

Lenten Devotional Guide
2025



LENT

Otterbein United Methodist Church

Wednesday, March 5

[Hebrews 12:1-14](#)

*Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time,
but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

Hebrews 12:11

I have never been much of an athlete, but there was a period of time that I worked pretty hard to try and be a decent musician. I played the clarinet and would practice my scales and various passages of music for what seemed like hours and hours. Sometimes, I would play the same part over and over again until it formed a muscle memory and I could play it without having to think too hard. This discipline of practice would make my mouth sore and my fingers begin to stumble over the keys. At that point, I knew it was time to rest. Those hours of practice helped me to become a better musician, but also helped me to appreciate the skill of other musicians I encountered, of the composers who write music, of our directors who helped us to discover and feel the music. Music is very rarely a solitary pursuit!

The same can be true of our faith. We practice the disciplines to become better, closer followers of Jesus. Sometimes, it feels like we miss the mark more often than not as we struggle alone. But, when we come together we can seek guidance from our companions and teachers and weave together something beautiful. Especially as our confidence in what WE have to offer grows, we can encourage those around us to build to THEIR strengths. As each of us discovers what it is ours to do in and with and through Jesus, we practice with discipline to fulfill our roles. We can continue, even through painful times, to faithfully be who God has called us to be in Jesus.

During this Lenten season, let us encourage each other to discover what it is ours to do (as individuals, as small groups, as a church, as a community) and to work with discipline, even when/especially when it is painful - for that is where the growth will come!

A Benediction - by Sarah Bessey

...May we be the ones who come close to you
Because of our vulnerability and not
Because of our false certainties;
Teach us to lay down our masks and pretenses.
You tore down the veil between us and the Holy of Holies,
Keep our hands from rehanging that curtain.
Give us opportunities to practice mercy and courage
(This may backfire but we're feeling bold now.)

Call us to humility, confession, and repentance even when
Pride feels more comfortable and superior.
Teach us how to rest, how to abide, and how
To light candles and be satisfied.
Don't let us get away with divorcing our prayers
From our politics and policies and practices.
May we love our neighbors.

May we learn to sit with you,
In silence,
And know it is enough to know you
And be known by you
And know ourselves.
Teach us to pray, God, as you have always
Welcomed us to pray:
Fully human, fully yours, fully held,
And fully loved.

We will tell you the truth of our lives
And of this world.
And we will listen to the truth you speak back to us
The truth of our belovedness,
Of your justice,
Of your faithfulness,
Of love.
And say
Let it be so,
Let it be in me.

Amen.

Christy Blagg

Thursday, March 6

[Deuteronomy 7:6-11](#)

On Following God's Laws

The scripture for today focuses on being God's chosen people. It also sets for us an expectation to follow God's laws.

The world we live in today has a lot of laws. Some of these worldly laws conflict with God's laws. It hurts my heart to see how our neighbors are being treated under the laws created by humans. There is also a pervasive feeling of "what can I do about this? Who will listen to my voice?"

I get that question a lot from my students. Particularly the ninth graders when they perceive injustice in something going on at the school, like the student who was upset that we had school on Veterans Day. He wanted to have the day off to go to the graveyard to the tomb of his grandfather. He spoke up about this in class. I suggested he might want to talk to the journalism students, as maybe they could provide a place for him to speak up. First year students at my school aren't allowed to take the journalism class until their second year, but they can still contact the students with ideas for stories or contributions. I also used this as a time to discuss why our writing skills are important—if you want to speak truth to power, then you need to know the ways that power will hear you, rather than dismissing your voice.

I think a lot of us are feeling disheartened right now about some human laws. True Christians want to love our neighbors as ourselves, and we see our neighbors frightened and worried about the effects of human laws on their lives. How can we speak truth to power? It's something I'm struggling with and praying about. We need to keep our focus on God's laws and do everything we can to create a safe space and show our neighbors love.

Maryann Wolfe

Friday, March 7

[John 1:35-42](#)

In our scripture passage from John today, Andrew has an important role. Not too long after moving my membership to Otterbein in 2000, I remember attending a study on the Apostles. At the end of the study, we were asked which of the Apostles we admired or felt a sort of kinship with. My answer at that time was Andrew, and I actually kept the handout on him that we were given. That handout includes information that Andrew was a humble helper with a positive attitude. Today's scripture describes how Andrew went *immediately* to tell his brother about the Messiah and to lead him to Jesus. He shared the news.

Another interesting fact about Andrew is that he was the disciple who told Jesus about the boy with loaves and fishes in the feeding of the 5,000 (see John 6:8-9). Here is another example of someone working in the background to share information that set the stage for one of the best remembered miracles of Jesus.

How can we emulate Andrew? How can we respond with immediacy to share the good news? Contemplating and writing this devotional caused me to remember how the youth group at a former church loved to sing *Pass It On* written by Kurt Kaiser (1969). The following lyrics* articulate how to share in a similar way:

*It only takes a spark to get a fire going,
And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing;
That's how it is with God's Love,
Once you've experienced it,
You spread the love to everyone
You want to pass it on.*

Judy Richardson

*<https://lyricstranslate.com/en/kurt-kaiser-pass-it-lyrics.html>

Saturday, March 8

[Titus 3:1-15](#)

This selection, to me, touches on a common theme throughout the faith: how we, as people in this world, are inherently sinful. The opening verses talk of this idealized version of a way for humans to live their lives, saying "*to speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto men.*" However, as the text continues, it is noted that we, as people, often do not reflect these values. We regularly fall into hate and preconceived notions about one another, and we are never truly perfect in our love for the world, each other, and God. This is why I find it so meaningful that we confess every Sunday how we have failed the church and at being God's people. We do not and can never truly love perfectly. This ideal is what we strive for, something that Jesus remarkably demonstrated all of those years ago.

It is only through God's generosity and Jesus' sacrifice that we have the hope of being saved. The text takes specific care to mention that it is not due to our righteous actions or good deeds that we are saved. It is *only* through Jesus' teachings and God's mercy that we can aspire towards salvation. The text also mentions how being too caught up in the workings of law can detract from our spiritual practices, citing them as "unprofitable and vain." Being a part of the body and work of the church is important and is a beautiful way to come together, to seek forgiveness, and learn how to more wholly love one another.

Dan Curtis

Sunday, March 9

[Deuteronomy 8:1-10](#)

Don't Forget the Lord

In these verses Moses is instructing and reminding the Israelites of what God has done for them and encourages them to rededicate their lives to him. Moses advises them to always remember that God is God, and they are his people.

By following His commands and dedicating themselves to obedience and praising His gracious works, their lives will be good beyond imagination. He reminds them that all is created by God and real happiness in life comes from full commitment to God. That requires discipline, sacrifice, and hard work - and that's why most people never find it.

Often, we fail to take notice and thank God when days go well, or when useful things work and don't break when used. We forget to thank God for all the little things in our lives that make us feel secure, safe, successful, loved, satisfied and happy. When we think "life is good," it's all because "God is good!"

Moses reminded the Israelites that when they felt that way to not forget it's because of God's love. As we begin this Lenten season and prepare for Jesus' death and resurrection and experience all that stirs in us, we need to remember that Jesus, too, is because of God's love - and offer our thanks, prayers, and praise!

Prayer: *Loving God, thank you for life in this beautiful creation and all the blessings you bestow on us. Help us to be mindful of all our blessings during this season of preparation, prayer, sacrifice, and benevolence toward those less fortunate than ourselves. And thank you for sending Jesus. Amen.*

Mike Earman

Monday, March 10

[Hebrews 2:11-18](#)

*He says, "I will declare your name as my brothers;
in the presence of the congregation, I will sing your praises."
For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*

Hebrews 2:12, 17-18

These passages highlight the “humanness” of Jesus during his time on earth. He accepted the humans of the time as his brothers, as he accepts us now as his brothers and sisters. Although it doesn’t say so directly, I see this as a call for us to accept our role as his brothers and sisters. Are we worthy to be called such? Do we live up to our Christian mission in our day-to-day lives? Are we taking care of each other as He has cared for us?

We all face challenges in our lives and it is sometimes easy to slip into a routine that doesn’t allow us to focus on God and our faith. We tend to listen more to our fellow humans who agree with us, and ignore or abandon those who don’t. If we are ALL the brothers and sisters of Jesus, shouldn’t we be more willing to listen to those who may differ from us in some way? Shouldn’t we be more understanding and work harder to make sure each individual we encounter feels accepted and loved?

I go through my daily life with few worries, although I have some (I know I am lucky). I have a nice place to live, have enough food, can afford to heat and air-condition my house, and have many friends. I try to stop occasionally and remember that God provides, not me. I am grateful for the gifts and opportunities I have been given, and try to remember to thank God for my good fortune (but probably don’t do it often enough).

Jesus paid the ultimate price for us with his death on the cross. Let us remember what He did for us, His brothers and sisters, and make more effort to treat ALL His other brothers and sisters as he would want us to. What can I, or you, do today, or tomorrow, or the next day, to make someone else’s life a little easier and spread some of God’s love in the world? What can we do to be worthy of being called Jesus’ brothers and sisters?

