LORD is upon those
who fear him,
and upon those who put their trust in his
mercy,
¹⁸ To deliver their soul from death,
and to feed them in the time of famine.
¹⁹ Our soul has patiently waited for the LORD,
for he is our help and our shield.
²⁰ Our heart shall rejoice in him,
because we have hoped in his holy Name.
²¹ Let your merciful kindness, O LORD, be
upon us,
as we have put our trust in you.

Patience is hard. Let me say that again, "Patience is hard." We are an instant gratification era of culture. We want something now.

In this Psalm, David is waiting on God to defend Israel. To be their shield against their enemies. David has trust in God to deliver them; he just doesn't know when it will happen. For David, God has truly earned every ounce of patience from the stories of his forefathers to his own experience. He knows God will deliver him and come through.

So, in a way patience comes from a place of trust, at least when it comes to waiting on the Lord. So that comes to our own reflection, do I trust God enough to endlessly wait? Do I think God will come through for me? Has he earned the wait? Has he ever not brought His goodness?

Like I said, patience is hard. God is worth waiting on. He is on our side and works all for our good. The wait is worth it.

So, the challenge is do you believe that? Do you in the core of your being? We see with Israel what happens when we aren't patient and what we become. We also just have to look outside. Let this truth settle in your heart today.

*God help me to wait on you Lord. Settle my soul and impatience. Place these truths on my heart.
Amen.*



Wednesday, March 4

Romans 4:1-12

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;

⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. ¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, ¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Over and over again in his letters, Paul emphasizes God's grace and our faith. *For by **grace** you have been saved through **faith**. And this is not your own doing; it is the **gift of God*** (Ephesians 2:8, emphasis mine). Faith is **trust** in the person of Jesus, the truth of His teaching, and the redemptive work He accomplished at Calvary.

We do not earn our redemption by our works or by trying to be good, but we receive the righteousness of Christ when we have faith in Him to redeem us from our sin; when we have faith that our lawless deeds are forgiven and our sins are covered by the blood of Christ and not counted against us.

Our temptation is to think that we must earn our righteousness or we have to be born into the right family or class or social status; that somehow God's grace is not sufficient. Phooey, God says of our plans to save ourselves. What we absolutely **cannot** do on our own, He has done for us. *For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life* (John 3:16). We need only believe. And in believing, we receive.

Believe in Jesus and receive eternal life. Believe in Jesus and receive righteousness. Believe in Jesus and receive the Holy Spirit. Believe in Jesus and receive forgiveness for your sins.

Jesus, I believe in You. I receive Your amazing gift of grace. Cover me in Your righteousness. Thank You for saving me from my sin and giving me eternal life with You. Help me to share the truth of Your love with those around me, that they too may believe and be saved.
Amen.



Thursday, March 5

Romans 4:13-17

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Starting my own business after years in the corporate world has been both exciting and exhausting. I'm confident in my technical skills, but learning to put together an airtight contract has stretched me in ways I didn't expect. Suddenly I'm thinking about loopholes, liabilities, indemnities, and every possible angle someone could exploit. It feels like running a marathon with legal documents in hand.

And yet, in the middle of all this complexity, I'm reminded of how different our relationship with God is. With Him, there's no ironclad contract to negotiate, no clauses to decode, no hidden traps waiting to spring. His promise doesn't come through a checklist or a legal system. It comes the same way it came to Abraham – through faith. Romans 4:13–17 makes it beautifully clear: the promise wasn't given because Abraham kept a law or fulfilled a ritual. It was given because he believed the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

We, on the other hand, often prefer transactions. We feel safer when we can say, “I did X, so God must do Y.” That mindset makes us vulnerable to spiritual manipulation – protocols, ceremonies, and routines presented as prerequisites for God's acceptance. But Paul dismantles all of that. The inheritance comes by grace so that it can be guaranteed. Jesus plus nothing is still everything. God isn't looking for performance; He's looking for trust. Sin isn't merely breaking rules – it's refusing to trust the One who has already made the promise.

So, as I wrestle with earthly contracts that must be airtight, I'm grateful that God's covenant with us is held together not by my perfection but by His faithfulness. May we rest in the simplicity of His promise, submit our hearts to trust Him fully, and allow Him to do what only He can do

*Father, teach me to rest in the unshakable truth that Jesus is truly enough. Guard my heart from any human influence that would make me think I can add anything to the finished work of Your Son on the cross.
Amen.*



Friday, March 6

John 3:1-8

¹ Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. ² This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶ That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘You must be born again.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”

Nicodemus *came to Jesus by night*. Why? As a member of the Sanhedrin, he was among the rulers of the Jews so his esteemed position could turn into shame and social destruction overnight in the eyes of the Pharisees and the Jewish community. With humility and fear, he came to Jesus with a burning desire (Holy Spirit?) for the full truth that Jesus spoke.

Jesus spoke plainly to Nicodemus knowing that Nicodemus knew the Old Testament and was devoted to God. *How can a man be born again when he is old?* Nicodemus believed all his life that he was already transformed through life in the spirit despite prophesy found in Deuteronomy, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah. Jesus explained “being born again” and the dichotomy of life in the flesh and life in the spirit.

No physical birth and all that it entails can bring entry to God’s kingdom. Physical birth demands our full attention, and all five senses are maximally experienced. That same intensity falls over us as we experience being born in the spirit of God though without the element of the physical. This is a very personal birth that requires our choice of full surrender to God’s love and acceptance.

“Born again” is a phrase that has baffled many besides Nicodemus. Jesus explained two separate and distinct realities of birth: human birth and spiritual birth. The Gospel of John is full of this truth. Human birth is of the material world ending in death. We cannot and will not please God by striving to be a “good person” in the material world.

Spiritual rebirth is God's unique gift to us. Through Christ, all things are possible. God's love opens the door to everlasting life and the light of Christ. Interested? Follow the example of Nicodemus and investigate.

*“... unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”
Amen.*



Saturday, March 7

John 3:9-16

⁹ Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, "Are you the teacher of Israel and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen, but you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³ No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴ And 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, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

Poor Nicodemus. He came to Jesus wanting to understand more about this teacher. But Jesus spoke cryptically: "*You must be born again... The wind blows where it wishes... so must the Son of Man be lifted up...*" It was not what Nicodemus wanted to hear.

Nevertheless, Nicodemus knew there was something unique about Jesus. That is why he had left his Pharisee friends behind to meet privately with Jesus. He needed to know more. Yes, he left a bit confused and perhaps frustrated. But his intrigue, and even fascination, with Jesus remained.

