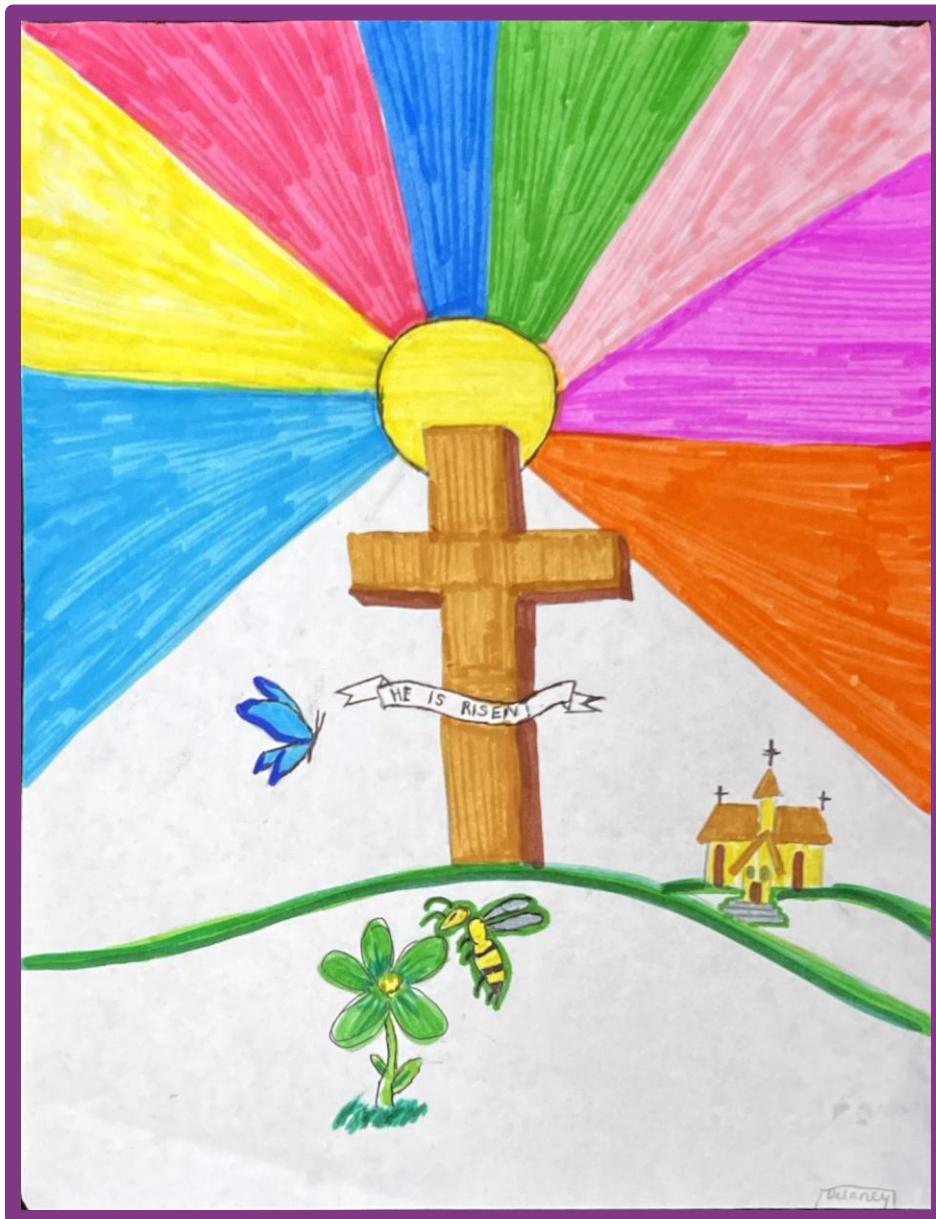


Becoming Easter People

2025 Lenten Reflections and Prayers



Picture by Delaney Kinard

A Challenge for The Lenten Season

*The Lenten season begins on Ash Wednesday, March 5 and concludes on Saturday, April 12. Sundays are not included in the 40-day calculation.

COMMIT TO GIVING NOT GIVING UP THIS LENTEN SEASON

“What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.” James 2:14-17

During this Lenten season I would like to challenge you to add to your spiritual Lenten journey through deeds (rather than giving something up). There are many commandment fulfilling opportunities of loving one another both within our own church and outside in our community. Our food ministries, children's ministries, and jail ministry, to name a few are always looking for more volunteers.