Janet Gloeckner

Tuesday, March 11

[Hebrews 3:1-11](#)

When I first met Steve in March 1999, I was a never-married, retired federal civil service employee, a lapsed Presbyterian, having been brought up in the Calvinist tradition, and I was not even sure if I was still a Christian. By God’s grace, and after I learned about United Methodist beliefs, including the fact that God grants us free will, Steve and I were married 2 years later, at Aldersgate United Methodist Church, in Alexandria, where Steve was serving as the Associate Pastor.

So the subtitle found in this passage of Hebrews, just before verse 7, caught my attention: “Warning against Unbelief”.

I did a little research about Hebrews on Wikipedia. Who wrote this letter, and why? Most scholars now agree it was not written by Paul, because, for one thing, the style is too “sophisticated” to be Paul’s writing. Quoting from Wikipedia: “Some scholars believe it was written for Jewish Christians who lived in Jerusalem. Its essential purpose was to exhort

Christians to persevere in the face of persecution. At this time, certain believers were considering turning back to Judaism and to the Jewish system of law to escape being persecuted for believing Jesus to be the Messiah."

Hebrews 3:7-8a says: "*Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, 'Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion.'*"

As I write this on February 6, I am fearful for the harm being done to the federal workforce, for the work that they will be unable to continue for the American people and to help people in need throughout the world. And I pray for all those negatively impacted by these work stoppages. But I will not revert to unbelief. As the song says, "I have decided to follow Jesus, . . . no turning back, no turning back."

Prayer: *Dear Lord, Help me each day to be more like Jesus. Help me to be kind to everyone I meet, to do what I can to help, and to continue to pray for all in need, in this country and around the world. In Jesus name, Amen.*

Susan Young

Wednesday, March 12

[Hebrews 3:12-19](#)

*But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today,
so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.*

Hebrews 3:13

Living in today's world is often challenging. Various types of sin from crime, to envy, to lust, to simply not respecting and caring for our neighbors can seem to smother the air around us like a fog. Sometimes the devil will make us feel hopeless, like none of our good deeds each day really make a difference. During these moments especially is when we need to turn to God. That is also part of the reason that fellowship among Christians is crucial. By being together, we can encourage and support each other as we strive to keep our hearts free from the evil around us. Without that feeling of connection, our hearts are more susceptible to feelings of greed, jealousy, and bitterness.

Valentine's Day used to be one of my favorite holidays. Not because of the flowers and chocolate (although those are two of my favorite things), but because of the intense feelings of love and comfort as we all remind each other of our devotion to one another. Unfortunately, with my recent separation, this Valentines season has evoked a lot of sadness, feelings of inadequacy, and envy in my heart as other couples are making special plans to celebrate their love. But while struggling with these emotions, I have since witnessed first-hand how the love, support, and kindness from my family and friends has helped replace those negative feelings.

May we all continue to fight the good fight against sin, and keep our hearts pure. With pure hearts, we will better be able to serve as the disciples we are called to be. So, send that card, give that hug, or make that phone call to those in need. Together, we can break off the chains of sin over our hearts and replace it with the love and truth that God promises.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, please forgive me of my sins, and help me resist the temptation of sin to keep my heart pure. Send someone in my path today that I can encourage, and help free their heart as well. Amen.*

Emily Joiner

Thursday, March 13

[Hebrews 4:1-10](#)

This short passage from the book of Hebrews points out that because God rested after creating the world, he urges, even insists, even today, that his followers do likewise. It is not enough to nod our heads and talk about resting; God expects his people to actually rest, not just give lip service to resting. The reason for observing Sunday as a time to rest is sometimes lost in the shuffle of preparing for the worship service: writing a sermon, rehearsing the anthem, preparing the Sunday school lesson, and all the other Sunday morning activities. When accepted as gifts not only *from* God, but also gifts *to* God, we can approach them eagerly, knowing we are pleasing our Father.

Lynda McConnell

Friday, March 14

[Hebrews 4:11-16](#)

Let us therefore make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one may fall through such disobedience as theirs. Indeed, the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And before him no creature is hidden, but all are naked and laid bare to the eyes of the one to whom we must render an account. Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Hebrews 4:11-16

Entering God's Rest with Confidence

Lent is a season of reflection, repentance, and renewal. It is a time when we intentionally draw near to God, examining our hearts and realigning our lives with His will. The passage above speaks to this journey, urging us to strive for God's rest while taking comfort in our compassionate High Priest, Jesus Christ.

The passage begins with a call to diligence: "*Let us, therefore, make every effort to enter that rest*" (v. 11). This rest is not mere physical relief, but a deep, abiding peace in God's presence. However, we are reminded that God's Word is "*alive and active*" (v. 12), discerning the thoughts and intentions of our hearts. During Lent, as we read Scripture and examine our lives, we may feel exposed, with our weaknesses, sins, and struggles laid bare. Yet, this exposure is not meant for condemnation but for transformation.

Verses 14-16 offer a powerful encouragement: Jesus, our High Priest, understands our struggles. He was "*tempted in every way, just as we are, yet he did not sin*" (v. 15). This truth reassures us that we are not alone in our battles. Christ is compassionate and loving, and so we must not try to hide our weakness and sin in shame, but rather, run to him to find forgiveness and a loving embrace. Christ knows our pain, doubts, and failures, and because of Him, we can "*approach God's throne of grace with confidence*" (v. 16). What a profound truth! We do not come before God in fear but in boldness, knowing that mercy and grace await us.

As we journey through Lent, let us embrace both the challenge and the comfort of this passage. Let us strive to enter God's rest by laying aside sin, trusting in His Word, and drawing near to Jesus. He invites us to come as we are "weak, broken, and in need" so that we may receive His mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

May this season be a time of renewal, and may you find mercy and reassurance in God's Word and in turn walk confidently in His grace. Amen.

Kent Carneal

Saturday, March 15

[John 4:1-26](#)

When reading this scripture, I find it easy to relate to Jesus. It can be hard to remember he is fully human as well as being fully Christ when he is performing miracles and preaching to the multitudes. This scripture turns this all around. There are no miracles worked, and no masses following him, Jesus is just tired, and wants a drink of water. A woman comes to draw water, and Jesus asks for a drink, however, the woman is Samaritan, and won't give him water, as they are not supposed to interact. Jesus then mentions the water of life, which is the main point of this scripture. Jesus says that through the water of life, you will never be thirsty again. This can also be applied to everything else in our life. All worldly possessions are only temporary, and will eventually disappear, like food, water, and ways of entertainment, but

through Jesus, all things can be granted eternally, and we will have no need for worldly desires. It is easy to forget to bring Jesus into our daily lives, but when we do, our gratification with the way we live will increase exponentially, and we can find joy in even the smallest things. It is good to slow down in life, and remember to let Jesus shape the way we live. There are times we want and need worldly things, even Jesus wanted a drink of water to soothe his thirst, but we can bring Christ into those moments, and find holiness in the most mundane tasks.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, let us bring you into our daily life, so that we can live a gratified life through your presence. Remind us to move through life slowly and intentionally, so that we can be who you want us to be. Amen.*

Micah Blagg

Sunday, March 16

[Jeremiah 1:1-10](#)

*The word of the LORD came to me, saying,
"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart."
Jeremiah 1:4-5*

These words of God spoken to a young man named Jeremiah should be comforting. God gives him a tough task but promises to help him do it. But immediately Jeremiah tries to get out of it - like Jonah, like Moses, like Peter, like Paul, like us. Just about everyone in the Bible called to do something special tried to get out of it. Except for Mary who was called for the most special and difficult task of all.

I recently revisited the called by God scenario. In the process of being ordained, the candidate has to answer some deep questions. One is "Are you being called by God to this ministry?" You have to write a paper answering that in the affirmative AND you have to defend your answer before a panel of Elders. How do you know that God is calling you? What is God calling you to do? Did God choose your calling before you were even born as with Jeremiah? How is your response to what God is calling you to do going?

Perhaps Lent is a good time to reflect on this question.

Prayer: *Lord, if you are calling me and I don't hear you, nudge me. If I hear but act like I do not, nudge me. If nudging does not work, bless me with a deeper understanding of your call to me. Amen.*

Larry Clark

Monday, March 17

[John 4:27-42](#)

Just then his disciples returned and were surprised to find him talking with a woman. But no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?" Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" They came out of the town and made their way toward him.

Meanwhile his disciples urged him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you know nothing about." Then his disciples said to each other, "Could someone have brought him food?" "My food," said Jesus, "is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work. Don't you have a saying, 'It's still four months until harvest'? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest. Even now the one who reaps draws a wage and harvests a crop for eternal life, so that the sower and the reaper may be glad together. Thus the saying 'One sows and another reaps' is true. I sent you to reap what you have not worked for. Others have done the hard work, and you have reaped the benefits of their labor."

Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I ever did." So when the Samaritans came to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. And because of his words many more became believers. They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."