Later, some of the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest Jesus, but the officers returned empty handed. Instead, they brought this report, *No one ever spoke like this man!* (John 7:45) The Jewish leaders rebuked the officers. But Nicodemus defended them saying, *Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?* (John 7:51) Again, Nicodemus wanted to know more about Jesus.

Unfortunately, the Bible doesn't tell us the precise moment when Nicodemus decided to become a follower of Jesus. And maybe it wasn't a precise moment. Maybe it was more like a slow awakening. Maybe Nicodemus carefully and deliberately weighed the person and teaching of Jesus until the scales were tipped. We don't know.

What we do know is that Nicodemus was a seeker who found what he was looking for. And once that happened, Nicodemus was all in, demonstrating courage when Jesus's other followers did not. Immediately after Jesus was crucified, Peter and all the rest went into hiding. They, too, could end up on a Roman cross.

Despite that, Nicodemus joined with Joseph of Arimathea to obtain and bury Jesus's body. It was an act of devotion unlike any other in history.

Jesus said, *Seek, and you will find.* (Matthew 7:7) Nicodemus could certainly attest to that.

*Lord, Jesus, let us seek you above all else in life.
Amen.*



Sunday, March 8

Exodus 17:1-7

¹ All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. ² Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?" ³ But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?" ⁴ So Moses cried to the Lord, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." ⁵ And the Lord said to Moses, "Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. ⁶ Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink." And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. ⁷ And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, "Is the Lord among us or not?"

During the Wilderness Wandering, the Biblical text tells us that the Israelites experienced three significant occasions of divine testing. After going three days without fresh water in the wilderness of Shur, the Israelites encounter the bitter pools of Marah and, subsequently, they grumble against Moses. Nevertheless, the Lord provides fresh water and guides them to the oasis of Elim (Exodus 15:22-27).

When the Israelites enter the wilderness of Sin, their experience of hunger manifests in their berating of Moses and Aaron. Yet again, Yahweh delivers His people through a miraculous display of loving power: the generation of quail and manna (Exodus 16:1-36).

And once the Israelites encamp at Rephidim, their inability to find water leads to the threat of violence against Moses. For the third time in as many trials, the Israelites contest the leadership of Moses and challenge the providence of God. In His great mercy, Yahweh empowers Moses to bring forth water from "the rock at Horeb" (v. 6).

In each case, the Israelites respond to the test of faith with doubt in God's ability or willingness to be their Savior. In their quarreling and grumbling against Moses, the representative of Yahweh, the Israelites exhibit the innate rebelliousness against God that characterizes unsanctified human nature. The human heart is desperately thirsty for divine love, but it is so often led astray by the frailties of the flesh.

It is in the risen lord, Jesus Christ, that this deepest of all thirsts is quenched, that death and doubt are overcome through the living waters of the Spirit of God.

*Father God, You invite us, who are thirsty, to come to you and drink. And You promise us that, if we drink, we will never thirst again. May we always trust in Your eternal provision for our salvation.
Amen.*



Monday, March 9

Psalm 95:1-5

¹ O come, let us sing unto the LORD;
let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

² Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving
and show ourselves glad in him with psalms.

³ For the LORD is a great God
and a great King above all gods.

⁴ In his hand are all the depths of the earth
and the heights of the hills are his also.

⁵ The sea is his, for he made it,
and his hands prepared the dry land.

Lenten reflections take shape during a time established by the church for penitence and fasting ... weighty stuff. And Lent's liturgical color is purple, a regal, somewhat austere color; certainly not one we naturally associate with joy. Lent is not about joy. Joy comes after Lent, on Easter Sunday. Like Advent, Lent is a time of waiting, waiting for our Lord to come; only then do we celebrate.

Today's reading, a portion of Psalm 95, seems ill-placed during such a time. It is an exuberant song of joy, one commentators believe accompanied ancient festivals. Some think it was sung as worshippers entered the inner courts of the temple to wait for Yahweh's coming with his salvation. It reminded the singers who was coming to save, and the grandeur and majesty that would accompany him.

How then can we fit this into penitence, fasting, and waiting? Entering Jesus's parable of the prodigal might help:

Here we are, headed home, knowing well the slipperiness of the world's pleasures. Their departure leaves us hungry and far from home. As we walk, we anticipate stern rebukes, maybe punishment. We have dishonored both our father and our God.

But there is no turning back. Weakly we practice a script acknowledging our iniquity. Each step heightens the anxiety; our soul seems to drain through our feet.

Then in the distance we see a strange form running towards us in a flapping cloak followed by others. Watchmen? But the odd dress of the one in the lead?

Then we see him clearly as he approaches with the servants. Rushing up he embraces us, filled with joy! Our script flows out to be ignored. Instead, we are lifted up into his love, drowned by his overflowing joy, clothed anew, and honored! We are alive again like never before!

*Father God, let us sing unto you and rejoice in our salvation! You alone are a great God, a great King, and our glorious, merciful, loving Father!
Amen.*



Tuesday, March 10

Psalm 95:6-11

⁶ O come, let us worship and fall down,
and kneel before the LORD our Maker.
⁷ For he is our God,
and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.
⁸ Today, if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts
as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness,
⁹ When your fathers tested me,
and put me to the proof, though they had seen my works.
¹⁰ Forty years long was I grieved with this generation and said,
"It is a people that err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways,"
¹¹ Of whom I swore in my wrath
that they should not enter into my rest.

How much do you want God?

I think that is an honest question. Do you want him enough that you would shout His praise during the service? Maybe raise those hands? Would you kneel down mid-service? Would you lay down on the floor mid-service?

That is what David calls us to, an earnest heart for God. He is calling Israel to truly lay it all down before their God. I don't know about you, but the floor is a very dirty place. Am I that humble and put God that much higher above myself that I would worship from the floor at Grace?

It is something to wrestle with.

What do I put above God and what do I put below? This is an honest assessment to figure out where you are with David's calls to you to worship. It is not just for Israel.

So, ask yourself these questions as you walk through your day? How will your posture change come Sunday? How will you worship him? Only the songs you like? Hymns only? Only through the liturgy? How do I serve people? Worship doesn't have qualifiers – it is just an earnest response to God from the core of your being.

*God help me to worship you. Help me to remove the barriers around me to freely worship. Help me to
worship and fall down.
Amen.*



Wednesday, March 11

Romans 1:16-23

¹⁶ For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."

