

Created for Community



Lenten Devotional 2021

St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church

CREATED FOR COMMUNITY

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2021

Introduction

We are people *created for community* – community with one another, of course, and also community with *creation*, with the *saints*, with our *neighbor*, with those on the *margins*, and most of all, with *Christ*. Though we enter this Lent physically apart, we know that we are still connected in myriad ways to one another.

The goal of this devotional is to help you lean into some of those connections, with one another and with God. Here's a roadmap and explanation of how to use it:

Sundays will offer an overview of the week's theme, as well as suggested thematic practices for the week. The traditional Lenten practices are: **praying, fasting and giving**, and there will be one of each suggested. You're encouraged each week to try these for at least a day, but even better, all week. If you like something, do it beyond that week! The prayer practice will be explored in more depth following the Wednesday night conference-wide Zoom gathering, at 7:30.

"Musical Mondays" will provide a hymn to guide your week. If you choose to receive this devotional digitally, as a daily email, you can enjoy Jon singing and playing it for you; if you prefer just the hard copy, you can meditate on the text.

Wednesdays you will find the liturgy for the evening's conference-wide Zoom prayer service, held at 7pm. Even without attending the service, you can do this liturgy on your own.

Saturdays will invite you into some thematic activity – perhaps a focused walk, or a craft. This is a good way to engage kids in our theme, but is also fun for grown-ups!

The other days will provide short reflections written by members of St. Paul's, offering insight and bringing us closer to others in our faith community.

Thanks to all who contributed to this devotional, and may we all hold one another and all the world in love and prayer.

Ash Wednesday

“Lent as a season of self-sacrifice is not really of special interest to the people: the entire year is a time of suffering and abnegation.

On Ash Wednesday Mexican-Americans renew their cultic communion with mother earth. For them the earth has always been sacred, and they retain a fundamental identity with it. The earth supports and regenerates life; it is life.

Foreigners may come and take away the earth from them, but they cannot take them away from the earth; “the people” is the living earth, the living earth is the people. When distant from their land, they dream about it, sing about it. They pray that when they die, they will be returned to their earth, there to be buried.”

from Virgilio Elizondo’s Galilean Journey, reflecting on the Mexican-American experience of Ash Wednesday:

Dear Creator, Thank you for forming us from the dust of the earth and breathing into our nostrils the breath of life. Accompany us on our journey through this Lenten Season and help us to honor the miraculous gift of life and the Holy Spirit that you have given us as we strive to serve and honor all of creation.

Glory be yours forever. Amen



Thursday, Feb 18

*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 Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and sustain me with your bountiful Spirit. (Psalm 51:1-17)*

This psalm always transports me back to the musty, mahogany pews of my childhood church where we sang it every week as the ushers processed down the aisle and presented our offerings to the pastor. At first, the words seem like they would be more appropriate after the confession, but in verses 16-17 it goes on to say that the only offering or sacrifice acceptable to God is “a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart.” Even as we give our tithes and offerings, we remember that they do not please God as much as our repentant hearts ready to be created anew - sustained by the Holy Spirit.

Dear Lord, You are such a loving and gracious God. You forgive us even when we don't deserve it. During Lent, help us turn our focus back to you so that we can love you with all our heart, all our soul, and all our mind – and love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen

Submitted by: Seminarian Lisa Frauens

Friday, Feb 19

6Is not this the fast that I choose:

*to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?*

*7Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

*8Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.*

*9Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am. (Isaiah 58:1-12)*

When I read this passage, it seems like a pretty straightforward message: care for others. Feed the hungry, house the poor, clothe the naked – make sure the basic needs of others are met. I often find myself looking for specific instructions like this – what can I do to help others? What is the best way to support others? Who should I help when there are so many needs, so many people hurting?

But I may be asking the wrong questions. This passage makes me consider that it's not the what or the who, but the how and the why that are more important in caring for others. This care needs to happen because the "bonds of injustice" affect all of us, because the inequity affects all of us, because we are all created for community. This care should not happen only when it's convenient for me, or only when I have extra to share, or only when it's someone I know, but should be ongoing as part of building my relationship with Christ. Creating community in Christ means connecting with all, it means building relationships with those with whom we might not otherwise interact, it means supporting each other as a collective. I also think it means we need to go deeper to consider our role in the oppression and inequity, to acknowledge and take steps to repair past harm. Give when it isn't easy, when it isn't convenient. Care when it doesn't affect you directly, because it affects all of us as a community. Take action that is out of your comfort zone, that builds a connection with someone new, within our church or within your neighborhood, workplace or school. Create a community that is supportive of all, where all can belong and experience God's love. This care for others isn't always about what others don't have or are lacking, but about what we can be together as a community.

Dear God, give us eyes to see and hearts to care for the needs around us, even when it isn't easy or convenient, so that we would help to build up the whole community of Christ.

Submitted by: Jen Canning

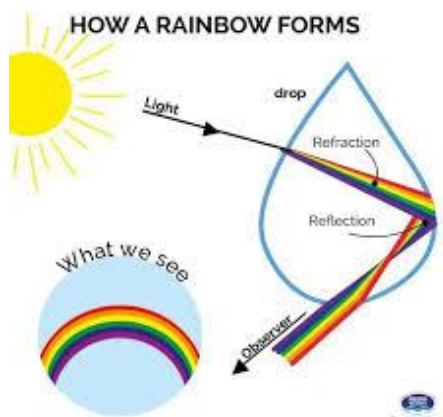
Saturday, Feb 20

I love science and I love God! Some say science and God do not mix, but I think that science helps make concrete the abstract nature of God's presence and love. This week's story about the promise of God's forgiveness in the form of a rainbow and how when we see a rainbow we can remember God's promise is a great example of how delving into the science makes a rainbow the perfect example of God's promise.

Did you know that when you view a rainbow with a friend, the rainbow you see is different than the one your friend sees? You are each viewing the refraction and reflection of light through different raindrops! I think this is amazing and it shows me how God's light can be everywhere all at once – something that I often doubt, particularly when life gets difficult. So, when you see a rainbow think of the sun as God's light and the raindrop as our baptism. When we allow God's light to pass through us in our holy baptism, we are free to express God's love in many and beautiful ways!

For our little ones, go on a rainbow scavenger hunt! Can you find in your home or in your neighborhood all of the colors of God's light? How many of each color can you find? Do you have a favorite color? Do you think that God has a favorite color?

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/24418022968063847/>



[Simple Rainbow Science Experiment for Kids - Supplies You Already Have](#)

Submitted by: Holley Haynes

1st Week in Lent – In Community with Creation

This week's Sunday readings highlight the destructive power of the flood as well as the power of God's promise represented there. In the gospel reading Jesus is with the wild animals in the wilderness. While we often think of community as limited to human beings, our human existence is interdependent with all the created world. This theme is especially apparent in Mark 4:35-41, the account of the fishermen whose lives depend on the sea but who become afraid of its power in the storm.

PRAY: in color.

This week we hear the story of God's first covenant with God's people, marked with a streak of color in the sky. From "the beginning," God has long communicated with God's people through creation, and all its glorious colors. This week, try coloring your prayer. Write down who or what you are praying for, doodle around it, and color your doodles, all the while dwelling in the presence of God. Read more about praying in color here: prayingincolor.com, or view the Facebook Live video from July 8, 2020.

FAST: from meat or clothing

Did you know that the clothing industry produces 10% of all humanity's carbon emissions and is the 2nd-largest consumer of the world's water supply? How about that almost 30% of the world's ice-free land is used to raise food animals, and beef cows produce about the same carbon emissions as the entire fashion industry?