John 4:27-42 (NIV)

I am what could generally be considered an overachiever. Before kids, this was something that wasn't really a problem! I *thrived* on working on multiple projects, being involved in different groups, learning as much as I could about things, figuring out problems. In fact, my career is made of these things: I am the Operations Coordinator for the JMU School of Music. I schedule over 200 performances a year, maintain our academic calendar, solely run our social media & website, oversee our 400+ assets on our instrument inventory... my job was MADE for the overachiever. And I do believe I do it well.

After I had my children, I found that I lived (okay, still live a lot of the time) in a frazzled state because I felt like I had to do it all and do it perfectly: take care of the children, make all the meals, keep the house clean, do the laundry as often as possible, take care of myself, sleep (???), etc. Sean, my husband, helps and is amazingly devoted to being a great father and husband. But *even with his help*, I was feeling like I needed to do it all and do it all to the level I always had, but I wasn't keeping up. I knew I had to look at my life, decide what I needed to focus on to be the best for me and my family, and I needed to accept that some things weren't

going to be the same. **What I usually did had to change for the end goals to be met.**

Indeed, if you come to my house, there are frequently dishes in the sink, laundry that hasn't been done, and toys spread out. But my children are fed and clean, my job does not suffer, and we are an incredibly happy little family—the family I've always wanted.

I say all of this because when I consider how we grow the Kingdom of God, as discussed in this passage, I think it's important for us to recognize 1) God can use people you didn't expect in ways you didn't expect (and in ways *they themselves* didn't expect), 2) that we all have special gifts, and 3) those gifts *can* and *probably will* change over time, just like my ability to keep up my overachieving, perfectionist tendencies. I think it's important to take stock somewhat frequently of what your gift is and how you can use it to further the Kingdom of God. Maybe you used to sing in the high school choir and the church choir and music was your "gift", but maybe that was 60 years ago and you're not so sure you can devote the time and effort to singing in the church choir. *That's okay!* What else can you offer? What other ways can you help to sow the harvest that the next generation reaps? Because Jesus is very clear in how the Kingdom of God will grow: each generation will sow and reap. One generation will reap the harvest from the prior generation, having done nothing for that harvest, but they will then become the sowers for the next generation's harvest. And how you individually contribute to the next generation's harvest might surprise you!

Prayer: *Dear Lord, I pray that you guide me to find my gift and how I can use it to sow the harvest for the next generation. Help me to search my heart, my mind, and my life for ways that I can contribute to the Kingdom of God. Amen.*

Sarah Macomber

Tuesday, March 18

[John 4:43-54](#)

When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son. "Unless you people see signs and wonders," Jesus told them, "you will never believe." The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies." "Go," Jesus replied, "your son will live."

John 4:47-50

The key theme in this passage is faith. Jesus was returning to a once skeptical Galilee, which now welcomed him as they had seen all he had done in Jerusalem. A royal official approached Jesus and asked him to heal his ill son. After declaring the boy healed, Jesus felt

that the official would probably not believe him without a sign, but he went on and took Jesus at his word. His son lived, which made believers out of his entire household.

This passage can parallel our personal faith journey with moments of doubt, desperation, and the need for trust in times of trouble. Don't think that God has left us when we face the trials in our lives. Trials come to believers, too, but we must go on and face these challenges knowing that God is always there. He can reach his hand into your life whenever he wants, to help you with anything big or small. God knows our needs and all we have to do is look to him. We also need to remember that someone could be watching how we handle these difficulties.

Saint Augustine said this about faith: "Faith is to believe what you do not see; the reward of this faith is to see what you believe." Saint Thomas Aquinas quoted, "Faith has to do with things that are not seen and hope with things that are not at hand." This aligns with the theme throughout this passage, where faith plays a central role in the healing of the official's son. May we experience the same faith he did by placing our trust in God and be able to witness the result.

Prayer: *Dear God, thanks for always being there where we need you. Help us to realize that all we have to do is ask, and have faith. Amen.*

Kathy Billhimer

Wednesday, March 19

[Romans 1:28-2:11](#)

In these verses God paints us a picture of humanity when it turns from God. When we do not set our eyes on the good and righteous things of God, we tend to focus on worthless and immoral things. Romans states that not only are we guilty of this in our own lives, but we applaud others who are as well. I'm sure we can all relate to those days on the playground trying to get others to do sneaky and wrong things. These verses focus on a subject that plagues humanity each and every day: judgement. How often do we find it so simple to judge a person? Often, with even that first impression, we focus on things such as how one looks or what they wear. We judge how others carry themselves, how they may do things within their home, how someone chooses to raise their children, the opinions they share with us in a simple conversation...the list is endless. We are under the assumption that our way of thinking and living is the correct one while theirs is wrong. It is easier now than ever to do this as we have access to social media and can see what everyone is up to. We may be jealous of someone's vacation, or we may turn our nose up at the content they present and think that we would NEVER. (Jokes on us, huh?) But do we ever really stop and think that even though these thoughts may be unkind that we are an immoral person? One who is unrighteous and evil?

These are just some of the words used in Romans 1:29 to describe a person who has turned from God. When you stop and think about it...who are we to judge? While we may find judging others so easy, what we need to do is look in the mirror and realize that we are only condemning ourselves... *"Therefore, any one of you who judges is without excuse. For when you judge another you condemn yourself since you, the judge, do the same things."* (Romans 2:1) I once saw a sign at a church that said, "You don't know enough to doubt God" and I could not agree more. God is the one true judge and the only one whom we should care about. In this season of Lent, take the time to reflect on some moments in your life where you may not be proud of how you reacted or of the thoughts that crossed your mind about someone. Let's use this time to focus on those God-like qualities of goodness and kindness and spread that everywhere we go.

Prayer: *Lord, help me to recognize my own faults and misguided ways of thinking. Allow me to seek Your love and grace and learn to judge myself before judging others. Amen.*

Erin Wenger

Thursday, March 20

[Jeremiah 4:9-10, 19-28](#)

Oh, my suffering, my suffering! My pain is unbearable; my heart is in turmoil; it throbs nonstop. I can't be silent, because I hear the blast of the trumpet and the roar of the battle cry! Disaster follows disaster; the whole land is ruined. Suddenly, my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment. How long must I see the battle flags and hear the blast of the trumpet? My people are foolish. They don't even know me! They are thoughtless children without understanding; they are skilled at doing wrong, inept at doing right.

Jeremiah 4:19-22

God called the prophet, Jeremiah, to preach to the people of Judah concerning the disaster coming from the Babylonians (see Jeremiah's call in chapter 1). Over and over again, God's people have turned away from God, pursued idols, their own selfish desires, and rejected the poor and outcast. These verses describe God's anguish at the events to come, God's grief for God's people. Here we are at this point in time, grieving and greatly disturbed by the chaos and destruction in our own world. Devastating floods and fires, genocide, the treatment of people as disposable, wars and threats, lies that undermine our unity as a nation, greed and the pursuit of revenge break God's heart as well as our own. Our personal struggles with illness, broken relationships, death of family and friends, feelings of inadequacy overwhelm and exhaust us. We cry out **with God**: "How long?" Perhaps the words of verse 22 will convict

us and turn us toward the God of love and mercy, who loves us all beyond measure. May it be so.

Prayer: *O God of mercy and love, thank you for reminding us that You know our grief, exhaustion, and pain. Help us turn our hearts to You, so that our minds and hands will be used to share Your love and mercy with all persons we meet. Give us ears to hear the stories and cries of folks desperate for mercy. Provide us with the courage and strength to act in love. All of this we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.*

Pat Wingert

Friday, March 21

[Jeremiah 5:1-9](#)

Even in despair there is hope.

These are not verses to lift your spirits. In fact, the entire book of Jeremiah is not for the faint-hearted. It is a book concerning impending doom, told by a man who did not relish the assignment that God had given him.

These verses detail the many shortcomings of the people of Jerusalem. Things are so bad that God states that if even one person could be found who deals honestly and seeks the truth that he would spare the city.

However, the situation is so bad, that even with this low bar, Jerusalem cannot be saved and eventually the southern kingdom is defeated as the northern kingdom was about a hundred years earlier.

In these verses, the many ways the people of Jerusalem had turned away from God, despite all he had done for them, are detailed.

Many folks today have similar feelings of doom about our own country or about their own lives; there is a fear that perhaps the best days of our country are in the rear-view mirror, or that their own sins are so great that they are forever lost, and that God has turned his face from them.

However, while Jerusalem must face its punishment even in this dark book, there is hope. God promises that eventually the relationship will be restored.

As noted in chapter 31 verse 10: *"Hear the word of the Lord, O nations; proclaim it in the distant coast lands: He who scattered Israel will gather them and will watch over his flock like a shepherd."*

And later in verse 17, *"So there is hope for your future declares the Lord."*

We need to allow the story of Jerusalem to comfort us during our own dark moments, we must remember the Lord never forsakes his people forever.

Prayer: *Dear Lord, though my failings are great, and I feel distant from you, help me to remember that your love endures and that you never forsake us. Amen.*

Jim Clough

Saturday, March 22

[Romans 3:19-31](#)

*"Since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,"*

Romans 3:23-24

When I was in elementary school, I would attend Day Camp in the city park. One thing I enjoyed was learning archery. I was never very athletic, but as a PE requirement I took a semester of archery at Madison College. Most of my arrows did hit the target, but I didn't make many bullseyes.