¹⁸ For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. ¹⁹ For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. ²⁰ For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. ²¹ For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

When I was growing up, I spent my summers with my grandparents who lived about 800 miles from us. One particular summer, when I was 10 years old – for reasons that I am not aware of – instead of my parents coming to get me, my grandparents took me home. I was so excited for them to come to our house – it had been a long time. I told them all about our house, our dog, our cars – my mom drove a Ford Mustang, which I thought was pretty cool.

However, when we got home, I discovered my parents had gotten rid of the Mustang and bought a Ford Pinto! Never mind what a poor decision that turned out to be – I was ashamed because I had told my grandparents something that was no longer true. I was only 10, yet I experienced that shame. I learned to be careful about what I share.

But I have good news for you: *For the Scripture says, "Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame."* (Romans 10:11) Just as Paul placed his confidence in the gospel of Christ and was willing to share His message of redemption, so can we, knowing that it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes. What a powerful, amazing, and **unchanging** truth that is! We can share the gospel with boldness resting in the knowledge that *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.* (Hebrews 13:8)

O Lord, help me to boldly share the gospel with those who do not know You. Use me to open their eyes to Your majesty and Your amazing grace. Open the hearts of those You set in my path, to hear and see the salvation we have in Christ Jesus Your Son.
Amen.



Thursday, March 12

Romans 1:24-32

²⁴ Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, ²⁵ because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

²⁶ For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; ²⁷ and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

I don't know about you, but Romans 1 is not a passage I feel comfortable hearing casually read aloud in church. Charles Spurgeon once said that the first chapter of Romans is a dreadful portion of Scripture – so sobering that he would hardly read it publicly. I understand him. This is a chapter to wrestle with privately, to read slowly at home, and to be shaken by the depth of human brokenness it exposes.

Yet even though it is uncomfortable, it is still truth. And what troubles me is that the very church called to proclaim God's truth has begun to soften it. In the name of tolerance, the church that should influence the world is instead being shaped by it. Paul described in vivid detail the moral collapse of the Gentile world, writing from Corinth – a city where he witnessed firsthand what happens when God is rejected and human desire becomes the only compass.

Three times in this passage we encounter the chilling phrase: *God gave them up*. We often mistake God's wrath for patience or mercy, but perhaps what we are witnessing in our culture today – where absolutes are dismissed, and personal pleasure becomes the highest authority – is not divine tolerance but divine judgment. That is a sobering possibility.

So how should we respond? By speaking God's truth with love and conviction. God's Word – not public opinion – remains our standard. It doesn't matter how persuasive the arguments sound, how harmless certain choices appear, or what new labels we attach to old sins. God's Word stands unchanged. This is a moment for deep reflection. A moment to reaffirm our unwavering trust in the authority of Scripture. A moment to anchor ourselves again in the sovereign, unchanging Word of God

Father, in this hour when Your church feels the strain not from the outside but from within, hear the cries of the faithful remnant who stand firmly on the authority of Scripture. Strengthen us to defend Your Word with love and empower us to spread the sweet fragrance of grace and peace throughout our neighborhoods and communities, now and always.
Amen.



Friday, March 13

John 4:5-26

⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ The woman said to him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock." ¹³ Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." ¹⁵ The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water."

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come here." ¹⁷ The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true." ¹⁹ The woman said to him, "Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet." ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship." ²¹ Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." ²⁵ The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things." ²⁶ Jesus said to her, "I who speak to you am he."

This might be one of the more convoluted passages in all of Scripture. The text sweeps us through the topics of relationship, drinking water, not about drinking water, redemption, marriage, right worship, I know things and, eventually, identity.

What is it about? Us!

All these responses ran through my head: I'm not a woman! I'm not Jewish. I know Jesus! I have led a chaste life. I don't have much in common with that woman from Samaria! Well, obviously, Jesus did not have to die on the cross for the person with such statements of defense.

For whatever reason, Jesus' engagement with the Samaritan woman was full of purpose. Perhaps one of the seemingly pedantic topics is one that reflects an experience in your life. Even one can speak volumes to your faith journey. Simply reflect theologically on that point of the text above. If they all relate, well, you will be busy reflecting on much. That is the purpose of this exchange between the woman of Samaria and the one who would tell her all things.

*Speak to me Lord. When I listen, may I honor you with my worship anointed by your spirit and truth. Let that hour come, Lord.
Amen.*



Saturday, March 14

John 4:27-42

²⁷ Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you seek?" or, "Why are you talking with her?" ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?" ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

³¹ Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, saying, "Rabbi, eat." ³² But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." ³³ So the disciples said to one another, "Has anyone brought him something to eat?" ³⁴ Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. ³⁵ Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest.

³⁶ Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. ³⁷ For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.'

³⁸ I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me all that I ever did." ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

What was he thinking? There, in front of everyone, Jesus was chatting with a Samaritan woman, who had a history of serial relationships with men. Already she had had five husbands and was currently living with a man who was not her husband. It could have been a reputation killer, but Jesus didn't care. Instead, this conversation led to many other conversations among the Samaritan people. Many of them came to faith in Jesus. That is what Jesus cared about.

This is only one example of Jesus breaking Jewish conventions by associating with the wrong people. On one famous occasion, Jesus was having supper with a Pharisee named Simon. The next thing they knew a woman was kneeling at Jesus's feet. That would have been strange enough, but this woman was a notorious sinner. Everyone knew her ways. But there she was, on the floor kissing Jesus's feet and anointing them with oil.

Simon was aghast. No self-respecting Jewish person would allow something like that. They would become ceremonially unclean instantly. While Simon agitated about this internally, Jesus called him out.

He said, "Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not ceased to kiss my feet. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much.

It made no sense to Simon. But it was the foundation of Jesus's work: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners." (Mark 2:17)

*Lord have mercy on me, a sinner.
Amen.*



Sunday, March 15

1 Samuel 16:1-5

¹ The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² And Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' ³ And invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do. And you shall anoint for me him whom I declare to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ And he said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord. Consecrate yourselves, and come with me to the sacrifice." And he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

In 1 Samuel 16:1-5, the LORD begins to enact His replacement of the corrupt despot Saul, proclaiming, *I have provided for myself a king* (v. 1). Having allowed the Israelites to experience the consequences of their desire to *be like all the nations* (1 Samuel 8:20) through the disaster of Saul's reign, Yahweh takes action to redeem the monarchy by choosing His own king from among the sons of Jesse the Bethlehemite (v. 1).

To begin the process of revealing this new king to Israel, the LORD charges Samuel with the task of traveling to Bethlehem to discern which of Jesse's sons is to be the anointed leader. However, Samuel must travel through Saul's territory to arrive at Bethlehem, and he expects to be interrogated by the hostile ruler regarding his purposes.