This week, to care for creation, try giving up meat for the week, and enjoying some of the plant-based goodness of creation. Could you continue having at least one meatless day each week?

Or, consider pairing down your wardrobe: chose a "capsule wardrobe" (for example, two pairs of pants/skirts, three tops, two pairs of shoes) for one week, wear only these. Then at the end of the week, take stock of your closet. How do you feel about the clothes you didn't wear? Anything you could get rid of? Was your morning routine shortened or lengthened with limited options? Do your clothes serve your needs?

GIVE: to a charity that protects the earth.

If you need ideas, check out Charity Navigator to find one with a good rating.

Monday, Feb 22

Creating God Your Fingers Trace (With One Voice #757)

Tune: DUNEDIN

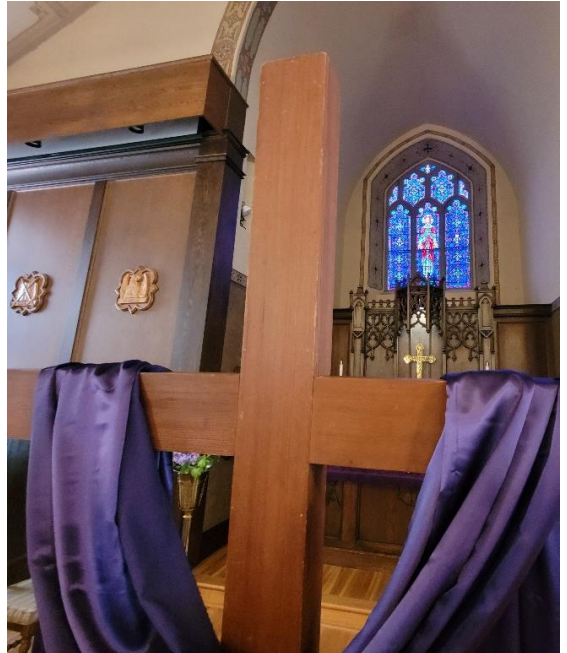
(alternate tune: ELW #684 - PROSPECT)

1. Creating God, your fingers trace
the bold designs of farthest space;
Let sun and moon and stars and light
And what lies hidden praise your might

2. Sustaining God, your hands uphold
earth's myst'ries known or yet untold;
Let water's fragile blend with air,
enabling life, proclaim your care.

3. Redeeming God, your arms embrace
all now despised for creed or race;
Let peace, descending like a dove,
Make known on earth your healing love.

4. Indwelling God, your gospel claims
one fam'ly with a billion names;
Let ev'ry life be touched by grace
Until we praise you face to face.



Tuesday, Feb 23

13I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. 16When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” (Genesis 9:8-17)

Back when the book of Genesis was written a rainbow would have been pure wonder. There was no scientific explanation of how light refracts through raindrops. It’s easy to imagine how people might have seen each rainbow as a miracle, the arch connecting us to God as the sun shines through a sky darkened with storms. But even with all our scientific advances and knowledge, little has changed in the way we view rainbows. References to rainbows as a form of connection aren’t hard to find. The Rainbow Bridge connects us to our beloved pets who have passed on. Dorothy sings of the rainbow connecting us to our hopes and dreams in The Wizard of Oz. Even Kermit the Frog searches for the Rainbow Connection. Clearly, there is something about this celestial phenomenon that extends to a place science cannot reach.

My mom passed away when my sisters and I were teenagers; all of us on the verge of the most important milestones in our lives when we’d most like to have her by our sides. Those moments of intense joy are ringed with sadness without her there. By strange coincidence or divine miracle, many of these big moments have been marked by rainbows for each of us. A rainbow arching across the sky on my wedding day and the morning after my first child was born. We feel a comfort in the connection to our mother through that colorful arch that is so much more than refracted light.

Surely not everyone has such strong symbolism attached to their personal experiences with rainbows. And yet we are connected in our awe of them. Our street is oriented so that none of the houses have a great view of where a rainbow would typically show its arch. Our neighborhood is friendly, but we aren’t a tight-knit community and we certainly represent a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. Still, we have a group text thread that is primarily used as a Rainbow Notification System. Whenever one is spotted the texts start to chime and families pour from our homes and into the street. We come together to witness the miracle and connect to each other in our awe. These days, that common experience seems to be as much the miracle as the rainbow itself.

Heavenly Father, thank you for the wonders of your creation that connect us to you, to one another, and to the generations of people before us. Help us to remember that we are all connected through you and to look for the ways we are alike while embracing our differences. Amen.

Submitted by: Elizabeth, Alice and Ellie DeLorenze

Wednesday, Feb 24

Gathering Song

Bless now, O God, the journey

ELW 326

Prayer

Gracious Creator, you fashioned us in your image in the midst of a world beyond our knowledge and understanding. Continue to weave us together in community with all created things, and deepen our awareness of the ways you connect us to the earth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Scripture: Mark 4:35-41 *Jesus calms a storm*

Engaging with Scripture

At home: Reflect, talk, or journal about one or more of the following:

- Jesus says, "Let us go across to the other side." To what other side does Jesus beckon us, as individuals, and as the church? What keeps us on our own sides?
- Jesus commands the sea, "Peace! Be still!" Into what storms in your life do you need the commanding voice of Jesus to speak peace?
- Jesus asks, "Why are you afraid?" How would you answer that question today?

Sung Response

God of the sparrow

ELW 740

Prayers *Include prayers for creation in your conversation with God today.*

Blessing

The Creator who fashions us together with all things,
the Christ who leads us into a new beloved community,
the Spirit who holds us in the communion of saints,
one God, ☩ bless you now and always.

Amen.

Sending Song

The day you gave us, Lord, has ended

ELW 569

Dismissal

Go in peace, joined together in Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Thursday, Feb 25

*4Show me your ways, O Lord,
and teach me your paths.*

*5Lead me in your truth and teach me,
for you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long.*
(Psalm 25:1-10)

I love learning. I love God. So why is it so hard to sit still and learn from God sometimes? Why am I so insistent instead on relying on my own ways and means?

Turns out, that's the human condition in a nutshell. Our natural inclination is not to turn toward God, but to turn inward, in toward our own navels, as Luther said. He defined sin as "incurvatus in se," curved in on oneself.

Psalm 25 offers us a clear prayer to help us with this. In the two verses above we find a prayer that could sustain us throughout this season and beyond.

Show me your ways, O Lord. I too often let my own ways block what you're trying to show me. Help me get myself out of the way.

Teach me your paths. When I go down my own path, redirect me. Show my feet the right way to tread.

Lead me in your truth and teach me. If I start to go astray, take my hand to guide me once again toward your will. Teach me to trust this hand.

For you are the God of my salvation; in you have I trusted all the day long. There is nothing more trustworthy than you. You have saved me, do save me, and will save me. You alone. Teach me to look only to you.

Amen.

Submitted by: Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Friday, Feb. 26

12And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. (Mark 1:9-15)

I actually find comfort in knowing that Jesus was tempted by Satan. Because I am tempted, too. Matthew and Luke both tell us exactly how the devil tried to tempt Jesus, but not Mark. Mark leaves it open, and in doing so, he invites us to fill in the gaps with our own temptations, the ways we feel tempted when we find ourselves out in the metaphorical wilderness of faith.

How are we tempted? Let me count the ways...

I am tempted to focus on myself and my own needs, remaining blissfully unaware of my neighbor's struggles.

I am tempted to find my rest in a good TV show, rather than in prayer.