OK - imagine you're at an archery range. There's this perfect bullseye target way out there - that's God's glory. Now, whether you're an expert archer or it's your first time holding a bow, none of us can hit it. Not even close.

In verse 23 we have ALL (everyone) SINNED (missed the mark). Whether you're a straight-A student or constantly in detention, attend church regularly or haven't seen a sanctuary in years, we all missed that perfect target.

But here's where it gets good. Paul didn't write this verse to condemn humanity. Instead, it's a divine wake-up call. Without God, we're left alone in our sin.

Think about that archery range again. While we're all standing there with our arrows scattered everywhere except the bullseye, God isn't standing back laughing at our attempts. Instead, he's already got a plan in motion.

When we really get this—that we're all in the same boat, all missing the same mark—it changes how we see ourselves and others. No more comparing our arrows or thinking we're shooting better than the next person. We're all archers destined for eternal separation from God, in desperate need of his help.

In Jesus, though, we have someone who takes the shot, hitting the perfect bullseye on our behalf. This is where grace comes in.

Grace is getting what you don't deserve, and not getting what you do deserve. When you surrender your life to God and believe that Jesus paid the ultimate price with His blood on the cross to purchase your redemption for eternity, then you are truly living in the grace of God.

Also don't fall into the trap of thinking that you are the worst person ever. Don't think that you fall short of a very high standard that we all set up for ourselves, which is an impossible standard.

We all try to be perfect human beings, to always say the right thing and hope to never offend anyone. But every man, woman, or child who was ever born, or ever will be, has a problem with sin. It is impossible to be perfect.

Through the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross, we are justified by God's grace. It is a gift! As hard as we work, we can't earn it, as good as we strive to be, we don't deserve it. Given our own devices and strength, we will always fall short of God's glory. All you have to do is accept God's gracious gift of Jesus.

Jesus hits the bullseye for us every time!!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, for too long I have striven to make the bullseye of your glory through my own merit. I have been attempting to do my own good works and have been trying to keep the commandments in my own strength. But I recognize that there is nothing that I can do to make myself pleasing in Your sight, except in and through the life of Christ dwelling in me. Thank You that in Christ, I am justified, redeemed, and clothed in His righteousness. Help me, I pray, to live as You intended me to live, in utter dependence on You and not on myself. In Jesus' name I pray, amen.*

Linda Conrad

Sunday, March 23

[Mark 5:1-20](#)

In this passage, we are reminded of the powerful story of Jesus' encounter with a man possessed by a legion of demons. This passage reveals much about the nature of Christ, His authority over evil, and the transformation He brings into lives that are bound by darkness.

This passage is a vivid reminder that no matter how strong or deep the hold of darkness might seem in our lives, Jesus has the power to deliver us. The demons recognize His authority immediately, and even the man, once in chains, is found sitting at Jesus' feet, clothed and in his right mind. The power of Christ brings not just deliverance from external forces but also healing and restoration to the soul.

Yet, this story also carries a message of the cost of freedom. After the man is healed, he desires to follow Jesus, but Jesus sends him back to his community to tell others what the Lord has done for him. True transformation isn't just about personal healing; it compels us to testify to the goodness of God, to share the freedom He has given, and to lead others to the same hope.

Jesus shows us that no person is beyond His reach, no soul too lost to be restored. The man in this passage, like so many, had suffered under the weight of sin and oppression. But in an instant, Jesus changes his entire life—showing that in Him, there is power to set us free from whatever holds us captive.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus, Thank You for Your incredible power over darkness and Your ability to set us free from whatever chains bind us. We confess that there are times when we, too, feel bound—by fear, anxiety, sin, or past hurt. But we believe that in You, there is freedom. We ask that You come into those areas of our lives that need Your touch. Free us from whatever holds us back from fully experiencing the peace and wholeness You offer. Help us to share Your goodness with others, just as the healed man did. May our lives be a testimony to Your power and love, so that others might come to know the freedom found in You. In the name of the risen Christ, we pray. Amen.*

Bill Pollard

Monday, March 24

[Jeremiah 7:1-15](#)

In these verses Jeremiah is proclaiming a message at the gate of a house of worship. He talks about many ways that the people of Judah have to act, carry themselves, and live their lives so that they are able to continue to live where they are. As I read this I was thinking of all of the false idols of today's day and age. Verse 8 stuck out to me, "*But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless.*" I think those words hold so much weight to me because we as a society often trust or look up to certain people, or ideas that we don't really stop to think about, that we see in the news, or on social media, etc.

Now, when it's so easy to get caught up in all of the mainstream media, politics, technology, social media, and all other distractions of life, it is more important than ever to remember our anchor. Jesus, God, and living and going about life in a way that they call us to. There is so much in the world to distract us that makes it hard for us to ignore. I am not saying to ignore and forget the world, because that is where we live and that is the future, but bring balance to your life. I often forget that the calming presence of God and his word is here, everywhere. It is revitalizing, and refreshing knowing that despite all of the distractions and hardships of life God is ever present. So attend church, watch church on YouTube if you can't go in person, read your bible, pray about the world and your fear, and unplug and give yourself a break from the ever moving and changing world. God is always here, hoping you denounce the false idols of the world and choose him. It is so easy to get lost in the world of modern technology and soak yourself up in all of the "drama" of the world. But that is not the

Christian world. The Christian world should be full of love, compassion, and peace. So move about your days with that love, compassion, and peace and let it shine through you.

Kira Blagg

Tuesday, March 25

[John 7:37-52](#)

I must admit that I was totally engrossed by the argument I was reading. Was it Bethlehem, or was it Nazareth, where it all started for the man Jesus? Or could it have been both, as I would have preferred to believe? This past year I was reading a book on the historical Jesus authored by an eminent Catholic biblical scholar. He was seeking to delve beneath the words of the gospel writers to construct a plausible picture of how it all might have really happened, as free from theological bias as possible. And there was this section in his book—eight closely argued pages—that analyzed the evidence for Jesus' birth in Bethlehem, as well as some opposing indirect evidence that he might have been born in Nazareth. And I must admit that I was fascinated by the author's arguments, challenging as they were to my confirmed opinions. You see, I love a carefully argued, reasonable, and nuanced conclusion, and his conclusion was indeed that for me.

I suppose that if I had been living in Jerusalem at the time of the festival mentioned in John's gospel, I might have found myself in the presence of a group of Pharisees, intrigued by their debate with the crowd about who this Jesus really was. Was he the Messiah? Did he check the right boxes to qualify for Messiahship? There could be no doubt that Jesus hailed from Galilee. But the Hebrew Scriptures insisted that the Messiah must come from Bethlehem, the City of David (Micah 5:2). How could he then be the Messiah? I imagine that I would have been fully absorbed in their arguments, as I tried to think them through for myself.

But perhaps, in my imagination, there might have been a different outcome. Perhaps, by the grace of God, I would leave the seat of the scoffers and their cold speculations about Jesus' identity and instead go to sit at the feet of Jesus. And hear his loving voice invite the crowd, but also me: "*Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink.*" And perhaps, by the grace of God, like Nicodemus, I would lay aside my need for critical analysis and certain knowledge and, in simple faith, trust in Jesus.

After all, it does not matter if you know for sure the place where Jesus was born, as long as you know he has been born within your heart.

Steve Young

Wednesday, March 26

[John 8:12-20](#)

*In your law it is written that the test of two witnesses is true.
I am one who testifies for myself. My other witness is the Father who sent me.*

John 8:17-18

In the scripture John 8:12-20, the word *witness* is written 3 times, the word *testify* is written 2 times, and the word *testimony* is written 4 times. The Pharisees were challenging our Jesus and His response was in using these 3 words.

This scripture brought to mind a time and place that these 3 words became so real to me. I was working as a drive-thru teller at Dominion Bank – South Main back in the 1970s. My window was back at the teller line (3 windows) – maybe 5 feet from them. In order to hear my customers, I had to tune out the voices behind me, as well as traffic from Mick or Mack above the bank, Biff Burger beside the bank, and the constant South Main traffic. I became very good at this tune-out.

One afternoon there was only one teller on the line and me at the drive-thru. Our branch manager had the afternoon off. As we had to have an officer on duty, we were given one-in-training. The desk set clear of us.

All of a sudden, the other teller rushed over to me, waving her arms and saying, "It did not go off! It did not go off!" I said, "What did not go off?" She just repeated, "It did not go off!" I said, "Stop! What did not go off?" Then she said, "I was robbed!"

All tellers were trained in robbery procedures. I rushed over to the door to lock and I saw the robber down by Rocco running towards the apartment complex. He became enclosed in a large pink cloud – the dye pack had activated (on a delayed timer). I called to the officer where the "List of Command for Robberies" was and started calling from the top down. I drew the drapes, pulled the drive-thru shade down, and covered up the teller window so the fingerprints would stay intact.

Long story short, the robber was eventually caught and brought to trial. From the time of the robbery, the teller and I were not allowed to discuss any details. We were called as *witnesses* – just us 2 – we were kept in separate rooms. She was called first, I learned, then I was called. I took the stand, placed my hand on God's word – the Bible – and repeated the words, "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God." I was about to *testify*.