It is here that Yahweh provides His servant Samuel with the means of evading Saul's paranoid wrath. By explaining that he will undertake a special sacrifice to the LORD at Bethlehem, Samuel is able to safely make the journey to Jesse's community. After assuaging the fears of the city elders, Samuel sets the stage for the identification of the new king by consecrating Jesse and his sons as he prepares the sacrifice.

In the fullness of time, Samuel's faithful work in Bethlehem will lead to David's ascension to kingship as well as the decree of Yahweh's covenantal promise to *establish the throne of his kingdom forever* (2 Samuel 7:13). And, ultimately, it will culminate in the birth of the *shoot from the stump of Jesse* (Isaiah 11:1), Jesus the Christ, who will reign forever as *King of kings and Lord of lords* (Revelation 19:16).

*Father God, may we imitate the faithful obedience of your servant Samuel as we diligently labor to prepare the world for the Second Coming of King Jesus.
Amen.*



⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him."
⁷But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab and made him pass before Samuel. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one."¹⁰ And Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. And Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen these."¹¹ Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and get him, for we will not sit down till he comes here."¹² And he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy and had beautiful eyes and was handsome. And the Lord said, "Arise, anoint him, for this is he."¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the Lord rushed upon David from that day forward. And Samuel rose up and went to Ramah.

Appearances are so captivating. I see all sorts of people in the world. Perhaps like you, I see some who step away from the others. They grab my attention and hold it. They alter the direction of my train of thinking from wherever it was going to hover instead over what these people's lives must be like. They fascinate me with their looks, with how they hold themselves, floating along as life's favorites. Their living must be far more interesting than mine. They have it so together. They are so attractive.

In this, I see as man sees – the surface. There is more to this than just seeing, though. The attraction that powers this way of seeing moves above me, so to speak. That is, attractiveness exerts power over me. If I'm not careful, the fascination of attractiveness transforms into a desire to have it, to acquire it. Like Eve, I want that attractiveness. I want to *grasp* it to make it mine.

God's seeing is not at all like this. As we read in today's passage, God sees the surface and beyond the surface. God sees *being* – yours, mine, Eliab's, David's. Perfectly, too. This shouldn't be a surprise for all being comes from God. In essence, God looks at human being and sees what we've done with it. Being God, he alone knows how our adornment of his gift of being will play out in time and in being with other human beings.

God knows about the power of attraction, too, for he authored it as a gift to human being. Attraction is how we come to adorn our being with what we consider to be attractive, like we adorn our surroundings.

God reveals the problem in all this today: We decide what is attractive by looking at others and then seek to adorn our being as it seems they have, on the surface.

*Father God, help me see attractiveness as you see it, in Jesus above all else.
 Amen.*

Tuesday, March 17

Psalm 23

¹ The LORD is my shepherd;
therefore I can lack nothing.
² He shall feed me in green pastures
and lead me forth beside the waters of comfort.
³ He shall refresh my soul
and bring me forth in the paths of righteousness for his Name's sake.
⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me.
⁵ You shall prepare a table before me, in the presence of those who trouble me;
you have anointed my head with oil, and my cup shall be full.
⁶ Surely your goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

The Lord is my shepherd. This is a theme throughout the Bible, one of God taking care of his people. The first three verses are as if David is telling someone about the Lord because he uses He when referring to the Lord: He says look people, the Lord will take care of me in all ways. That is what a shepherd does – take care of the sheep in his care. He will go find them when they wander and lead them back. He refreshes them and keeps them safe. He feeds them and keeps them well and content.

This psalm has parallels with the Lord's prayer. Both talk about God's provision, protection and peace to those who trust in him. God is the one who ultimately is our provider. He makes the waters flow, he makes the grass grow. We have peace knowing that God will take care of us as we live in his presence. He is our faithful guide with our hard times, and we will dwell with him for ever.

*O Shepherd, abide with us, care for us still
And feed us and lead us and teach us thy will
And when in Thy heavenly fold we shall be
Our thanks and our praises will render to thee.
Amen.
God In Our Home, D. Nystrom, pg. 323*



Wednesday, March 18

Ephesians 5:1-14

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ² And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³ But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. ⁵ For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore do not become partners with them; ⁸ for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹ (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), ¹⁰ and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. ¹¹ Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. ¹² For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. ¹³ But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, ¹⁴ for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says,

“Awake, O sleeper,
and arise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

When my daughter was in college, she worked part-time at H-E-B. The store manager provided her a red polo shirt with the H-E-B name/logo on it as part of her work uniform. She was to wear the shirt during her work shifts but was not to wear it when she was out and about. Why was this H-E-B's policy? Because if she wore the red H-E-B shirt outside of the store, she would be identified with H-E-B and all her words and actions, good or bad, would reflect on H-E-B.

God is not like H-E-B. He isn't trying to protect His brand because He is the brand and stands for Himself. He is more like Nike – wanting everyone across the globe to bear His mark. He uses us to spread the gospel.

Many years ago, I was the leader of my daughter's Girl Scout troop. The co-leader of the troop was Christian, as was I. But she was a compelling Christian. I wanted what she had. I wanted the relationship with Jesus that she had. She walked in love in the light of Christ. I wanted to be like her!

That, my friends, is the power of the gospel working in us and through us. *Be imitators of God*, Paul tells us, *as beloved children*, because when we do that, those around us will see His goodness and His glory. The light of Christ will shine through us and others will be drawn to His light.

Heavenly Father, I am Your beloved child. I want to walk as a child of the light, that all who know me would see and know Your wonderful unfailing love and would be drawn into the light of Your Son. Help me to be a compelling Christian.
Amen.



Thursday, March 19

John 9:1-13

¹ As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. ² And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" ³ Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." ⁴ We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming, when no one can work. ⁵ As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." ⁶ Having said these things, he spit on the ground and made mud with the saliva. Then he anointed the man's eyes with the mud ⁷ and said to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing.

⁸ The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar were saying, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" ⁹ Some said, "It is he." Others said, "No, but he is like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." ¹⁰ So they said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" ¹¹ He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed and received my sight." ¹² They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." ¹³ They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind.

Things are not always what they appear to be. For years, I assumed that people with larger body frames were simply the result of poor habits or careless choices – until someone very close to me was diagnosed with a metabolic condition that prevented fat from being burned and instead caused rapid, uncontrollable weight gain. That experience humbled me deeply.