I am tempted to hang on to that stimulus money, rather than give it to someone who needs it more.

I am tempted to eat another handful of chips, even though I know it's bad for this temple with which God gifted me.

I am tempted to engage in really juicy gossip, because it makes me feel better about my own shortcomings.

I am tempted to say things I know will sting my neighbor, because that is easier than speaking with thoughtfulness, compassion, and humility.

I am tempted to choose convenience and instant gratification over care of the earth.

The list goes on.

We begin each Lent by hearing this story of Jesus being tempted, and today, I am hearing it not as history, but as promise: the promise of Jesus standing with me in my own temptations. He gets it, I know. And, if there is one thing I know can help me overcome life's challenges, it is having by my side someone who understands my plight.

Jesus, I'm so glad that you get me. With you by my side, I know I can overcome my temptations. Amen.

Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Saturday, Feb 27

Wintertime isn't the first season one thinks of when deciding to connect to nature. Primarily, it is cold, the paths can be icy, and the branches are bare. But, a walk in the wintertime has its own beauty and by planning carefully and dressing warmly these local walks will provide you with time to reflect on God's promises to Abraham and Sarah. God made three promises to Abraham and Sarah: the promised land, the promise of descendants, and the promise of blessing and redemption.

The West Esker Trail in Mendon Ponds Park is one of my husband Jeff's favorite winter walks. This particular walk is lovely to meditate on God's promises to Abraham and Sarah.

First of all, what is an esker? Eskers are ridges made of sands and gravels, deposited by glacial meltwater flowing through tunnels within and underneath glaciers, or through meltwater channels on top of glaciers. In this walk you will walk along the ridge of an esker. In the summer and fall the foliage is the highlight as well as the journey to the top. However, in the wintertime the branches are bare and you can see a beautiful wide view of Hundred Acre Pond.

As you hike this trail climbing up the esker, think about Abraham and Sarah's faith in God and faith and trust in each other. When you walk along the ridge of the esker look out on the view of Hundred Acre Pond and meditate on God's promises of land, descendants, and redemption. I think of the view from the top of this glacial formation as God's promise of land, and the barren trees God's promise of descendants, and the coverings of snow and ice as a reminder of God's redemption in our holy baptism.

https://www.monroecounty.gov/files/parks/jan_15_mpp_map.pdf

Submitted by: Holley Haynes

2nd Week in Lent – In Community with the Saints

This week's Sunday readings highlight God's promise to many generations; the passage from Romans reminds us that our faith is intertwined with those who have gone before us. The understanding of community expressed in our creeds extends beyond the present time to include those whose faith has influenced our own and those we influence after us. We hear this connection to what has been established before us echoed in Mark 9:2-8, the account of the transfiguration.

PRAY: with the Psalms

These ancient prayers give us insight both into the lives and hearts of our forebears in faith, and show us that humanity has struggled with some of the same things for all of time! Monastic communities read through the entire Psalter each week (find a plan online); or you could focus on just one Psalm each day (suggestion: 19, 22, 51, 107, 130, 27, 139). Attend the Wednesday online gathering at 7:30 to learn more about this practice.

FAST: from self-criticism and judgment

If God cares so much for you, well, how dare you value yourself as anything less than a beloved child of God? This week, whenever your inner critics clear their voices, remind them that you are God-protected and God-loved. Whenever you feel inclined to judge someone else, remember the same is true for them.

GIVE: your talent or your thanks

As you fast from self-criticism, make room to name the things that you're really good at. Find a way to share it with the world in a way that contributes to justice, peace, and/or delight. While you're at it, make an effort to thank other saints for the talents they bring to the world.

Monday, Mar 1

The God of Abraham Praise (ELW #831) - v. 1,3,4,7

Tune: YIGDAL

1. The God of Abr'ham praise, who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of everlasting days, and God of love-
"I Am the One I Am"- by earth and heav'n confessed;
I bow and bless the sacred name forever blest.

3. The God of Abr'ham praise! Your all-sufficient grace
Shall guide me all my pilgrim days in all my ways.
You deign to call me friend; you call yourself my God!
And you will save me to the end through Jesus' blood.

4. Your promise you have sworn; I on your oath depend.
I shall, on eagle wings upborne, to heav'n ascend.
I shall behold your face; I shall your pow'r adore,
And sing the wonders of your grace forevermore.

7. Before the great Three-One the saints exulting stand
And tell the wonders God has done through all their land.
The list'ning spheres attend and swell the growing fame
And sing the songs which never end, The wondrous name.

Tuesday, Mar 2

1When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. 2And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." (Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16)

Today's lesson refers to God's direction to Moses to lead his people to Mt. Horeb where they will be refreshed by water. God promises Moses that He will meet them there.

"Walk before Me."

Have you ever experienced walking alone in the dark with a feeling that you are being followed? If so, you may have turned around from time to time to look and you see nothing. Then you whisper "Please God, stay with me and guide me home safely." As you continue walking, you may realize that God is that one behind you. He is your watchman.

Each Sunday of Lent guides us closer to the glorious day of Easter. We walk ahead with anticipation, knowing that we will celebrate the Resurrection of Christ. On Easter Sunday, we have arrived to meet Him; a feeling of joy and relief.

Question: Is God walking BEFORE us or BEHIND us during our Lenten journey?

As our world, our country, our state and our community experience life with the COVID-19 Pandemic during this Lenten Season, we pray that God is walking WITH us.

Almighty God, thank you for walking before, behind, beside, and within us, each and every day. Amen.

Submitted by: Shari MacFarlane

Wednesday, Mar 3

Gathering Song *Bless now, O God, the journey* ELW 326

Prayer

Timeless One, you renew your promises in every generation. Deepen our awareness of the communion of saints who have gone before us, the saints in our own time, and the saints who will carry on your message of grace after us. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Scripture Mark 9:2-8 *Jesus is in conversation with those who have gone before him*

Engaging with Scripture

At home: Reflect, talk, or journal about one or more of the following:

- That moment on the mountaintop is sometimes called a “thin place,” where the veil between God and humanity for a moment becomes sheerer. Have you ever had such a moment, where God felt very close? Describe it.
- If you could talk to one of your ancestors in the faith, who would you talk to? What would you ask them?

Sung Response By all your saints ELW 420
Evening liturgy may differ...

Prayers

Include prayers giving thanks for those in your wider community who have died in the recent months.

Blessing

The Creator who fashions us together with all things,
the Christ who leads us into a new beloved community,
the Spirit who holds us in the communion of saints,
one God, ✠ bless you now and always.
Amen.

Sending Song *The day you gave us, Lord, has ended* ELW 569, LBW 274

Dismissal

Go in peace, joined together in Christ.
Thanks be to God.

Thursday, Mar 4

19[Abraham] did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. 20No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. (Romans 4:13-25)

Oh, to have the faith of Abraham in his hundredth year of life! Here is a man who followed the laws of his religion dutifully. While he knew that biologically speaking, Sarah was well beyond the child-bearing age (leaving Abraham without an heir), it didn't stop him from believing that God could make it happen if He chose to do so.

There are times in life when that kind of faith is what is required. When life does not seem to be going your way and in spite of following the "rules" a job is lost or a diagnosis is given; when you set out on a new course, not knowing if it is the best thing for you and your family. You can discuss, you can hope, you can analyze, but what you really need is faith in God—the faith of the saints, the faith of Abraham—the knowledge that even when things seem to go wrong they really will be alright. And if mistakes are made, God will see you through that, too.