I remember the defendant's attorney had the name of one of our US presidents. He questioned me on what I had *witnessed*. I explained the tune-out, the dye-pack explosion, and his direction of escape. The attorney stepped back a couple of feet and said, "can you hear me?" I said, "yes." He stepped back further and said, "can you hear me?" I said, "yes." Once

again, he stepped back even further and said, "can you hear me?" I am thinking he must think I cannot hear, so I said, "yes, I am not deaf." Well, the whole courtroom erupted in really loud laughter – even the defendant. I thought, "Oh no, I am going to be held in contempt." I had seen plenty of Perry Mason's shows. I turned to the judge to my left and he was smiling...thinking, did he laugh also? Kindly, he said, "you are excused." I hurried over to Jess's for the comfort of one of his hot dogs. I had survived the trial.

The attorney, if he could discredit my *testimony* – having only 1 of 2 witnesses – he could get a "not guilty" verdict. The defendant was found guilty – my *testimony* stood as a *witness* – 2 of 2!

As Christians, we are called to be *witnesses* to the word – the Bible – and with our word we *testify* every day that our Jesus is Lord, the Risen Christ, Son of the Living God.

There will be times when the evil one will try – with all his weapons – to discredit our belief in our Jesus – attacking our faith. This is when we must stand firm and say in faith: "I swear to tell the truth (our Jesus), the whole truth (our Jesus), and nothing but the truth (our Jesus) so help me, Father God." Our *testimony* - must be so!

We, as Christians, have been given the weapons to fight – we have been given "*the full armor of God*" (Ephesians 6:14-17): the helmet of salvation, the breastplate of righteousness, the belt of truth (our Jesus), our feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the Gospel of Peace, the shield of faith, the sword of the spirit which is the Word of God. What more do we need to fight the evil one – nothing!

So, be prepared to be a *witness* for the living God, *testifying* that His Son, our Jesus, is Lord, and our Bible, is our Father God's word. This is, as Christians, our *testament*.

Marylee Huffman

Thursday, March 27

[John 8:21-32](#)

It is easy to feel alone, ashamed, and unlovable when we make a mistake or sin. The world around us is full of gossip, hatred, and idols, and going against that every day of our lives is difficult. Everyone sins, and living a "perfect" life is impossible. When we feel defeated by the world's temptations and sinfulness, we have to look to our Heavenly Father who sent His one and only son for us. In John 8, verse 24, Jesus says "*I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am he, you will indeed die in your sins.*" God's miracle of Jesus brings us faith, love, and hope in a broken world. There is nothing earthly that will satisfy our need for God's unconditional acceptance and peace. Jesus goes on to say "*The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him.*" God doesn't expect perfection from us; rather he expects loyalty, meaningful prayer, and a true connection that trumps all worldly offerings. Being the faithful followers we are called to be pleases God,

and He sees the impact it has on us when we let Him into our hearts. In verses 31 and 32, Jesus says "If you hold to my teaching, you really are my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." Following God and worshipping Him relieves the troubles of the world and makes our hearts more giving and accepting of love. We are set free from this messy world and can have faith in the bigger plan that God has created for every one of us.

Prayer: *Dear God, open our hearts and minds to let you work through us today. We thank you for sending your son to save us and we pray that we allow his miracle to set us free. Free us from anxiety, temptation, and guilt, and let us experience the beauty and love that you grant to every person on Earth. Help us to come together in unconditional love, equality, justice, and peace as we ask that you bring us to everlasting life. Amen.*

Grace Hollowell

Friday, March 28

[Romans 6:1-11](#)

In this passage, Paul addresses the transformative power of baptism and the new life we have in Christ. He emphasizes that through baptism, we are united with Christ in His death and resurrection, enabling us to live a new life free from the bondage of sin. Thinking of this in three sections and maybe three days for the Father, The Son, and The Holy Spirit.

Reflection:

1. Dying to Sin: Paul begins by asking if we should continue sinning so that grace may increase. His answer is a resounding no. Through baptism, we have died to sin. Lent is a time to reflect on how we can die to our old sinful ways and embrace the new life that Christ offers. Are there specific sins you need to let go of? Use this season to seek God's help in overcoming them.
2. New Life in Christ: Just as Christ was raised from the dead, we too are called to live a new life. This new life is characterized by righteousness and holiness. During Lent, focus on what it means to live as a new creation in Christ. How can you reflect His love and grace in your daily actions?
3. Living for God: Paul reminds us that we should no longer let sin reign in our mortal bodies. Instead, we should offer ourselves to God as instruments of righteousness. Lent is a perfect time to recommit ourselves to God, dedicating our lives to His service. Consider ways you can serve others and live out your faith more fully.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, thank You for the new life we have in Christ through baptism. Help us to die to sin and live for You. During this Lenten season, guide us to reflect Your*

righteousness and holiness in all we do. Strengthen us to overcome our sinful habits and to serve You with all our hearts. Amen.

I hope this devotional helps you draw closer to God during Lent.

Ricky Goodwyn

Saturday, March 29

[John 8:47-59](#)

In John 8:47-59, Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees who were people of authority and power. As so often in Jesus' ministry, the Pharisees did not believe his words and picked up stones to throw at him.

It is difficult to imagine people in our country who speak Jesus' words today being persecuted, and yet it happens. On Tuesday, January 21, A Service of Prayer for the Nation was held at the National Cathedral in Washington, DC. The church was filled with government officials and the newly elected president and vice president. The goal of the service was to offer interfaith prayers of thanksgiving for our democracy, to seek God's guidance in the years ahead and to pray for unity, reconciliation, and bridge-building in our divided nation.

Mariann Edgar Budde, who is a mother, grandmother, and the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington, presented a message of unity to the congregation. Reverend Budde recognized that unity in our country does not mean agreement, political, or otherwise but a unity that serves the common good and builds community across diversity and division. She recalled Jesus' analogy of building a house of faith on rock as opposed to sand and emphasized three foundations of unity that are needed for the nation to withstand the many storms that threaten it.

The first foundation given was to honor the inherent dignity of every human being as the birthright of all people and children of our one God. In recognizing human dignity, we can seek common ground with people with whom we find differences. The second key to unity was said to be honesty both in private conversation and in public discourse, knowing that we must speak the truth especially when it costs us. The final foundation of unity given by Reverend Budde was humility. It was said that we all are fallible human beings, and that we say and do things we later regret. With humility we have an openness to one another across our differences. Humility can bring the understanding that we are more alike than we realize, and that we all need one another.

In closing Bishop Budde spoke, as Jesus did, on behalf of people who are often marginalized by society. She asked, gently, that the president show mercy to people in our country who are scared now, for gay, lesbian, and transgender children, for immigrants and for their children who fear their parents will be taken away. Finally, Reverend Budde asked that

the president find compassion for those fleeing war zones and persecution and reminded the congregation that God teaches us to be merciful to strangers, for we were all strangers in this land.

Bishop Budde ended her homily with this prayer, "May God grant us the strength and courage to honor the dignity of every human being, to speak the truth to one another in love, and walk humbly with each other and our God for the good of all people. The good of all people in this nation and the world."

Following the Service of Prayer for the Nation, Mariann Edgar Budde received positive responses to her message from people throughout our country, but other people threw verbal stones at the Bishop. She was attacked with bitter messages filled with malice which sparked a concern for her safety. Reverend Budde has said she will continue to pray for the president and hopes the focus will soon turn from her to the message of unity.

**The entire Service of Prayer for the Nation can be found on the National Cathedral website.

Barb German

Sunday, March 30

[Mark 8:11-21](#)

Your eyes are to see with - why don't you look?

Why don't you open your ears and listen? Don't you remember anything at all?

Mark 8:18 (Living Bible)

I always look forward to the seasons of Advent and Lent. They each offer a journey of faith and new enlightenment.

I like reading the devotionals written by the people of Otterbein - the people I worship with on Sundays. One of the things we have in common is our faith. So many times when talking to others we share how important our faith is in getting through times and celebrating good times.

I recently read in a devotional about how prayer is a gift of faith. What is faith to you? The definition in Hebrews 11:1 "*the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*"

On my journey of faith, the comforting, important realization is that regardless of how something turns out, God will be there with me. I have no doubts about that. It enables me to face "what is" knowing I will never be alone. It's a gift to share with others when the hard, sad times come and to celebrate when the joys of life visit. A feeling of God within reaching out to others.

Jesus once again reminds us to look and see others and trust in our faith, use our eyes - to see their needs, our ears to listen and learn.

Prayer: *Dear heavenly Father, thank you for sending Jesus to show us the way to trust and grow in faith. Amen.*

Anna Steele

Monday, March 31

[Jeremiah 16:10-2](#), [Romans 7:1-12](#), [John 6:1-15](#)

In Matthew 4, Peter and Andrew hear Jesus invite them to be "fishers of men." Christians often hear this as a call for evangelism, but what if they instead heard Jeremiah 16, which paints a much different picture? In this passage, we see an equally true side of God that we as Christians often try to ignore: His anger and vengeance. Here, God is looking for people to not only fish for, but hunt, others everywhere as well. (This hunting and fishing does have a positive end as God calls the Gentiles to Himself, after they denounce all they have known as a lie.)