It made me think of the man in our passage whose condition was quickly blamed on the sins of his parents. We often believe we can interpret what we see, attach meaning to it, and explain it away. But there is always more beneath the surface – more than our eyes can perceive and more than our assumptions can capture. No one around that blind man could have imagined that his suffering would be a stage for the glory of God. How could something so painful, so limiting, so devastating be connected to God's glory?

And yet, Jesus made it clear that it was. Perhaps the same is true for us. Your unemployment, that frightening diagnosis, the relationship that wounded you – maybe these aren't signs of abandonment. Maybe they are part of a divine story you cannot yet see. Maybe they are, in ways beyond your understanding, for God's glory.

When we hold this perspective, we can rest. We can trust that God is sovereign, that even when life feels confusing or unfair, the One in control is unfailingly wise and endlessly good. God is very good at being God. That is where my confidence lies, and I hope it strengthens yours as well.

Father, believing that the circumstances we cannot understand or control may still serve Your glory does not come naturally to us. Teach us to trust that You are loving, sovereign, and all-powerful, and that our lives rest securely in Your hands.
Amen.



Friday, March 20

John 9:28-34

²⁸ And they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. ²⁹ We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." ³⁰ The man answered, "Why, this is an amazing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. ³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. ³² Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. ³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." ³⁴ They answered him, "You were born in utter sin, and would you teach us?" And they cast him out.

³⁵ Jesus heard that they had cast him out, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" ³⁶ He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" ³⁷ Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and it is he who is speaking to you." ³⁸ He said, "Lord, I believe," and he worshiped him.

As you read this passage it is easy to get caught up in the dialogue. The pride of the Jews is offensive. They are better disciples. They alone can judge another person because they belong to the Moses club. The man who used to be blind counters back and we cheer him on as he devours their intransigent arrogance. It's a fight! And we all want to watch.

Let's get caught up in something else. The Jews are acting out of being astonished by the thing Jesus did for the blind man. They don't understand it. They still don't believe it even as they talk to the man.

The people are abuzz because it is a great wonder that has happened. They look to the Jews for answers/explanations. They have none, making it an even greater wonder. They cannot explain the surprise of seeing the blind seeing. This astonishing and stunning thing has created an awe that is difficult to explain. It is beyond jaw-dropping. They are flabbergasted. A healing before their very eyes. His, too.

What is their response? They seek to diminish the person. In the art of debate and rhetorical argument it is called the *ad hominem* fallacy. Attack the person or the pedigree or the personal attributes when losing the substance of the argument.

Get caught in what happened. It was a miracle!

*Father, in the journey of Lent, may we not get distracted by all the stops and troubles along the way. Help us to see with our eyes the miracle you provided for us in Jesus, our Savior.
Amen.*



Saturday, March 21

John 9:39-41

³⁹ Jesus said, "For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see may see, and those who see may become blind." ⁴⁰ Some of the Pharisees near him heard these things, and said to him, "Are we also blind?" ⁴¹ Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, 'We see,' your guilt remains.

They say that seeing is believing. But not for the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were poster children for this. They were the religious all stars of their day. People looked at them with admiration for their devotion and piety. And the Pharisees reveled in it. They loved being seen doing religious stuff that demonstrated their spiritual superiority over other people.

And then came Jesus. We, of course, know that Jesus is the Son of God who came into the world, in his words, *to seek and save the lost*. (Luke 19:10) But the Pharisees could not see that. Instead of rejoicing at his coming, they conspired to kill him. Why?

Basically, the blindness of the Pharisees was a heart problem. Not the organ that pumps blood. Instead, their problem was in the spiritual part of us that controls us. There are many diseases of this heart and, the Pharisees suffered from many of them. Chiefly though, they suffered from the heart disease of spiritual pride.

Spiritual pride is an elevated, inflated, inaccurate view of oneself. And this kind of pride is spiritually deadly. C. S. Lewis wrote, "As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."

That was the problem with the Pharisees. Their arrogance prevented them from perceiving that Jesus was, indeed, the messiah they had wanted all their lives. They saw Jesus but did not believe in Jesus. Seeing was not believing.

By way of contrast, the poor, the needy, the broken were attracted to Jesus. They saw and they believed. It is no wonder, then, that Jesus declared, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. (Matthew 5:3)

*Heavenly Father, please protect me from myself. Protect me from the sin of pride.
Amen.*



Sunday, March 22

Ezekiel 37:1-6

¹ The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out in the Spirit of the LORD and set me down in the middle of the valley; it was full of bones. ² And he led me around among them, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley, and behold, they were very dry. ³ And he said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" And I answered, "O Lord God, you know." ⁴ Then he said to me, "Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. ⁵ Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. ⁶ And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the LORD."

During the Babylonian Captivity, the prophet Ezekiel has a rapturous experience of the *hand of the LORD* (v. 1), in which he finds himself transported to the middle of a valley upon which are scattered a multitude of dry bones. The valley itself possesses idolatrous connotations, reminding Ezekiel's readers of the plain of Shinar upon which the Tower of Babel was constructed (Genesis 11:2), or even the plain of Dura, the setting of Nebuchadnezzar's prodigious golden statue (Daniel 3:1).

Even the scattering of the bones is significant, representing the ritual refusal of burial practiced against those who break covenants. The valley of dry bones is the antithesis of the holy mountains upon which Yahweh meets with his prophets.

The lifeless valley and its host of desiccated remains is a manifestation of the Jewish exiles' condition in Babylon: the hopelessness of utter defeat. And yet, the sin, judgment, and exile of the Judahites, and that of the other tribes of Israel before them, is not the final word in Yahweh's plan to use them to redeem the world.

The Lord directs Ezekiel to proclaim life to the dead bones. Yahweh will send His *ruakh*, His very breath and spirit, into the arid remains. The people of God will be liberated, restored, and made righteous in His sight, as only He can do. And the new Israel, the church, will share in this hope for the future.

As Saint Paul declares, *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.* (Romans 8:11)

*Father God, we give you thanks for the hope of life everlasting. May that hope animate us to share your divine life with the world.
Amen.*



Monday, March 23

Ezekiel 37:7-14

⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I prophesied, there was a sound, and behold, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ And I looked, and behold, there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them. But there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ¹⁰ So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army.

¹¹ Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are indeed cut off.' ¹² Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. ¹⁴ And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord; I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the Lord."