When we are serving those in need, we are not only nourishing the body but we are nourishing and feeding the soul with the Holy Spirit and God's love. When we serve our community, we are planting seeds of love both our love and the love of God. The love of Immanuel Lutheran Church continues to spread throughout our community through the works of those that give their time, talent, and treasures to these worthy programs. Take this opportunity of Lent to strengthen your faith by increasing your works and experience the true love that our church family shares with our community family.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are grateful that we can bring our church family and community together to nourish them in both body and soul. We ask that you continue to show us the way to serve you in a faithful and cheerful manner so that we demonstrate to all your commandment of 'Love your neighbor as yourself'.

Amen

Your sister in Christ,

Kim Leemhuis

A General Devotional for Lent

Luke 10:25-37 (The Good Samaritan)

Theme: We are called to love others “as ourselves”. How we practice this commandment in families influences how children will implement a love for others throughout their lives.

Activity: Lists of Love

- Separate in Groups
- Create a list of how parents show love to their kids
- Create a list of how kids show love to their parents
- Circle items on each list about how God loves us

Reflection Questions:

- Who showed love to the man who was hurt?
- How did he help him?
- Do you think it was easy to love this stranger? Why or why not?
- Have you ever had a chance to be the Good Samaritan/to help someone in need?
- Have you ever been the one in need and had someone unexpected take care of you?
- What difference does it make to imagine the person on the side of the road as your parent/child/sibling?
- Neighbors are not just those in need. They are also people we do not like or understand, people who have made bad decisions, people who have lost our respect or trust, etc. How do we love the “black sheep” of our families?

Closing Prayer: Pray in a popcorn style using the circled words on the list. The leader will start, “Loving God thank you for...” and then participants take turns shouting circled words from the list.

Then say, “Help us to love others by....” and participants take turns shouting the underlined words from the list.

Then say, “Amen.” Trey Morris

Two Reflections for The Second Week of Lent

Monday, March 17 - Saturday, March 22

Heart Windows, Pebbles, and Storms

We can see God through the windows in our hearts. The pane is clear and clean and easy to see through. There are times; for all of us, that our own pane has been hit by a pebble and cracked; but did not shatter. This pebble was a pebble of pain. It could have been from losing a loved one, going through troubling times, sickness, or family troubles.

Before the pebble, God was easy to see, and the view was as clear as day, but after the pebble our view became unclear. The pain distorted our view of God – did not take it away but made it out of focus. Every so often a pebble will come and crack your heart window causing you to wonder where God is.

Remember when Jesus left his disciples and went up the mountain to pray. A terrible storm came on the sea and the disciples wondered where Jesus was and why he was not helping them. Then they saw Jesus Walk on the water and save them. They thought that he was a ghost. He came to them in a way that they were not expecting. They almost missed seeing the answer to their prayers.

The message is to stay strong in our faith and when we find it difficult to see God trust him. Trust and believe that Jesus is with us every step of the way and He will take care of us!

Kat Finkbeiner

Psalm 46:10a

Be still and know that I am God.

A Quiet Mind

We live in a hectic world, full of unrest and disarray. Often our minds are filled with a list of things we need to do, and as we complete each task, our minds are racing forward to the next activity. We are so geared to living in this state of mental anticipation that our minds fall into this habit that is often difficult to break and can permeate our worship life. In my vocation as a worship leader, I often found myself doing this very thing within the service, always thinking about what was coming next and not being present in the moment. The commandment “Be still and know that I am God” requires more than sitting at rest. It involves quieting our minds so that we are open to what God has to say to us.

The Gospels tell of Jesus rising early and going to a quiet place to pray. With the press of the crowds and the great need for healing, communing in this way with God was essential as part of Jesus’ ministry to others. In our Lenten journey this season, may we be able to follow Jesus’ example and find a place where we can quiet our busy minds so that we can hear the message God has for us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me pause from the hectic thoughts that dominate my mind, so that in quietness I may hear Your still, small voice calling me and leading me to communion with You. Amen.

A little something extra: Search YouTube for the song “A Quiet Place” by the group “Take 6.”

Emily Wallace

Three Reflections for The Third Week of Lent

Mondy, March 24 - Saturday, March 29

Isaiah 41:10

Fear not for I am with you; be not dismayed. For I am your God: I will strengthen you, I will help you.

“He has led you to this point. He will get you through it.” I have often heard people saying this to others in need of comfort. I never felt this was much of a comfort although well meaning. It is true God will help us during difficult times, but we must trust in his love and lean on him for peace during these times. Believe in God’s love and trust in his plans for each of us.