Lent is a hard season for many Christians, answering the call to set aside time examining how far we have strayed from God's mark is painfully humiliating enough, but then the critical steps of restoration and repentance are exhausting. The punishing Father image has been misused for centuries, leading to either faith founded on fear that erodes to no faith at all or a corruption/distortion of the truth resulting in a God who is okay with everything because He just wants us to be happy. How could the law matter in this second version since it was written before Jesus arrived? Is there a possibility of love in the first? Paul addresses this very question throughout Romans, coming to a key summary in chapter 7: the law exists to show us our sin. Those laws we hear and become defensive? Showing us where pride has overtaken and we clearly know more about the nuances for violation than God who gave them perchance? The laws we adore? Are those the sins of vengeance and hatred coming out? What about all those weird ones we skim past? Could the sin of busyness be preventing us from spending the necessary time in God's presence to ask and listen to what He wants to teach us? Maybe the sin of arrogance that we have evolved so much past those outside our time frame or culture that we can ignore words in the Word? Paul is trying to help us see that yes, we have died to the law of works righteousness, but we can never, no never, die to the law of love that Jesus left us with as the crux of the greatest Commandment.

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Daddy, Help us to never forget that true discipline is a sign of love, whether it feels that way or not. Guide us as we seek to understand and apply your law in our lives. In Jesus Name, amen.*

Tara Eckenroad

Tuesday, April 1

[John 6:16-24](#)

We see in these verses the powerful image of Jesus walking on water, illustrating his power over nature to the extent of calming the stormy sea. Jesus speaks to the terrified disciples and says, "It is I; don't be afraid." He still speaks to us today during life's storms with the same reassurance. Though we might have difficult times, we aren't alone. Jesus is with us, and he doesn't want us to be afraid; just trust him. Proverbs 3:5-6 reminds us *"...and he will direct our path."*

Later in this passage the people wanted to hear more of Jesus' teachings. When they heard he had gone to the other side of the lake they got into the boats and crossed to Capernaum. There's a lesson there. If we want more of Jesus we must first "get into the boat." (Take the first step and trust him.)

I am reminded of a time when serving as Vacation Bible School Director I asked a lady in our church, Estelle, to consider teaching a young group of children. Estelle was in her 60s, and her response was, "Oh, no. I've never taught children. I could never do that!" I knew Estelle to be a loving, kind, and gentle person, so I approached her again. After finally agreeing to serve, she discovered she loved working with the children, and they loved her.

Estelle continued serving in VBS for a number of years. Estelle had "gotten into the boat" and experienced a blessing from God. We recently were reminded by our pastor that as children of God we are part of the body of Christ, and as such we have each been given a spiritual gift. Is God asking you to "get in the boat?" Trust him and he will direct YOUR path.

Carolyn Green

Wednesday, April 2

[Jeremiah 18:1-11](#)

So I went down to the potter's house. And there he was working at his wheel. The vessel he was making was spoiled...and he reworked it into another vessel as seemed good to him.

Jeremiah 18:3-4

I love the image of God as a potter. God, taking the clay, soft and pliable, into His hands molding and shaping it. But the clay slips and cracks and is spoiled. The Potter, undeterred, reworks the clay into the perfect image of the Potter and calls it good.

We are made in the image of God. So what if we ask not what can we give up for Lent, but what we can give into for Lent - all the good that the hand of God has molded into our very being. Give into, with the Good Samaritan, the expanded vision of who our neighbor is and loving them as we love ourselves.

Give into caring for the hurting and wounded left along the roadsides of our world. Give into kindness and tolerance, humility and justice. Give into the hands of a loving Potter all the spoiled, broken pieces of our clay vessel so that renewed and remade we can get on with living into the image of God in which we were molded and formed.

Brenda Smith

Thursday, April 3

[Romans 8:12-27](#)

In this letter, Paul is calling the believers "brothers and sisters" as they are adopted as God's children through Christ. They are now empowered by the Holy Spirit to live a life of freedom under Christ. Even in the middle of suffering or when we don't have the words to pray, the Holy Spirit knows how to intercede for us. Sometimes we don't know what to pray about or sometimes our circumstances are beyond words. Our sighs, or as Paul describes "groans" are too deep for words. Paul adds in verses 16-17 "*The Holy Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs-heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his suffering in order that we may also share in his glory.*"

Paul wrote that the "*present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed to us.*" In verse 26 "*In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans.*"

So it is alright to sit and just be in silent prayer. Just sit and listen. Give your own spirit time to meditate and pray in the presence of "Abba, Father." He hears our laments and cries. He understands.

During this time of Lent, it would be good to spend your time in prayer - even if you don't have words. The Holy Spirit knows your soul and heart as children of God and brothers and sisters in Christ.

C.S. Lewis said it well, "You don't have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body."

Liz Lawson

Friday, April 4

[Romans 8:35-39](#)

No one can avoid death. We will all die one day. Likewise, none of us can escape the realities of living in a fallen and broken world. At some point in our life, we will experience difficulties, distress, and/or suffering. At times, we may be overwhelmed by loneliness, grief, and/or fear. Earlier in Romans, Paul insists that such realities are a result of our humanity's

own doing. We have opted to place our trust in created things rather than in our Creator. We have chosen to chase after other gods. As a result, we all experience the consequences – injustice, greed, selfishness, deception, and other evils abound and impact life. But all is not lost. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, God has once again proven God's faithfulness and demonstrated God's steadfast love.

In Romans 8:35, 37-39, Paul emphatically assures us that there is nothing – there are no distressful situations or evil powers that can separate us from God's loving presence. The only question is whether we will continue to cling to God in the difficult seasons and allow God's loving presence to carry us through to the other side. In these verses, Paul's bold words come from experience – he knows from his own experience that God remains faithful even in the most difficult and trying times. He knows God will not abandon him and that God's loving presence will surround and embrace him through all of life.

Lent challenges us to pause and reflect on our relationship with God. Are there circumstances or powers that we have allowed to deceive us into thinking that God has abandoned us or left us alone? Read Romans 8:35, 37-39. At the end of verse 35, insert events, feelings, circumstances that cause you to question God's love and faithfulness and then boldly and confidently read aloud verses 37-39. You are never alone – God's loving presence surrounds you at all times, in all places and through all circumstances.

Dan Brown

Saturday, April 5

[John 6:60-71](#)

Many Disciples Desert Jesus

Hold On to the One with the Words of Eternal Life

The difference between the disciples who left Jesus and the ones who stayed was not whether they thought Jesus' teaching was offensive or not; both groups knew it was a "hard teaching." The difference was the ones who stayed knew that Jesus alone had the words of eternal life. Jesus asked them if they wanted to go elsewhere, not because he needed to know the answer, but because they needed to say it. Peter confesses in this moment his belief that Jesus has the words that lead to eternal life and that he is the Holy One of God. When we come into contact with things that cause us to doubt or struggle with our understanding of who God is and what he calls us to, we would do well to not panic, but rather to dig in and try to figure out who he is and why we may be challenged by his teaching. We also have resources around us like friends in Christ to pray with us and we should consider the alternatives, where else would we go? Jesus alone has the words of eternal life and will challenge our assumptions

and our ways because he calls us to a deeper walk with him. I have decided to hold on to Jesus, it is and will be the best decision I have ever made.

Prayer: *Lord, help me to hold on to your teachings, even though some words may be hard to understand or follow. I know that you see the 'big picture' and have the best plan for my life. Thank you, Lord. Amen.*

Linda Jordan

Sunday, April 6

[Mark 8:31-9:1](#)

Take Up the Cross

When he had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it."

Mark 8:34-35

"Take up thy cross," the Savior said, if thou wouldst my disciple be; 'Deny-thyself, the world forsake, and humbly follow after me.'" These are the words from the hymn, *Take Up Thy Cross*. If you search a hymn book, you will find the cross mentioned many times. Some of the hymns refer to Jesus' cross and some to our cross, both intertwining.

Since Jesus' crucifixion on the cross played a central role in redeeming humanity for our sins, the cross is the most common symbol of Christianity. During Lent when we think of the cross, we picture a cross being carried to Golgotha and Jesus nailed to it, bleeding and dying for our sins. However, Jesus makes it clear in today's scripture reading, as well as in Luke 14:27 and Matthew 10:38, that we each have a cross to bear if we want to be His follower.

To deny himself does not mean to go without something, but to give full control of ourselves to Christ. Jesus did not use the word "cross" as a symbol of suffering, although we may suffer at times, but as a symbol for God's will. The cross each of us is called to bear is God's will for our lives. If we choose God's will daily, we become everything we can be in Christ. If we reject His will and go our own way, we lose the person He would have helped us become. We all suffer, some more than others, but since the cross and Jesus are inseparable, when we evade the cross, we are actually evading Jesus. We prove our love for Him by loving our cross. We must never be ashamed to be His disciples and take up our cross because it was Jesus that bore it first for us.