How can I be so sure God is with me every day of my life? Some days I may not "feel" it, most days I don't see it, but I have no doubt that God is there. I put one foot in front of the other, knowing that even if my life doesn't take the shape that I expected it to, God will carry me. As Christians we know that following the commandments or laws doesn't guarantee a happy, worry-free life, and you can't earn your way into heaven. We are granted God's grace, free and clear, as long as we believe.

For obedient Abraham, he surely must have felt that time was running out on God's promise to him. But rather than rail against God for not providing him with an heir he kept the faith, knowing that all would be alright if he believed in God no matter what happened around him.

Twenty years ago, we made a decision to move to Rochester from Long Island, leaving a church we loved, dear friends and a successful business. We took our 3 daughters out of school. They didn't go quietly. We sought a slower pace of life and a chance to connect with Michael's family in western NY. We weren't sure how it would turn out, but we have been blessed to have found another church we love, great neighbors, schools and relationships with relatives we never would have had.

Now, we are moving on again. How bittersweet to leave this place we have loved so much, our church family, a job Mike has held for 20 years as well as doctors who have helped me cope with debilitating conditions. We're moving to be near one of our daughters and her family. Will we be as happy as we are here? I don't know. But I have faith that wherever I am, God is with me, and that is enough.

Submitted by: Laura Patchen

Friday, Mar 5

34[Jesus] called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 35For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. 36For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? (Mark 8:31-38)

We spend a lot of time, energy, and money avoiding death. We don't even like to use the word. “She passed away,” we say, or, “He's no longer with us.” And yet Jesus had no qualms about it, not even about asking us to die! So how do we get more comfortable facing the reality of death - not only that big one at the end of life on earth, but also so many small deaths along the way, all those losses and changes that trouble us so?

What if we could get better at death through contemplative prayer? That is how practitioners of this powerful form of prayer describe it: as a way to daily die, to be confronted by those fears, deceptions, and fixations we had convinced ourselves are a necessary part of us, but which need to die in order for us to find life. Contemplative prayer is not for the faint of heart! But when we practice this daily, as Pastor Drew Jackson observes, “death is no longer an unknown for us because we already know that life comes through the process of death.”

Pastor Jackson goes on, “Life best lived is a series of losses, a series of deaths. Death is not meant to be a one-time event at the end of life but, rather, a daily experience by which we learn to continually embrace the unknown, step into mystery, and release the need to control . . . The contemplative way is a practice in ‘death.’ If you have ever witnessed the moment of death, you know that death is ultimately silent, still, and alone. The practices of contemplative spirituality prepare us for this. The contemplative way thrusts us into the beautiful struggle of embracing the unknown and losing the need to control.” (Read more: <https://gravitycenter.com/life-found-dying/>)

Could this be what Jesus was talking about when he bid us to lose our life? Could he be asking us to sit quietly with those things that bring death to our spirit, so that we might be empowered to hand them to God, and go forth with a new life in Him? Are we up for it?

For prayer today, sit in quiet solitude for 3 min, or as long as you can.

Submitted by: Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Saturday, Mar 6

The following craft focuses on the 10 Commandments. I like this craft because it helps children visualize the two big concepts of how the first 3 Commandments are about loving God and the second 7 Commandments are about how we should love our neighbor. When we put our two hands together in prayer we can use the 10 commandments to guide us as we look to love God and our neighbors.

Ten Commandments Craft for Littles

Materials

Large paper grocery bag

Scissors

Glue

Crayons or Coloring Pencils

Printer paper and printer

Cut the paper bag open and trace the shape of two tablets onto the paper bag and cut out. See link below for example. <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/18858892179268304/>

Print out the coloring sheet below and invite your child to color. Another option is to have your child trace their own hand and write the words onto the fingers of the hands.

[Ten Commandments Coloring Pages - Best Coloring Pages For Kids | 10 commandments craft, Ten commandments craft, Bible lessons for kids](#)

Glue the hands onto the paper-bag tablet. Crumple up the craft in a ball and then flatten, to make it look like stone.

3rd Week in Lent – *In Community with Neighbor*

This week's Sunday readings center us in the Ten Commandments, which serve, among other things, as a way of living in community with our neighbor. Jesus' actions in the temple are, in part, a reaction to dishonest dealings with neighbors from near and far who have come to worship. Being in community with our neighbor is complicated and beautiful. Mark 2:1-12, the story of the paralyzed man brought to Jesus through the roof of a crowded room, highlights the way in which it takes a community to care for one another.

PRAY: the 10 commandments

This week we hear the 10 commandments in worship, those laws God gave to help the Israelites know what a community of God should look like, to guide them how they ought to treat God and neighbor. Luther's explanations of the 10 commandments in the Small Catechism offer a great glimpse into our hearts, showing us where we fall short and how we could live more closely aligned with God's vision. Use this little resource as a prayer guide, perhaps journaling your confessions and desires for growth. (If you don't have a Small Catechism – there's a free app for that, from Augsburg Fortress.)

FAST: from complaints

This week, refrain from gospel or negative words about others (and refer to Luther's explanation of the 8th commandment!).

GIVE: your time

Call or write three people this week you've been meaning to reach out to.

Monday, Mar 8

Where True Charity and Love Abide (ELW #653) - v. 1-2.
Tune: UBI CARITAS

Refrain:

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.

(Where true charity and love abide, God is dwelling there).

1. We are gathered by the one love of Christ Jesus;
Let us lift our voices to God and be joyful.
In holy wonder let us love the living God,
And may our hearts ever be one in faithful love.

Refrain

2. Since we are all one in the Lord, as we gather,
Let us be watchful that no strife still divide us.
Contention, envy, ill will, spite- may these all cease;
With us, abiding in our midst, is Christ our God.

Refrain



Tuesday, Mar 9

1God spoke all these words:

2I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3you shall have no other gods before me. (Exodus 20:1-17

It feels like we are currently in our own, present-day wilderness, a slave to the coronavirus. It was easy at first - although scary because we didn't know much about how the virus would behave - we could put "normal" on hold and focus on each other's needs – how was my family doing, how was my neighbor?

But, as the pandemic has dragged on for what is about a year now, I know I've built up my golden calf with nuggets of scarcity, pity, love of self, lamenting what I don't have, conserving my energy reserves, isolation, insecurity. Although I don't mean to, I'm worshiping the gods of fear, pride, self-love, self-reliance, sloth. It is just easier to deal with my own "stuff" (emotional, mental, and even physical) than to reach out to another to help them deal with theirs.

We were, however, Created for Community. The need to congregate is in our DNA – we gather to celebrate beginning-of-life and end-of-life events, and everything in-between. We confirm this in our current situation: Our mental health is suffering because of our isolation. We miss getting together with loved ones, our church community, our neighbors.

Our God is a God of Love. Love means "connection."

He brought us out of the wilderness once; he'll do it again. We must do our part to break down the calf and spread new nuggets of a listening ear, a verbal or eyes-only smile, a facetime mutual sharing of sight, a "touch" in the form of a card, or even 'just' a text or email to someone we've been thinking about. When we spread these nuggets around, they will reflect God's love back to us.

I SO need it – I'm guessing you do, too.

Dear God, keep our sights always on you and your saving love. Amen.

Submitted by: Alisa Piccirilli

Wednesday, Mar 10

Gathering Song *Bless now, O God, the journey* ELW 326

Prayer

Neighbor to all people, you call us into human communities to serve and be served by one another. Open our hearts to the needs of all our neighbors, and teach us to recognize the gifts you have given each of us to use in service to others. In Jesus' name we pray.
Amen.