Dear Lord,

Please be with all those in need of your love and peace. Help us to see your love in our lives and guide us through each day with your words in our hearts. Help us to be patient and know all things are done in your time and to your plan.

In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen

Lianne Smith

Psalm 19:14 Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my salvation.

“The Truth shall make you odd,” a preacher once said as he expounded on the words of Jesus from John 8. Speaking Christian truth with love may not always be found in the mainstreams of conversation. Words of dishonest hate with derision have made their way into that arena causing rifts of division between people, groups, and nations. Pastor Chris has reminded all of us to be mindful of the backstory whenever we use words to speak the Truth. Yes, that may be peculiar, but it will set us free.

Prayer: God of grace, help us to continue loving one another with compassion and understanding. Help us use healing words of kindness toward those we encounter.

In the name of Jesus. Amen Linda Cobb

Matthew 7:7

Ask and it will be given to you; Seek, and you find; Knock and it will be opened to you.

Mark 11:24

Therefore, I say to you, “whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”

Asking God for a specific answer may not always happen when want it to. You must be patient and know that God WILL provide for you when you least expect it and sometimes it may only be a variation of the answer you're seeking to find. Sometimes God will open a door for you only to have that door close on you too. I believe that God is closing that door for you only to have you wait until the right door will be opened!

In my own life experience, I prayed hard many, many years ago for God to send me someone in my life that would “be good to me” and “treat me right”. Lo and behold along came Richard, who has been “good to me” and has “treated me right”! We both have had past relationships that were not the best situations. We will celebrate 28 years of marriage this year and I do thank God for my many blessings.

If you are facing a closed door, know that the right door will open, making way for you to step in, at the right time.

Prayer: Thank you for the many blessings you have given me and continue to bless my friends and family and keep your hands of protection around them.

Leisa Hotchkiss

Rejoice the Fourth Week of Lent, The Resurrection is Near!

Monday, March 31 - Saturday, April 25

YOUR PACKAGE WILL ARRIVE: SUNDAY, APRIL 20, 2025

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” John 3:16.

If you received an email advising you that your package was arriving on April 20th and you knew that you did not order anything, who do you think would be sending you a gift and why (pretending that Easter is not occurring on that date for the sake of my message please)? We generally give gifts to one another to commemorate a special occasion or event in someone's life such as holidays, birthdays, graduations, weddings, baptism, etc., these are our traditions.

Imagine for a moment that God has sent us that email advising us of the gift that he was sending us, the gift of his sacrificed son, Jesus Christ. That is what happens on Easter Sunday with the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; **our gift has arrived!** The gift of eternal life by the grace of God through the faith in Jesus Christ has been sent to us by our Father. Remember that remarkably familiar verse, What a priceless gift and we do not even have to worry about whether it is the right size or color!! No need for exchanges, only faith. Sounds so simple yet we know through our own trials and tribulations that our faith is often tested. Even Jesus had his faith tested. But alas we come full circle because after all, he is a wonderous and marvelous God, he forgives. Even after we have our moments of faithlessness, we are granted forgiveness.

Heavenly Father, let us move forward this year by allowing divine grace to be the influence that inspires us to encourage virtuous desire and strengths while resisting the temptations of sin and evil so that we are worthy of our gift of your sacrificed and resurrected Son, Jesus Christ. Amen

Your Sister in Christ,

Kim Leemhuis

Five Reflections for the FINAL Week of Lent

Monday, April 7 - Saturday, April 12

John 15:1-2

I am the true Vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that continues to bear fruit, He repeatedly prunes, so that it will bear more fruit [even richer and finer fruit].

Many young people do not know what pruning is. Pruning is generally done with plants. Plants often have dead stems, or old buds and leaves that hinder the plant from thriving. If a plant is pruned, it promotes new growth and is healthy for the plant to thrive.

Have you ever looked back in life and seen here God took something away that was simply getting in the way? Something that you thought was important to you but was dragging you down. Later in life you are so thankful that what was dragging you down simply faded out of your life. Maybe it was a toxic person, maybe a toxic habit, maybe a financial burden, or possibly leaving a job or location. I feel God knows us so well and (prunes) takes away the unnecessary parts of our lives so that we can bear fruit for His kingdom.

Jesus also states that He is the vine and we are the branches. The branches cannot exist without the vine. The branches will simply wither and die. We, the branches are dependent on Jesus, the vine so we can thrive. Jesus paid the price for our sins on the cross so that we may have eternal life.