Prayer: *Must Jesus bear the cross alone, and all the world go free? No, there's a cross for everyone and there's a cross for me. The consecrated cross I'll bear 'til death shall set me free; and then go home my crown to wear. For there's a crown for me. Amen.* (from the *Book of Hymns*)

Wilma Mitchell

Monday, April 7

[Jeremiah 24:1-10](#)

Before reading today's text refer to Jeremiah 22:24-28. Judah was sinning and God sent Jeremiah to warn them to stop or face the consequences. These few verses tell how angry God was and leads us into the following:

Two Baskets of Figs – Jeremiah 24:1-10

God places 2 baskets at the Lord's temple and asks Jeremiah, "What do you see?" He responds, "figs." "The good ones are very good but the bad ones are so bad they cannot be eaten." God then compares the good figs to the captives Nebuchadnezzar took back to Babylon. The hostages in their despair did not turn from God but turned to him for strength. God told Jeremiah because of their faithfulness, he would watch over them and bring them back to their homeland.

The bad figs were those who remained in Jerusalem or fled when Nebuchadnezzar entered the city. They continued to arrogantly sin seeking prosperity over a God-centered life. Consequently, they felt the wrath of God.

Which basket of figs are you? Do you feel blessed when things are going your way but cursed when it does not? This scripture tells us that life's struggles can make us stronger if we keep our hearts and minds on God during difficult times and prosperity is a curse if it entices us away from God. Lent is a time to reflect, an opportunity to bring our hearts and minds back to relying on God. Using his teachings for direction we learn how to live a God-centered life.

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, Please help us to recognize your presence during difficult times. It is your strength and your promise to be with us always that will strengthen us to endure. If things are going our way, please help us to use our prosperity for you. Amen.*

Vicki Gaines

Tuesday, April 8

[Romans 10:1-13](#)

This passage stuck out to me because it is a well-known message, but is very important. As Christians, we strive to be right with God. In this passage, it talks about how we can be right with God. We have to put faith in him with everything we do. We have to confess our sins and ask for his forgiveness. We have to believe in him. That is how we stand to be right with God. It is important that no matter what we do we look towards Christ to guide us and trust in him. When we do right by God and trust in him, we feel safe. We have a savior that died on the cross for us. We can never repay the debt of Jesus' sacrifice but we can dedicate our life to worshipping him. Let's work hard to keep doing right by God and strive to be good Christians.

Prayer: *Dear God, thank you for sending your Son to die on the cross for us. Help us to be the best Christians we can be and to work hard in doing right by you. Thank you for guiding us and making us feel safe. In your name we pray, Amen.*

Chelsea Joiner

Wednesday, April 9

[John 10:1-18](#)

The Good Shepherd

In John 10:1-18, Jesus paints a beautiful picture of Himself as the Good Shepherd, contrasting His care for His sheep with the dangers of thieves and hirelings. Jesus begins by stating that He is the door through which the sheep must enter. He is not only the path but also the protector. The sheep know His voice and follow Him because they trust His care. Unlike thieves who come to steal and destroy, Jesus came to give abundant life.

As we reflect on this passage, we are reminded of the intimate relationship between the shepherd and the sheep. The shepherd knows His sheep by name and leads them with wisdom, guidance, and protection. In the same way, Jesus knows us intimately. He calls us by name and desires to guide us through the complexities of life.

Verse 11 reveals that Jesus is the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for the sheep. This self-sacrificial love is at the heart of the gospel. Jesus didn't just offer us a pathway to salvation, he gave everything- his life, his love, his presence- so we could have life in its fullness. His sacrifice on the cross speaks volumes about His commitment to His people.

When we are faced with confusion fear or doubt, we can rest assured that we are never alone. The Good Shepherd walks with us, even through the darkest valleys. We are His, and He

is ours. He promises to lead us, protect us, and provide for us. The question is, will we listen to His voice and follow?

Prayer: *Jesus, thank you for being the Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us. Help us to trust You more deeply, listen to Your voice, and follow Your lead. Guide us through every season of life, and let us rest in your care. Amen.*

Susan Pollard

Thursday, April 10

[John 10:19-42](#)

As we read through John, we see Jesus talking about being the Son of God. During this time, some Jews were celebrating this revelation, while others accused Him of blasphemy. As we journey through Lent, it's important to focus on our relationship with Jesus the Son and God the Father. We're approaching the time when Jesus was preparing for His crucifixion, a profound sacrifice He made for us. While some Jews believed in Jesus and others did not, we come to the conclusion that He is the Messiah through faith, love, and trust. Let's take this time to remember that He is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in one.

Anna Goodwyn

Friday, April 11

[John 11:1-27](#)

*Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the Life.
He who believes in me will live even though he dies
and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"
Martha replied, "Yes Lord, I believe you are the Christ,
the Son of God who has come into the world."*

John 11:25-27

The story of Lazarus is one of the best-known stories in the New Testament. It shows that Jesus had the power over death, and it showed that power to the world.

But sometimes we overlook another important part of the Scriptures, and that was the faith of Martha. Before she witnessed the power of Christ over death and before she witnessed her brother emerge from the tomb, **Martha believed!** She publicly acknowledged Jesus as the Christ and the Son of God.

In our lives today, we are always demanding "proof" of something before we believe. Our mantra is "show us the data" before we believe. Martha's faith in Christ did not require

proof, expert testimony, or reams of data. Martha simply recognized the power of Jesus and believed.

As we move through this season of Lent we should remember Martha. Maybe we should daily acknowledge that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who came into this world to offer us eternal life.

Perhaps we should repeat the Apostles Creed that we say on Sundays, every day. Let us acknowledge every day, not only during Lent, that "Jesus Christ is his only son, our Lord." Faith in Christ was the only thing Martha needed to have a relationship with Jesus. It is still all we need today.

Ron Cartee

Saturday, April 12

[Romans 11:25-36](#)

*Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments and his ways past finding out!*

Romans 11:33

All God's acts are done in perfect wisdom, first for his own glory, and then for the highest good of the greatest number for the longest time. These words by David Jeremiah, were part of a Bible study, I was listening to.

So far I had studied God's goodness, sovereignty, and holiness. I didn't have problems with any of those attributes. In fact, up until that point, the study had been deepening my intimacy with my savior.

Then I reached the chapter on God's wisdom, and it was as if a giant wall had gone up in my face. I had no trouble with the first part: "*All God's acts are done in perfect wisdom.*" It was the second part that had me confused. "*...for the highest good of the greatest number for the longest time.*"

I couldn't understand it. Within the world today there are so many people and children in need of help. How does this fit into God's wisdom?

As I wrestle with this question, I find myself saying I need to trust God because of who he is, despite the circumstances.

I still struggle with his wisdom. But do you know what? He's God; He doesn't answer to me. I am not his counselor. It's a truth that brings freedom.

We will never completely understand God's ways or grasp why he does what he does, but we can worship him for the goodness and love and mercy that he has already shown us. Lord, I don't understand your wisdom. Sometimes I even doubt it. Help me to rest in you, even when I don't comprehend your ways.

CF Williams

Sunday, April 13

[1 Timothy 6:12-16](#)

...pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, gentleness.

Fight the good fight of the faith.

I Timothy 6:11-12

Today is Palm/Passion Sunday. The season of Lent culminates as the church walks with trembling footsteps through Holy Week – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and quiet Saturday, to the celebration of the glorious resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday. The church has for centuries been trying to figure out what it might mean for us as those who seek to follow the Way of Jesus to actually do so in our day-to-day living.

The great Apostle to the outsiders, Paul, is writing to his beloved friend and disciple Timothy. Realizing that there is little probability that they will meet again this side of glory, Paul is giving instruction and encouragement to Timothy. There is nothing passive in the instructions Paul leaves for Timothy and us in the verses cited. Lent is a season that calls us to delve deeply into our faith commitments, the ones we made in public through baptism and confirmation; the ones we reaffirm every Lord's Day when we come to the table for Holy Communion. It is a time to assess our daily living in the light of our confession and affirmation of faith. Paul tells us to **pursue** and to **fight the good fight of the faith**. These commitments go beyond personal piety and take us out into the world that sees them as frivolous. These commitments require me to choose. They are not part of my natural inclinations. These commitments challenge me/us anew each day.

- Each day we prayerfully choose righteousness – living by the command of God first.
- Each day we prayerfully choose godliness over and against the culture of fear, lies, and division that permeates the cultural air.
- Each day we prayerfully choose faith putting God as revealed in Jesus at the center of our lives, a God no eye has seen, whose will no one may probe.
- Each day we prayerfully choose love, the greatest of spiritual gifts. This is risky business. Left to my own devices I would easily opt for what suits me best, what makes me feel good about myself, or as the Beatles tune says it; *I, me, mine, I, me, mine, all through the day*. God shows us in Jesus what is meant by the *steadfast love that endures*, that never runs out, never runs dry, never gives up. That is the call and the challenge for us as those who claim to follow the Way of Jesus every day.

Each and every day we are called upon by God in Jesus Christ to *fight the good fight of the faith*. God helping us, let it be so.