Scripture Mark 2:1-12 *A community comes together to bring a neighbor to Jesus*

Engaging with Scripture

At home: Reflect, talk, or journal about one or more of the following:

- With whom do you identify in this story? The man on the mat? Someone crammed into the house, trying to be close to Jesus? One of those going to great length to help their friend? Someone across the street, wondering what's going on? What is it about them that connects with you?
- Jesus forgives and heals the man based on his friends' faith. Who in your life has modeled faith for you, or even strengthened your own faith? In what way?

Sung Response *Jesu, Jesu, fill us with your love* ELW 708
Evening liturgy may differ...

Prayers

Include prayers for the neighbors physically near where you live or worship: include neighborhood names, businesses and organizations, and, if appropriate, names of individuals you know.

Blessing

The Creator who fashions us together with all things,
the Christ who leads us into a new beloved community,
the Spirit who holds us in the communion of saints,
one God, ✠ bless you now and always. Amen.

Sending Song *The day you gave us, Lord, has ended* ELW 569

Dismissal

Go in peace, joined together in Christ. **Thanks be to God.**

Thursday, Mar 11

14Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.” (Psalm 19)

At the beginning of my teaching career over 30 years ago, I was inspired by educator and child psychologist, Haim Ginott. His words resonated with me and became my mantra for how to approach each child who entered my classroom or my life. In moments of exasperation, I would catch myself reciting his famous quote...

“I’ve come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It’s my personal approach that creates the climate. It’s my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized.” — Haim Ginott

Rooted in reverence for the Lord, I realize that this quote actually morphed over the years for me into thought patterns organized by God’s love, which guide what I say and how I think. I earnestly seek a clean heart with meditations pure and pleasing to God. I regretfully fall short, but sincerely strive for words that come from my lips to be exclusively complimentary, helpful, healing and encouraging to friends, family, neighbors and even strangers. We are given discernment and power by the Holy Spirit to choose our words and thought patterns to love like Jesus, serve, and bring others closer to Him. The Spirit guides us to place others’ needs before our own; to help our neighbor and serve our community in ways that He specifically calls us. The Lord redeems and strengthens us so we can offer ourselves to others through wholesome thoughts, words and actions. So let’s first seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Then go with praise in our hearts and prayer on our lips to use the Spirit’s power for new thought patterns and for using only good and helpful words for His glory.

Lord, renew a right spirit within us, purify our thoughts and reframe our words so we can be used as instruments of inspiration to others for Your glory. In Your holy name, Amen.

Submitted by: Linda Jackson

Friday, Mar 12

25For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. (1 Corinthians 1:18-25)

Sometimes we hit red lights. These can be actual red lights, which can be annoying, or events that cause us to stop in our tracks. Injury or illness can be a red light. So can loss – of employment, security, even of a loved one.

Until we hit these red lights, we think we're "on track." We're going through life, making what we think are wise choices, building on our strengths. God knows better. He sees our foolish pride. He sends us these messages to make us stop, reflect, and find our strength and wisdom in Him.

Heavenly Father, We are unwise and weak, even though we often don't think so. Thank you for sending us reminders that all we have comes from you. Help us to seek your wisdom by following your Word and your example.



Submitted by: Sue Wyatt, Council President

Saturday, Mar 13

Inspired by: Numbers 21:4-9

When you read the story of the snakes and Moses at first tomorrow, you may think that God sent the snakes as punishment for the Israelites for complaining. But think for a minute: they were in the wilderness where snakes live. The snakes were there the whole time biting and causing the Israelites pain. It was through God's guidance that the Israelites named the true cause of their pain and suffering and were able to be healed.

Part of this story reminds me of children whining. Many times we hear our children (and ourselves) complain about being bored, hungry, tired, or in need of something, but when we offer a solution to that complaint it is met with resistance and more complaining. Some of the best advice I was given as a parent is that often children whine about being bored, hungry, or tired when they are lonely and needing attention. Many times there are no immediate solutions for taking away your child's pain. I've learned to say, "I can't make it all better, but I can sit with you" and it is by being there with my child that we find peace. God wasn't going to take away the snakes, but he was able to guide them to healing and how faith in God is the way forward.

As you make the snake craft below, give thanks that God is with us in our pain and our loneliness.

[Wooden Spoon Snakes - Slithering Good Kid Craft Idea](#)

4th Week in Lent – *In Community with Those on the Margins*

This week's Sunday readings include the visit of Nicodemus to Jesus at night. Though he is a leader in the community, his interest in Jesus pushes him to the outside of his own group and to the edges of Jesus' followers. We continue to read of the Hebrew people wrestling with their wandering in the wilderness, not being part of a settled community. Those on the margins are also a part of our communities. When Jesus crosses over to the land of the Gerasenes in Mark 5:1-20, he encounters and brings healing to a man who has been left on the margins and restores him to community.

PRAY: the paper

All around us are people in need, and often their voices are not heard. This week, pray the paper (or your newsfeed): as you encounter the headlines, take a moment of prayer over each one, commending the needs behind each story to the loving mercy of God. (Alternative: attend Wednesday's Zoom gathering and do chair yoga with Pr Imani Olear, founder of Yoga 4 a Good Hood, and hear about how yoga is serving Rochester's inner city.)

FAST: from apathy

With so much need, it can be overwhelming to take it all in. This week, choose one issue affecting marginalized people, and learn something about it.

GIVE: your energy

What can you do this week to help a marginalized community? Donate goods? Call a legislator in support of something to help those in most need? Listen to someone's needs? Volunteer for a worthy organization? Choose one thing, no matter how small, to help someone in need.

Monday, Mar 15

I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say (ELW #332)

Tune: THIRD MODE MELODY

1. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Come unto me and rest.
Lay down, O weary one, lay down your head upon my breast.”
I came to Jesus as I was, so weary, worn, and sad.
I found in him a resting place, and he has made me glad.

2. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “Behold, I freely give
the living water, thirsty one;
stoop down and drink and live.”
I came to Jesus, and I drank of that life-giving stream.
My thirst was quenched, my soul revived, and now I live in him.

3. I heard the voice of Jesus say, “I am this dark world’s light;
Look unto me, your morn shall rise, and all your day be bright.”
I looked to Jesus, and I found in him my star, my sun,
and in that light of life I’ll walk till trav’ling days are done.



Tuesday, Mar 16

5 The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” (Numbers 21:4-9)

Especially as a mother of young children, the stories of the Israelites wandering and complaining in the wilderness always amuse me. I especially love how in this one, they complain first, “There’s nothing to eat and drink,” and then, “I don’t like what there is to eat and drink!” Well, which is it? Do you not have it, or do you not like it? It sounds like a conversation right out of my living room!

Of course, I speak from a place of great privilege - my family and I do always have plenty to eat and drink, and things to entertain us. We have recently struck up a relationship with a family in the Gambia, as well as with the bishop of the Lutheran Church there and his wife. Occasionally we video chat with the family. Recently, the young man proudly showed us their home: mats on the floor, a bag of rice to feed the family for a month, not a toy in sight for the 5 children in the household. I found myself embarrassed to give a tour of our house, not because it wasn’t clean (it wasn’t!) or not nice enough (a frequent insecurity of mine), but because of the sheer abundance of stuff in our home that has come to feel normal, in such sharp contrast to their bare bones living. What would he think to see so many pillows and blankets, or a floor littered with all manner of toys? It was a wake-up call for all of us, realizing our plenty. I found myself newly motivated to take stock of what I have, and reflect on what I really need, and be more generous with what is left.

Generous God, help us to recognize our abundance, and to share it with those in need. Amen.