"It ain't over 'til it's over" is a Yogi-ism we may quote from time to time, but it expresses a truth in which we rarely place our trust. Instead, we tend to trust in a fantasy that we are modern prophets who can size things up on our own and then prophesy the future from what we see. "I can see this coming," we congratulate ourselves with our DIY vision in hand. Or, more humbly and more often, "I didn't think of that," which engenders the "Hindsight is perfect" escape clause when our prophecy doesn't "pan out."

All predictions are precarious, resting as they must on a significant assumption that future events will derive from present circumstances that are all known. Today's reading from the prophet Ezekiel, one of my favorites, sets our thinking about the future in its proper place: it is atheistic.

Our thinking about the future places God on the sidelines, making him a spectator of the forces he authored rather like a model train hobbyist. With some level of confidence, we see where the engine is headed and conclude where it then must go. Ezekiel, however, hears God saying otherwise.

Here, in my opinion, is the key: ... *I have spoken, and I will do it, declares the LORD.*

Dear reader, when you take stock of your circumstances and think of the future, please keep this brief passage of scripture in mind. Shake vigorously together your reading of the Bible, your knowledge of science, and your memories of your life while holding the thought that there was a time you were not but this day you are.

Now, look ahead of you as far as you can see and remember this: ² *In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? ³ And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself; that where I am you may be also. ... I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.* (John 14:2-3, 18)

*Lord Jesus, you have spoken. And you will do it! Blessed be Your Holy Name, now and forever!
Amen.*



Tuesday, March 24

Psalm 130

¹ Out of the deep have I called unto you, O LORD;
LORD, hear my voice.
² O let your ears consider well
the voice of my supplications.
³ If you, LORD, were to mark what is done amiss,
O LORD, who could abide it?
⁴ For there is mercy with you;
therefore you shall be feared.
⁵ I wait for the LORD; my soul waits for him;
in his word is my trust.
⁶ My soul waits for the LORD,
more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning.
⁷ O Israel, trust in the LORD, for with the LORD there is mercy,
and with him is plenteous redemption;
⁸ And he shall redeem Israel
from all their sins.

Psalm 130:6 in the New Living Translation says, *I long for the Lord more than sentries long for the dawn, yes, more than sentries long for the dawn.*

Remember that the dawn will come. We know that the physical dawn will come but sometimes it is very hard to wait for it, for instance, we want to leave at dawn to go fishing or leave on a trip at first light. Sometimes we are awake at night waiting for the dawn because of stress and worries.

Here the psalmist is crying out to the Lord for forgiveness, and mercy because of his sins and in hope trust that God will answer his prayer. We know that the Lord will answer, and he will give it in his own time, but we have to trust that the Lord will answer because sometimes we get impatient.

We live in a world of quick fixes and instant gratification: I want it now and do it for me now. But we cannot expect God to act according to our wishes because he has a plan for us and the plan is revealed when he wishes it to be revealed to us. So, we need to thank him for what he has done so far and trust him for his future plans and follow him in trust.

O Lord, we entreat you mercifully to hear us, and grant that we, to whom you have given the desire to pray, may by your mighty aid be defended and comforted in all our adversities; through, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

(BCP Proper 3)



Wednesday, March 25

Romans 6:15-23

¹⁵ What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶ Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, ¹⁸ and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹ I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

²⁰ For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹ But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Growing up I learned to be a people-pleaser. When I did things well, I received praise. I liked praise. I liked approval of others. In school I received praise and approval when I got an A. I became an A student. But getting an A soon wasn't enough. I had to get the highest grade in the class. And if I didn't, envy set in, or feelings of inadequacy or both.

By the time I was a young adult, I was proficient, maybe even masterful, at turning a compliment into something negative about myself. I was full of self-pity and self-doubt. I had made approval of others my master and I was a slave to it. What grew out of that was a very negative self-perception, feelings of unworthiness, and shame. I could not see or experience the beauty God had created in me. I was never satisfied with the results. There was never enough praise from others.

That was my experience of making something or someone other than God my master. We all have a master. Something that drives our behavior, our character, our life. When God is our master, the outcome is our sanctification – always growing closer and closer to the likeness of Christ. It gives us life, life to the full. When something else is our master, it spirals out of control, leading us towards destruction and death.

Almighty God, I choose You as my master. Free me from the grip of anything else that wants to enslave me. Fill me with Your abundant life, with Your peace, with Your eternal purpose. Help me to find my identity in You alone and live solely for You, trusting in You and following Your Son with all that I am, all You have created me to be.
Amen.



Thursday, March 26

John 11:18-27

¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

College life brings enough challenges on its own, but it becomes even more difficult when you're faced with a lecturer who refuses to bend. I once had one during a lab course – strict down to the very last second. I'll never forget the shock of having a paper I poured my heart into rejected simply because it was submitted one minute late. One minute. It felt painfully unfair.

How different our Savior is. Jesus can arrive four days "late" and still be perfectly on time. Mary and Martha had exhausted every ounce of hope. Their brother was gone, and to them, the moment for a miracle had passed. If only Jesus had come sooner, they thought, Lazarus might still be alive.

What they didn't realize was that God was preparing something far greater than anything they could have imagined. The Lord over life and death was about to summon a man – already decaying – back to life. Nothing like this had ever happened before, so it never even entered their minds as a possibility.

But Jesus is the resurrection and the life. All life begins with Him and ultimately returns to Him. Lazarus was raised, yes, but he would eventually die again, as all people do.

For believers, this is our confidence. Death does not have a hold on us. We get to be with him forever once we take a rest from this sinful world. For those who reject Him, Scripture speaks of a second and eternal death – a sobering truth.

I am deeply grateful that the Savior who can be "four days late" and still right on time is the One who watches over my life. And I rejoice that my eternity is secure in Him.

*Father, help us trust that your silence is not denial, that you are always at work in our lives. Prepare us for eternity in your presence where death does not have any power over us as you are the resurrection and death.
Amen.*



Friday, March 27

John 11:28-37

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

When the time comes, how would you like to die?

For Mary, this particular time was not the time she wanted for her brother to pass on. Like most of us, we appeal to the Almighty to grant us "the how" of our own death. Probably the most common criteria spoken is that we die in an instant and overnight. Oh yeah...without pain. And, please, Lord, take care of my family. And... Well, you get the idea.

Mary had the same desire for her brother's death that her sister Martha had. Lazarus had been entombed for four days already. People had come to support Martha and Mary in their grief. Word was going around that Jesus was heading to their village, Bethany. So, Martha had left and went to meet this Jesus on the way. When she came to him, she said the same thing Mary told Jesus in v. 32, ... *if you had been here, ...*

She did not want him to die that way at that time. Jesus could have (should have?) been there to prevent his death because it was not the way they wanted him to die. We sure hope we can die a certain way.