God has made a special plan for us. He prunes us to thrive in this life and if we have faith in His promises and grace, gives us new life in the future. Our God is compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Prayer: Dear God, thank you for loving us. We pray that you will continue to grow our faith and trust in you. Thank you for your abundant grace. Amen.

John Kinard

The Repentant Thief

The story of the repentant thief crucified next to Christ gives us a vivid description of one being saved by God's grace through faith. All four gospels tell this story. In Luke 23:39-43 scripture tells of two thieves being crucified next to Jesus. One thief mocks and insults Jesus, the other has an immediate transformation of the heart and acknowledges Jesus as the Lord of the Kingdom of Heaven and admits his sins.

"39 One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" 40 But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? 41 We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." 42 Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." 43 Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

The repentant thief would have heard Jesus asking his father to forgive the very people who played a role in putting him on the cross. This must have had a profound impact on the repentant thief, perhaps understanding that Christ's forgiveness is unconditional without limits. He confessed and admitted he deserved to be punished, but realized Jesus was an innocent man. He then asked Jesus to be welcomed into his heavenly kingdom, and Jesus welcomed him with open arms.

The repentant thief didn't have time to provide restitution to the victims of his crimes. He didn't have time to make up for his wrongdoings by doing good deeds. He didn't have time to go to church and be baptized. By all **human** accounts, he couldn't make up for his mistakes. He was about to die and wouldn't have time to live out his newfound faith. He just confessed with his mouth and believed in his heart that Jesus Christ was Lord and was the key to everlasting life. This is a living illustration that God's grace is a gift given to us by the Father and cannot simply be earned by our works.

God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness were given to this thief without restrictions. This tells us that no sin is too great for God to forgive, and no sinner is beyond the reach of God's salvation if we are willing to turn to him with genuine faith and a repentant heart.

Prayer: Good and gracious God, thank you for your grace and mercy! Although we don't always do what you want us to do, we have comfort in knowing that you died on the cross to ensure that nothing will ever separate the faithful from your eternal love. Amen.

Will Stroup

1 Peter 5:6

Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.

August 4th, 2024 my family's lives were changed forever. It is well known and documented that it was on that day when my son Beckham was diagnosed with a Wilms tumor and was expediently admitted into the hospital and plans were begun for surgery and treatment. At times it still seems surreal and at other times reality crashes into my mind, the gravity of the situation we faced.

We have all likely seen commercials while watching our favorite shows that advertise Shriners Children's Hospitals or similar entities and organizations that treat ill and sickly children. For me, in all those moments, it stirs up emotions like empathy and sadness but also a feeling of false comfort, thinking that I was so far removed from ever being impacted by such a tragedy.

I can admit that with the events surrounding Beckham this past year served as a very humble experience for me. However, just as God always does, I recognize the love and grace he provided through the suffering. Watching Beckham's positive energy and spirit as he fought his illness, I personally saw him walking with Jesus' hand in his. Not only have I been given a living inspiration in my own son, but it was a realization that was gifted the strength and perseverance through my faith and belief in our God to not only carry these burdens but most importantly continue to see his love, grace, and mercy through it all.

I am humbled and uplifted in HIM.

Brett Waters

Matthew 4:1-4 (Jesus is tempted in the wilderness)

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, “If you are the son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread. But he answered, “It is written that One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Reflection:

My family laughs at my tendency towards being “hangry” (ie angry due to hunger) when I skip a meal, so this passage hits home for me. Jesus faces temptation when he is at his most vulnerable after fasting, but he is strong and resists the temptation, responding with scripture affirming the importance of God’s word. Lent is a time for us to exercise the discipline that Jesus demonstrates here. I won’t be fasting this Lent, but I will try to follow Jesus’ example and improve my spiritual discipline and reliance on God’s word.

Prayer:

Dear God, please help me to follow Jesus’ example during this Lenten season. Help me to exercise self-discipline, resist temptations and find my sustenance in You. Grant me the necessary strength and wisdom to deepen my faith so that I can be a better servant for You. In Thy name I pray. Amen.

Courtney Christensen

Easter People

Did you know that EVERY Sunday is liturgically considered a mini-Easter regardless of the season?

As Christians, although we accept the crucifixion of Jesus, we are called to be Easter people.

Prayer: Mysterious God, as the season of Lent concludes and Holy Week approaches, sustain in me the Spirit of Jesus. Help me to be an Easter person every day, reflecting Christ’s humble and loving nature. Amen.

Will Cleveland