Submitted by: Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Wednesday, Mar 17

Gathering Song*Bless now, O God, the journey*

ELW 326

Prayer

Mender of division, you sent Christ to heal the world and to gather those on the margins. Bring your healing power to us. May we extend your power and grace to those separated from their communities and those longing for a tangible sign of your love. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Scripture*Mark 5:1-20 Jesus crosses barriers to attend to those on the margins***Engaging with Scripture***At home: Reflect, talk, or journal about one or more of the following:*

- Mark spends 5 full verses describing the Gerasene man's situation. Why do you think it was so important to Mark that we could picture it so vividly? What part of the description is sad, scary, or concerning for you? Why?
- Why do you think the people were afraid when they saw the man sitting "in his right mind"? What were they afraid of? What would you have been afraid of, and how would you have responded to this strange event?
- What neighbors or communities (in/around your immediate community or beyond) are in particular need, and what do you think that need is? If you've never engaged with them, what keeps you from doing so? If you have, what barriers needed to come down to do so?

Sung Response*When the poor ones/Cuando el pobre*

ELW 725

*Evening prayer liturgy may differ...***Prayers**

Include prayers for those who are marginalized in your community. Also pray for those who are forgotten and those we have failed to realize are marginalized.

Blessing

The Creator who fashions us together with all things,
the Christ who leads us into a new beloved community,
the Spirit who holds us in the communion of saints,
one God, ✠ bless you now and always. Amen.

Sending Song*The day you gave us, Lord, has ended*

ELW 569, LBW 274

Dismissal

Go in peace, joined together in Christ. **Thanks be to God.**

Thursday, Mar 18

*19 Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress;
20 he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. (Psalm
107:1-3, 17-22)*

Almost nine years ago, and within the span of only a couple of months, five very challenging life experiences converged on me, scourging me in a way I had never imagined possible. I had heard and read about anxiety and depression and thought I understood these problems, merrily going along thinking I'd avoid being afflicted. Boy, was I wrong. As it happened, I proved to be quite human; the cumulative effect struck quite suddenly—and with a vengeance. I didn't recognize myself; I couldn't focus on anything; I wanted to hide from the sun and the world; several times during the wee hours each night, I'd pace like a nervous tiger in a tiny cage and yell at my husband. The condition manifested itself physically as well. I had stomach problems, a constant headache and loud ringing in the ears. I had difficulty breathing; my heart beat hard and high in my throat and thumped like a drum in my ears. I felt a strange pulse in my abdomen all the time which made me feel ill, and I really thought I was losing my mind. I could absolutely not be seen in public. I was in a desperately dark place and lost my connection to all that was good for about two weeks before I admitted to myself I should see the doctor.

The moment she entered the examination room, I burst into tears. She offered a diagnosis I didn't want to hear, wrote a prescription for a drug I didn't want to take, and referred me to a psychologist I didn't want to see. I sat in my car in the parking lot afterward and realized my heavenly Father had been patiently waiting to hear from me. He understood that I was feeling overwhelmed, but I felt like I had sinned for not crying out to him first. Once I made my connection with Him, I was able to soldier on with my treatment. He lightened my burden and stayed by my side, and with His help, I recovered quickly, completing my treatment within the span of 12 months, gaining tools to resist the Enemy when he insidiously tries to distract me that way again.

Billy Graham expressed it well: “At its best, anxiety distracts us from our relationship with God and the truth that He is “Lord of heaven and earth” (Matthew 11:25). At its worst, anxiety is a crippling disease, taking over our minds and plunging our thoughts into darkness.”

Dear Father in heaven, help us remember that you are always there, waiting for us to connect with you in times of trouble and darkness. Amen.

Submitted by: Dorothy Borglum

Friday, Mar 19

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Grace... St. Paul loved this word! Some form of it appears in every one of the letters attributed to him. This letter to the community at Ephesus uses it 17 times.

The Oxford English dictionary provides this definition for the verb grace:
do honor or credit to (someone or something) by one's presence

We each grace our communities- St. Paul's Evangelical Lutheran Church, families, circles of friends, workplaces, schools, towns and cities- simply by being participants. Sometimes this is easy- often our communities are chosen by us and reflect similarities between and among the individuals.

But God has created us as members of the whole human community. And it is not always easy to participate fully and lovingly in that community.

We can easily ignore the people in the periphery of our view of that larger community- those at the margins. Those margins may be defined by political or socio-economic or geographical (natural or human) boundaries. "They" are different, not like us, do not understand us, and many more excuses are raised in defense of the separations we create.

For Paul, grace represented both the great gift bestowed upon us by God and Christ in their sacrifice and our response to that gift. Even though our response cannot "measure up" to the value of what we have received, our response is still important. Our response is our recognition of the value of that gift. If our response is easy- such as participating in communities of our choosing with people like us- we diminish the value of the gift we have received. If instead, we seek out those parts of the larger human community where we are less comfortable- the margins- how much more we reflect what has been given to us.

And it is not necessary to do feats of greatness, it is enough to simply be present and "do honor or credit to" those at the margins of our lives.

Gracious God, you have honored us by your gift. Help us to reach out to the margins in our world and show that grace to all members of the human community. Amen.

Submitted by: Tim Hammer

Saturday, Mar 20

“Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ” (John 12:20-33)

Did you know that the original meaning of the word “Lent” has to do with the spring season? You know, the season when we watch as everything that had died over the winter starts to come back to life? Pretty cool that, even as we look toward the resurrection of our Lord, we also see those signs of life creeping into our environment once again.

A perfect way to embrace this trajectory of life, then, is to plant some seeds of our own! Take some time this weekend to plant some seeds. Let your tending of them in these final weeks of Lent be like a prayer for new life to take root in your own life. Here are some tips for growing a garden from seed:

<https://originalhomesteading.com/garden-seed-starting-ideas/?20190521=>



Submitted by: Holley Haynes and Pastor Johanna

5th Week in Lent – *In Community with Christ*

This week's Sunday readings remind us where we are headed in this season and always: to the cross. When we are at the limits of our own power, overwhelmed by guilt or shame, or confronted with death, we find ourselves in the company of Jesus, who is our community even when all else fails. In Mark 10:32-45, Jesus once again reminds the disciples and us that our call will lead us to the cross.

PRAY: the Examen

This practice, developed by St. Ignatius of Loyola, is a simple tool to reflect upon your day, and discern where God was present in both the high and low points. To learn about this transformative way of praying, you can check out the Ignatian Spirituality website (www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/), attend the Wednesday Zoom gathering, and/or download the app: "Reimagining the Examen." Here is the 5-step gist:

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

FAST: from the news, or from screens

The world will on whether you read/watch about it or not. For a week, or even just a day or two, disconnect from the news. Spend the time you would have been consuming news connecting with God and/or with your loved ones.

Alternatively, turn off all the screens for a day. Spend that time in prayer or with family instead.

GIVE: a tithe

Tithing—the practice of giving 10% of your income—is a Christian tradition from the Hebrew Bible... but not a common one. If you are one of the 95% of churchgoers who don't tithe, try it for one week. Figure out your weekly income, and give 10% of it away to the church or to charity.

Monday, Mar 22

Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart (ELW #750)

Tune: HERZLICH LIEB

1. Lord, Thee I love with all my heart;
I pray Thee, ne'er from me depart,
With tender mercy cheer me.
Earth has no pleasure I would share,
Yea, heav'n itself were void and bare
If Thou, Lord, wert not near me.
And should my heart for sorrow break,
My trust in Thee can nothing shake.
Thou art the portion I have sought;
Thy precious blood my soul has bought.
Lord Jesus Christ, My God and Lord, my God and Lord,
Forsake me not! I trust Thy Word.