Sometimes we are able to accept. Augustus Toplady said it very well:

"While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See thee on thy judgement throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

*Gracious and loving God, we put all our trust in you. Your plan for us is perfect.
Let me hide myself in Thee.
Amen.*



Saturday, March 28

John 11:38-44

³⁸ Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

What do dead people look like and smell like after four days in a cave? I don't know and I don't want to know. But I have been with Christian people at their moment of death. I do know what people look like then.

If you have ever shared that experience with someone, you know that it is a powerful, supernatural event. There is an indescribable holiness as well. The whole event can leave one speechless.

But make no mistake. Dead people don't look like living people. Something happens when the spirit departs. No matter how talented the mortician is, the person in the casket cannot look like the person before death. There is something unnatural about them.

That's because human beings were never intended to die. Death is a gross violation of God's desire for humankind. Death is not the way it is supposed to be.

Lazarus was not supposed to die. But Lazarus did die... twice.

Sometimes we forget that after they unwrapped Lazarus, he lived a while but died a second time. Which raises the question: why did Jesus bother?

Jesus told Martha, *Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?* (John 11:40) Those people at the tomb that day saw something that few people get to see: the incomparable power of God. The message is clear for all time. God, not death, has the final word.

Moreover, the story of Lazarus is an exciting sneak preview of a glorious day to come.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

*Come quickly, Lord Jesus.
Amen.*



Palm Sunday, March 29

Isaiah 52:13-53:6

¹³ Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted.
¹⁴ As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond
human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of
mankind—
¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths because of
him,
for that which has not been told them they
see,
and that which they have not heard they
understand.
¹ Who has believed what he has heard from
us?
And to whom has the arm of the Lord been
revealed?
² For he grew up before him like a young
plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should

look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.
³ He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted
with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him
not.
⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.
⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought
us peace,
and with his wounds we are healed.
⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own
way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

The prophet Isaiah's portrayal of the messianic suffering slave bears witness to the profound alienation and anguish that he will be called to endure. He is *marred ... beyond human semblance* (52:14) and is *despised and rejected by men* (53:3). And the repudiation he experiences culminates in the ultimate victimization: he is made the scapegoat of the world. For it is the slave who *has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows*. (53:4) It is the slave who *was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities*. (53:5) It is the slave who bears *the iniquity of us all*. (53:6) And although he is innocent, he is led to the grave.

In the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the suffering slave is made manifest. And his Passion demonstrates the way in which humanity's primordial sin of pride is expressed in the scapegoating of the innocent. When confronted with the radical love of Jesus, his persecutors and, by extension, the whole of rebellious humanity, choose injustice over justice, cruelty over mercy, and arrogance over humbleness.

However, the miracle of Easter undoes the inevitability of humanity's endless cycles of violence by demonstrating that ultimate fulfillment and flourishing arise from loving self-sacrifice rather than hostile self-interest. For it is the very same suffering slave who *shall be high and lifted up, and shall be exalted*. (Isaiah 52:13) It is the *lamb that is led to the slaughter* (Isaiah 53:7) that is eternally worshipped by the whole host of heaven, who proclaim, *Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!* (Revelation 5:12)

Father God, inspire us to renounce the ways of pride and violence. And teach us instead to rejoice when we share in Christ's sufferings, that we might rejoice when he comes again.
Amen.



Monday in Holy Week, March 30

Isaiah 53:7-12

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is
silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken
away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the
living,
stricken for the transgression of my
people?
⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.
¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him;
he has put him to grief;

when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong
his days;
the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.
¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall
see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my
servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with
the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the
strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the
transgressors.

God is faithful, generous, and loving “all the time.” We can *sorta* be like God, but only in fits and starts, and that only because God made us in his image.

Unlike us, God dwells elsewhere, somewhere where things are not exactly as they are here. He dwells where there is no time; we dwell here, where time is and under its dominion.

God lives always where he is; he is always. We have lives here that always begin and end always.

God is not like us. But we can be like God. Thanks to God; and thanks only to God.

God came to be with us, to show us who he is: faithful, generous, and loving. We showed him who we are: faithless, selfish, and murderous, things he already knew about us.

Because God is faithful, generous, and loving, God came to save us from ourselves. And all we could do was to betray God, to think only about ourselves, and to kill him.

What else could we do? That’s how we all are.

And God knew we would do what we did do. Still, he came.

But in the end, he outlived our faithless, selfish, and murderous being to come to us again with his offer to be like him: faithful, generous, and loving – moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day, all the way to eternity where God dwells waiting patiently for us to come to him, to be in him.

*Brothers and Sisters, let us go to the house of the Lord!
And Lord Jesus, thank you for being and then showing us the Way.
Amen.*



Tuesday in Holy Week, March 31

Psalms 22:1-11

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken
me,
and are so far from my cry, and from the
words of my complaint?
² O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do
not hear;
in the night season also, but I find no rest.
³ But you remain holy,
enthroned upon the praises of Israel.
⁴ Our fathers hoped in you;
they trusted in you, and you delivered
them.
⁵ They called upon you, and were delivered;
they put their trust in you, and were not
confounded.
⁶ But as for me, I am a worm, and no man,
scorned by all, and the outcast of the
people.

⁷ All those who see me laugh me to scorn;
they curl their lips, and shake their heads,
saying,
⁸ "He trusted in God, that he would deliver
him;
let him deliver him, if he will have him."
⁹ But you are he that took me out of my
mother's womb;
you were my hope, when I was yet upon
my mother's breasts.
¹⁰ I have been cast upon you ever since I was
born;
you are my God, even from my mother's
womb.
¹¹ O go not far from me, for trouble is near at
hand,
and there is none to help me.

This psalm is one written by King David. He is feeling alone, forgotten, abandoned by God, under extreme distress because of his enemies and he is in physical pain. But David cries out to God all the time but he remembers that God delivered the Israelites many times in the past when they cried out to God in trust. David addresses God in his troubles and acknowledged the God who was, is, and will be his protector and savior.

Have you ever felt that you have been abandoned, forsaken, forgotten? You are in good company. Jesus quoted the first part of the first verse of this psalm in his cry out to God while hanging on the cross. He, in his human nature, felt abandoned by God as he was carrying the weight of the sins of the world.

So, we can be honest with God about our feelings, as we remember that God is faithful, we recall his faithfulness to us in the past and we turn to him in hope of the future.