Jim Wingert

Monday, April 14

[John 12:9-19](#)

Jesus' Arrival in Jerusalem

Word had spread of the miracle of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. This influenced many Jews who began to believe in Jesus. Crowds came to Jerusalem to celebrate his arrival with the waiving of palms and shouts of "Hosanna." They also came to see Lazarus as proof of the miracle.

This triumphant moment for Jesus' ministry also created deeper unrest with Jewish leadership and sealed his fate.

Prayer: *Dear God our Father, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus Christ to love and save us. Let us celebrate his time with us on Earth by shouting "Hosanna" and showing our love for him. Amen.*

Julie Clough

Tuesday, April 15

[Philippians 3:15-21](#)

For, as I have often told you before and now tell you again even with tears, many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.

Philippians 3:18-21

There is a lot of talk in the news these days about US citizenship, but how about our other citizenship? This scripture suggests that Christians have "dual citizenship," both in the earthly world and in the Kingdom of God. This means that Christians are responsible for participating in their country while also honoring God.

Most of us have US citizenship because we were born in the US and one or both of our parents were US citizens. According to Christian belief, "being a child of God" through faith in Jesus Christ, grants us citizenship in heaven, suggesting our identity and allegiance lies with the heavenly kingdom, not just on Earth, a concept often referenced in scripture. The requirements and qualifications for anyone to become a citizen of heaven have been completed by Jesus Christ. No further steps needed for naturalization.

In the passage we are focusing on today, Paul is urging believers to focus solely on Christ, essentially saying that they should prioritize their heavenly citizenship over earthly concerns and continually pursue a Christ-like life as they look forward to entering the heavenly kingdom. Verses 18-19 declare that “enemies of the cross of Jesus” make their god their stomach.”. In other words, we must be wary of prioritizing self-indulgence over the teaching of Christ. This is not so easy to do in the world we live in today.

In Colossians, chapter 3, Paul further elaborates on heavenly citizenship. *Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things...Therefore as God's chosen ones, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and most importantly, love for one another* (vs. 2, 12). How would life as a US citizen look if everyone practiced these attributes of heavenly citizenship here on earth?

Prayer: *Heavenly Father, lead me to practice being a good citizen here on earth, the same as I would do as a citizen of heaven. Amen.*

Betty Redmond

Wednesday, April 16

[Philippians 4:1-13](#)

This passage is about having a life dedicated to Christ and appreciating all aspects of life without worry. The passage says to not be anxious or overwhelmed by what goes on in life, but rather to enjoy all the things God has placed on the earth for us. Paul also tells us to rejoice in the Lord full heartedly. This passage is important to me because sometimes I get caught up in life trying to get ahead, and between work and life in general, that I forget to take time to enjoy what I have. Rather than complaining about having to mow the grass, I should appreciate the fact that God gave us the green grass and the sun for crops and food to grow. At the end of the day, there is little to worry about because with God's hand we will be taken care of; and all the little aspects of life are not important in the big picture of living life for God and being a follower of him. The passage ends by Paul saying whether he is hungry or full, he has learned to be content because he has the power to face all conditions through the power of Christ. Through Jesus we can accomplish anything we put our minds to. However, we should remember at all times to stop to smell the flowers, thank the Lord for what we have, and live our life to the fullest for God.

Christian Joiner

Thursday, April 17

[John 17:1-26](#)

The story is told of a preacher who was shaking hands at the door of the church after the service. One outspoken member of the congregation thanked the pastor for both messages. "But I only preached one this morning" he gently corrected the parishioner, who responded "I meant the one you preached and the one you prayed." Some prayers prayed to God perhaps may be intended to be overheard. It would seem that the prayer prayed by Jesus in today's scripture might be one of them.

On this Maundy Thursday as we today remember the supper Jesus shared with his disciples before his crucifixion, the writer of the Gospel of John speaks (in chapters 13—16) of the loving farewell conversation Jesus had with his disciples and then relates (in chapter 17) of the prayer Jesus fervently prayed in their hearing. After three years of life together, the time had come for Jesus to leave. Jesus said he had finished the work that the Father had given him to do. But how could that be, when there clearly was (and is!) so much left to do? As we know, the disciples were being tasked with continuing to do the work.

As the disciples had the privilege of overhearing this prayer, so all of us as followers of Jesus who read it today need to know that the words are for us as well. What does it say to us? Quickly four things:

- (1) Jesus prayed "*I do not ask you to take them out of the world.*" Rather than trying to escape or withdraw from the world, we need to live out our faith as we face whatever comes.
- (2) Almost in the same breath Jesus prayed "*but I do ask you to keep them safe from the evil one.*" When we are tempted by that which is evil, we are not alone in the battle, but God is standing with us, and can help keep us safe.
- (3) Jesus prayed "*that they may be one.*" Our witness to God's love will only be strong if we unite and work together.
- (4) Jesus prayed "*May they be consecrated in truth.*" Our witness for Christ is truly effective when our lives are lived in a genuine and sincere way.

As it did for the early disciples, the work continues for us.

Prayer: *Gracious God, may we faithfully do the work you give us to do. Amen.*

Rudy Smith

Friday, April 18

[1 Peter 1:10-20](#)

Last year on Good Friday, I attended "Stations of the Cross" at Harrisonburg Baptist Church. Upon entering the sanctuary, I was offered a small journal where I could jot down my thoughts and reflections during the experience. At the first station there was a small jar of ashes. Participants were instructed to meditate on the related scripture and then, using the ashes, mark the image of the cross on a sheet of available loose paper. I opted to apply it onto the first page of my journal instead.

The next day, I began leafing through the journal to review the notes I had made while visiting the various stations. I opened the little booklet, and there was the ashen cross on the first page. What really caught my eye was the faint impression that the ashes had made on the inside cover of the journal. Not fully a clear likeness of the cross, it was rather indistinct. Amazingly, the points where Christ's nail-pierced hands and feet would have been located were clearly highlighted. There was even a circle where Jesus' thorn-crowned head would have been situated. I was in awe as I contemplated this unexpected symbolic image.

It further emphasized to me that Christ's suffering, blood shed, and death on the cross made possible our forgiveness and reconciliation with God. As Peter wrote for his audience of believers in today's scripture, it was always God's plan, and a prophesy fulfilled, that we would be redeemed by the precious blood of Christ.

Of course, we know the story does not end at the cross or with Jesus' body being placed in the tomb...Stay tuned for Easter Sunday!

Prayer: *Dear Heavenly Father, open our hearts and minds to receive the infinite love you have for us. On this solemn and holy day we gratefully acknowledge Jesus' obedient sacrifice by his dying on the cross for our sin. Help us to endure the hardships of life with faith and hope, knowing that our suffering is temporary and our reward will be great with you in glory. Guide us to live holy lives modeled by Christ's pure and perfect example. Amen.*

Carole Gaines

Saturday, April 19

[Romans 8:1-11](#)

The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.

Romans 8:6

I don't know about you, but it has been a rough six months for me. Working to get medication regulated, deaths and helping family members cope while trying to cope myself, crazy weather patterns threatening home and safety, political upheavals and keeping peace

within relationships, uncertainty all around. It's no wonder that sleep often doesn't come easily. It's also no wonder that answers often don't come easily regardless of how much we try to find them.

Romans 8:1-11 is a little difficult to decipher, but it speaks to living according to the flesh - laws and the physical - or living according to the spirit - with God and Christ. This passage declares "*the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.*" Concentrating on the spirit through Christ is the best way to achieve some semblance of peace in the turmoil of life. I know people try all sorts of ways to live happily in the midst of turmoil, but the way that turns out to be the best is to concentrate on the Spirit.

This Lenten season is almost over. It is my hope and prayer that you and I are able to continue to remember what we have learned throughout these weeks and lean on our spirituality and the grace and mercy from God to see us through our hard, as well as our easy, experiences.

Carole Barber

Sunday, April 20

[Luke 24:13-35](#)

The final reading and devotion for this year is a familiar story, even if it is not what we would call the traditional Easter scripture. Luke places Jesus' post-resurrection on the road to Emmaus, walking and talking with two disciples. Only one is named, Cleopas, and we get no real detail as to why Jesus is walking. After relating events to Jesus, they engage in a longer conversation about scripture and Jesus teaches them about all that had come to pass and why it connected to the more ancient narrative. With this amount of explanation over the extended walk, you would think that disciples who knew Jesus would catch on and figure out who he was. This only happened though as they were seated around the table and Jesus broke bread with them. Luke uses the four-fold structure that we use in our communion liturgy, "Jesus took the bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them." Then their eyes were opened and they realized who had been on the journey with them all along. This is the Easter message. When we encounter the one who feeds us at the table, we see him for who he truly is. It is why I think communion is the most important thing we do. It is the one place where we acknowledge theologically that Jesus is present. In the blessing, breaking, and giving of the bread, we know we are re-presenting Jesus, just as he did on Easter in Emmaus. This is our eternal message, this is our faith lived out in liturgy, this is Easter. When you come to the communion table on Easter Sunday or any other week, remember these words where Jesus is revealed and remember that same revelation takes place each time we break bread together as well.

Happy Easter!

Adam Blagg