2. Yea, Lord, thine own rich bounty gave
My body, soul, and all I have
In this poor life of labor.
Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place
May glorify Thy lavish grace
And help and serve my neighbor.
Let no false teaching me beguile;
Let Satan not my soul defile.
Give strength and patience unto me
To bear my cross and follow Thee.
Lord Jesus Christ, My God and Lord, my God and Lord,
In death Thy comfort still afford.

3. Lord, let at last Thine angels come,
To Abram's bosom bear me home,
That I may die unfearing;
And in its narrow chamber keep
My body safe in peaceful sleep
Until Thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me,
That these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, Thy glorious face,
My Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,
And I will praise Thee without end.

Tuesday, Mar 23

34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, "Know the Lord," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the Lord; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

This is one of the most stunning verses in all of scripture. First, that we would know God. God, the Creator of the universe - we would know that One! But perhaps even more, that God would not only "forgive [our] iniquity," but also, "remember [our] sin no more." Like, truly forgive and forget, actually *forget*, not forgive but still be cautious about us in the future. Just... wow.

Perhaps the reason I find this so stunning is not that I have trouble forgetting ways others have harmed me over the years. Although there are some events in my life that have left some lingering pain, I am more often than not forgiving to a fault, often opening myself up to being hurt again due to my unwillingness to let my pain put up walls. Forgetting others' missteps is not my problem. It is my own iniquity that I have trouble forgetting. When someone honks at me on the road, I replay the scene in my mind numerous times, considering how I could have avoided upsetting the person. I am quick to apologize for words I know hurt someone. I play and replay sermons and performances in my head, prone as I am to self-criticism, longing to go back and correct the mistakes.

And then I hear these words: "I will forgive [your] iniquity, and remember [your] sin no more." I want to question God - are you sure? 'Cuz I make a lot of mistakes. I think plenty of things I shouldn't, and sometimes say or do them, and I don't do the things I should. Are you sure, God, that you can forget all of that?

Yes, God is sure. God is sure about me, and God is sure about you. God dearly wants to forgive us, because not to would prevent God from being in relationship with us, and that relationship is God's deepest desire.

And if God finds us to be worthy of forgiveness, worthy of having our sins forgotten... who are we not to forgive ourselves?

Gracious God, you see us and know us for everything that we are, and you love and forgive us still. Help us to love and forgive ourselves, to see ourselves as you see us. Amen.

Submitted by: Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Wednesday, Mar 24 – *In Community with Christ*

Gathering Song

Bless now, O God, the journey

ELW 326

Prayer

Mysterious One, in Jesus you redeem us and invite all people to a place in your glory. Draw us closer to you, and in so doing, draw us closer to one another, that we may be strengthened to follow in the way of Jesus' cross and resurrection. In Jesus' name we pray. **Amen.**

Scripture

Mark 10:32-45 *Jesus reminds us that we are walking the way of the cross*

Engaging with Scripture

At home: Reflect, talk, or journal about one or more of the following:

- “What is it you want me to do for you?” Jesus asks. How would you answer this question today? What do you want Jesus to do for you?
- Think of a time you served someone else, and a time you were served by someone else. How was the experience different? Which did you prefer? Why?

Sung Response

Abide with me

ELW 629, LBW 272

Evening liturgy may differ...

Prayers *Include prayers for those in the world who are suffering.*

Blessing

The Creator who fashions us together with all things,
the Christ who leads us into a new beloved community,
the Spirit who holds us in the communion of saints,
one God, ✠ bless you now and always.

Amen.

Sending Song

The day you gave us, Lord, has ended

ELW 569

Dismissal

Go in peace, joined together in Christ.

Thanks be to God.

Thursday, Mar 25

12 Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
(Psalm 51:1-12)

Joy has not described much use this past year. Better descriptions are anxiety, worry and depression. A pandemic with over 440,000 deaths of Americans as I write this, angry mass protests against enduring racism, a bitter political campaign season, attacks on our government, loss of most of the normality of life with closed schools, restaurants, gyms and churches, lost jobs, financial worries, isolation and so much more. Anxiety, depression and worry seem much more appropriate than joy. So today we pray to God to help us. I want to ask God to relieve our depression and anxiety, but instead the psalmist says no, you need to ask for the willing spirit to restore joy. Joy!

I shouldn't be surprised. God's world and vision is always bigger than what I can imagine. When I see someone in need, I (maybe on my better days) will give that extra shirt. God says give the one off your back. When that person with a view so radically different from my own grates against me I pray for tolerance, but God wants me to do more, to love. And when I want to be relieved of my sadness and worries, God sees a world of so much more, and wants to restore my joy. Joy!

As people of faith we live in God's world of hope. Not a world of rose colored glasses and false hope, but a world of the endless hope of our Creator. As we gather together, "for where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them," even if only over our computers, we gather to share our anxiety and worries, but more importantly our hope and joy. Joy!

Dear God, in this time of worry and anxiety let me see the world of joy that flows from your endless hope.

Submitted by: Reid Cunningham

Friday, Mar 26

7 In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. (Hebrews 5:5-10)

On the cross, Jesus cried out to God in agony with tears streaming down his face. He knew suffering like most of us will never experience. When we feel like we are in the darkest of places and we'll never find our way out, Jesus calls out to us and says, "I know things are rough, but I'm right here with you." Like a good friend, he stays with us and offers us true compassion that comes from suffering with us.

Dear Lord, thank you for not being in some far-off place sitting on a throne but always being right here with us even in the darkest of times. Amen



Submitted by: Seminarian Lisa Frauens

Saturday, Mar 27

Tomorrow is a big day – Palm Sunday! It's the start of Holy Week, the week we remember Jesus's death and resurrection. The part of the story we hear on Palm Sunday is when he first arrived in Jerusalem, and everyone waved palms and said, "Hosanna!"

Normally we would re-enact that during worship, all cramming into the foyer and parading around the church waving palm branches. That isn't an option this year, but it doesn't mean you can't still do it at home! Make some paper palms (you could even trace your hand on green paper and glue it together to look like palm branches – get it?). Or go for a walk and hunt for a perfect leafy branch to wave during worship in the morning.

If you have some sidewalk chalk, get your neighbors involved in the celebration by drawing palm branches on the sidewalk and writing, "Hosanna!" and, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" You could even walk around your neighborhood waving things. At the very least, join the celebration during worship tomorrow, before we shift gears and also hear the story of Jesus' passion.

Here are some more ideas for younger kids:

<http://ohamanda.com/2011/04/18/palm-palms-a-giveaway-the-beginning-of-our-resurrection-week/>

Submitted by: Pastor Johanna Rehbaum

Palm Sunday, Mar 28

“We Pray this Day” (by Ann Weems, in *Kneeling in Jerusalem*)

O God, we pray this day:
for all who have a song they cannot sing,
for all who have a burden they cannot bear,
for all who live in chains they cannot break,
for all who wander homeless and cannot return,
for those who are sick and for those who tend them
for those who wait for loved ones
 and wait in vain,
for those who live in hunger
 and for those who will not share their bread,
for those who are misunderstood
 and for those who misunderstand,
for those who are captives and for those who are captors,
for those whose words of love are locked within their hearts
 and for those who yearn to hear those words.

Have mercy upon these, O God.
Have mercy upon us all.