*Surely, it is God who saves me;
I will trust in him and not be afraid.
For the Lord is my stronghold and my sure defense,
And he will be my Savior.
Therefore you shall draw water with rejoicing from the springs of salvation.
And on that day you shall say,
Gives thanks to the Lord and call upon his Name (Isaiah 12:2-3a)
Amen and Amen.*



Wednesday in Holy Week, April 1

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Paul, of course, is pointing us to the humility of Christ. He is our perfect example of a humble servant of God. Be like Him, Paul urges us. Easier said than done. I write from experience.

My friends, I must confess that I struggle with pride. Oh, I'd like to think that I don't – in fact, at one point in my life I didn't think I had a problem with pride. I compared myself to others thinking, "well, I'm not as prideful as he/she is." You see, pride is tricky. You can identify it in others easily enough, but it is hard to see it in yourself. Jesus told us, *First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.* (Matthew 7:5)

Even now as I write this, I am reminded of times that the Holy Spirit has convicted me of my pride. I am sorry that pride had welled up in me, yet so very grateful for His conviction and God's forgiveness.

Pride takes on many shapes and forms, and it affects all of us. Don't be fooled into thinking you do not have pride like I was. Even the apostles, those closest to Jesus during His life here on earth, struggled with pride. Remember how they argued about who was the greatest among them (Mark 9:33-35)? Or James and John wanting to sit at His left and right hand when He came into His Kingdom (Matthew 20:20-28)? We're in good company with our sinful, prideful nature.

Yet, we're in better company when our hearts are filled with humility. For then we are in the company of Jesus.

*O Jesus meek and humble, deliver me from my pride and fill my heart with humility.
Amen.*



¹ When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. ² And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor.

³ Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, ⁴ saying, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." They said, "What is that to us? See to it yourself." ⁵ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself. ⁶ But the chief priests, taking the pieces of silver, said, "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, since it is blood money." ⁷ So they took counsel and bought with them the potter's field as a burial place for strangers. ⁸ Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. ⁹ Then was fulfilled what had been spoken by the prophet Jeremiah, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him on whom a price had been set by some of the sons of Israel, ¹⁰ and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me."

I'm not concerned with arguing whether Judas Iscariot's fate was shaped by predestination or by his own choices. Whatever view one holds, it doesn't change the heart of the matter: Judas never displayed true repentance. What he experienced was remorse – deep regret over the consequences of his actions, not genuine sorrow over the sin itself. There is a world of difference between being sorry about sin and being sorry for sin.

Spurgeon once suggested that Judas may have assumed Jesus would slip away from His captors as He had before, and when Judas realized Jesus had actually been condemned, remorse crushed him. In that moment, he returned the blood money to the very men who had enticed him into betrayal. And look at how they treated him. It's a pattern as old as humanity – those who draw us into sin are rarely the ones who stand with us when the fallout comes. People are quick to tempt but slow to bear the consequences with us.

Yet I am convinced that if Judas had truly repented, he would have found forgiveness. God's grace is deeper than any sin, no matter how dark. Peter is living proof – he denied Jesus three times, yet sincere repentance opened the floodgates of mercy. David too, despite grievous failures, was restored because his repentance was genuine and heartfelt.

The difference is never the magnitude of the sin but the posture of the heart. True repentance always encounters abundant mercy.

*Father, help me always to find my way back to You, trusting that You will receive me. Your love reaches deeper than all my unrighteousness, yet You call me to come with genuine repentance to receive the grace that only You can give.
Amen.*



Good Friday, April 3

Matthew 27:11-31

¹¹ Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" Jesus said, "You have said so." ¹² But when he was accused by the chief priests and elders, he gave no answer. ¹³ Then Pilate said to him, "Do you not hear how many things they testify against you?" ¹⁴ But he gave him no answer, not even to a single charge, so that the governor was greatly amazed.

¹⁵ Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to release for the crowd any one prisoner whom they wanted. ¹⁶ And they had then a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. ¹⁷ So when they had gathered, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" ¹⁸ For he knew that it was out of envy that they had delivered him up. ¹⁹ Besides, while he was sitting on the judgment seat, his wife sent word to him, "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much because of him today in a dream." ²⁰ Now the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. ²¹ The governor again said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" And they said, "Barabbas." ²² Pilate said to them, "Then what shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said, "Let him be crucified!" ²³ And he said, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Let him be crucified!"

²⁴ So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." ²⁵ And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!" ²⁶ Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.

²⁷ Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole battalion before him. ²⁸ And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, ²⁹ and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on his head and put a reed in his right hand. And kneeling before him, they mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ³⁰ And they spit on him and took the reed and struck him on the head. ³¹ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him and led him away to crucify him.

As we explore this Journey to Jerusalem, we encounter this one man who is the only person to answer "I will!" to the offer to change places with Jesus. No one else, none of us, would offer to take Jesus' place as he is about to be scourged, crucified.

This switching of places was not the significant one. The holiest exchange had already been agreed to. The world-changing switch was being made. You see, we are the ones that are supposed to be on that cross. It is our sins that require atonement. You did not have to agree to anything. Still, the only begotten Son of God did. He took our place. Knowing full well what was about to happen, Jesus said, "I will." He took our place.

Glory be to our God.

Father, you have changed our depravity into holiness. You took our death and exchanged it for eternal life. You are taking us from here and placing us there, in the presence of your Throne of Grace. Thank you, God, for the holiest switch of all.
Amen.



³² As they went out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. They compelled this man to carry his cross. ³³ And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), ³⁴ they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. ³⁵ And when they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots. ³⁶ Then they sat down and kept watch over him there. ³⁷ And over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." ³⁸ Then two robbers were crucified with him, one on the right and one on the left. ³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him." ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him. For he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" ⁴⁴ And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

⁴⁵ Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. ⁴⁶ And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ⁴⁷ And some of the bystanders, hearing it, said, "This man is calling Elijah." ⁴⁸ And one of them at once ran and took a sponge, filled it with sour wine, and put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink. ⁴⁹ But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." ⁵⁰ And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit.

⁵¹ And behold, the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. And the earth shook, and the rocks were split. ⁵² The tombs also were opened. And many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, ⁵³ and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many. ⁵⁴ When the centurion and those who were with him, keeping watch over Jesus, saw the earthquake and what took place, they were filled with awe and said, "Truly this was the Son of God!"

Words fail. Read it again. And again. And again. Let it sink deep into your very soul.

*Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?
- Charles Wesley*

Lent

2026



Life is a journey meant to be shared.
Come join us on The Way.



Journey to Jerusalem202649