Monday of Holy Week, Mar 29

Jesus, I Will Ponder Now (ELW #345)

Tune: JESU, KREUZ, LEIDEN UND PEIN

1. Jesus, I will ponder now on your holy passion;
Let your Spirit now endow me for meditation.
Grant that I in love and faith may the image cherish
Of your suffering, pain, and death, that I may not perish.
2. Make me see your great distress, anguish, and affliction,
Bonds and blows and wretchedness and your crucifixion;
Make me see how scourge and rod, spear and nails, did wound you,
How you died for those, O God, who with thorns had crowned you.
3. Yet, O Lord, not thus alone make me see your passion,
But its cause to me make known and its termination.
For I also and my sin wrought your deep affliction;
This the shameful cause has been of your crucifixion.
4. Let me view your pain and loss with repentant grieving,
Nor prepare again your cross by unholy living.
May I give you love for love! HEar me, O my Savior,
That I may in heaven above sing your praise forever.

Tuesday of Holy Week, Mar 30

14 But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." (Psalm 31:9-16)

Psalm 31 starts out with a pleading, *"Be gracious to me O Lord, as I am in distress."*

Since this time in 2020, we have all felt that way a bit. The horror started to set in as we watched news stories of 700-900 people a day dying of COVID in NYC, supplies running low: ventilators, gloves, morgue space. The year continued to get worse with Black Lives Matter protests hitting a boiling point, with looting and rioting, turning into a division as if one was either against police or against black lives. And of course being an election year, social media got tense when separating truth from political agenda became difficult for some. I admit, I even lost a couple social media friends when, as politely as I could, I called them out for sharing untruths.

The physical environment was crazy too, with horrible fires in California, more tornadoes than ever, a dust plume from the Sahara Desert crossing the ocean. It certainly felt like the end of times. Pastor Hedin once opened a sermon with a joke about a Genie in a bottle who couldn't grant her master the wish of eternal life, so the master wished to live until the Bills won the Super Bowl. That was a funny joke until, with everything that was going on, the Bills came dangerously close to making it to the Super Bowl.

And still, every time I think things are getting better, there is a new strain of the virus, wait, 3 or more new strains of the virus. I see depression, anxiety, and poverty are commonplace for so many, and I wonder, when is this going to end?

Psalm 31:14: *"But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.'"*

So much of what is going on in the world is very evidently out of our control. I think about the Old Testament. The Israelites were slaves in Egypt. It took many plagues before Pharaoh finally let them go. I wonder, is the current world situation some sort of parallel? In modern times, what seems like unending angst, is God moving us to make changes? We've seen some bad behavior, but we have seen so much more of communities coming together to support each other: sacrificing vacations and gatherings, not seeing loved ones in order to protect them and each other. Overwhelming support for food banks, car parades to celebrate birthdays, or just to say "Thank You" to essential workers. Church folk, standing between protesters and police to prevent harm to either group. Volunteers being guinea pigs for a new vaccine. Could the suffering and sacrifice we are currently experiencing be God's hand changing our priorities for our future survival?

God, please guide us to be your light, to move us to do your will. In times of despair to remember, Jesus's suffering ended with resurrection! I trust in you O Lord, thy will be done.

Submitted by: Ann Menendez

Wednesday of Holy Week, Mar 31

The following is the familiar Philippians hymn, found in Philippians 2:1-11, out of Eugene Peterson's The Message. Consider: does this version speak to you differently than what we heard on Sunday? Can you, as Peterson suggests, "think of yourself the way Christ Jesus thought of himself?" What would that look like?

If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you *care*—then do me a favor: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.

Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became *human*! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.

Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honored him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honor of God the Father.

Christ Jesus, thank you for doing all of this for us. FOR US. May our knees ever bend before you. Amen.

Maundy Thursday

“The Pivot of Hope,” by Walter Brueggeman

This day of dread and betrayal and denial
causes a pause in our busyness.

Who would have thought that you would take
this eighth son of Jesse
to become the pivot of hope in our ancient memory?

Who would have thought that you would take
this uncredentialed
Galilean rabbi
to become the pivot of newness in the world?

Who would have thought that you--
God of gods and Lord of lords--
would fasten on such small, innocuous agents
whom the world scorns
to turn creation toward your newness?

As we are dazzled,
give us the freedom to restate our lives in modest, uncredentialed, vulnerable places.

We ask for freedom and courage to move out from our nicely arranged patterns of
security into dangerous places of newness where we fear to go.

Cross us by the cross, that we may be Easter marked. Amen.



Good Friday

Sing, My Tongue (ELW #355)

1 Sing, my tongue, the glorious battle;
tell the triumph far and wide;
tell aloud the wondrous story
of the cross, the Crucified;
tell how Christ, the world's
redeemer,
vanquished death the day he died.

2 God in mercy saw us fallen,
sunk in shame and misery,
felled to death in Eden's garden,
where in pride we claimed the tree;
then another tree was chosen,
which the world from death would
free.

3 Tell how, when at length the
fullness
of th'appointed time was come,
Christ, the Word, was born of
woman,
left for us the heav'nly home,
blazed the path of true obedience,
shone as light amidst the gloom.

4 Thirty years among us dwelling,
Jesus went from Nazareth,
destined, dedicated, willing,
did his work, and met his death;
like a lamb he humbly yielded
on the cross his dying breath.

5 Bend your boughs, O tree of glory,
your relaxing sinews bend;
for a while the ancient rigor
that your birth bestowed, suspend;
and the Lord of heav'nly beauty
gently on your arms extend.

6 Faithful cross, true sign of triumph,
be for all the noblest tree;
none in foliage, none in blossom,
none in fruit your equal be;
symbol of the world's redemption,
for your burden makes us free.

7 Unto God be praise and glory;
to the Father and the Son,
to th'eternal Spirit honor
now and evermore be done;
praise and glory in the highest,

Holy Saturday

Easter Eve: A Fantasy, by Vassar Miller

The day does not speak above a whisper, is a high dividing
upon a moment into ebbing and flowing,
two pairs of lips neither pressing nor quite yet parting,
the twilight between sleep and waking,
the bowl of hush held lifted to the bird's first trilling.
Yet the day does not wait. It has become a waiting
as we have become our shadows stuffed full of wind and walking,
and if my hand reached toward you, it would pass through you.
For the world has become a dream of that sleeping Head
which on Friday we pierced and folded in dust
until He awakens tomorrow when the light of His Rising
hardens to hills and crystallizes to rocks and ripples to streams.



Easter Sunday

Awake, My Heart, with Gladness (ELW #378)

- 1 Awake, my heart, with gladness,
see what today is done;
now, after gloom and sadness,
comes forth the glorious sun.
My Savior there was laid
where our bed must be made
when, as on wings in flight,
we soar to realms of light.
- 2 Now hell, its prince, the devil,
of all their pow'r are shorn;
now I am safe from evil,
and sin I laugh to scorn.
For Christ again is free;
in glorious victory
he who is strong to save
has triumphed o'er the grave.
- 3 This is a sight that gladdens—
what peace it does impart!
Now nothing ever saddens
the joy within my heart.
No gloom shall ever shake,
no foe shall ever take,
the hope which God's own Son
in love for me has won.
- 4 Now I will cling forever,
to Christ, my Savior true;
my Lord will leave me never,
whate'er he passes through.
He rends death's iron chain;
he breaks through sin and pain;
he shatters hell's grim thrall;
I follow him through all.
- 5 Christ brings me to the portal
that leads to bliss untold,
whereon this rhyme immortal
is found in script of gold:
“Who there my cross has shared
finds here a crown prepared;
who there with me has died
shall here be glorified.”