

“Forty Days in the Wilderness”



Lenten Devotional

2025

Central United Methodist Church

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Daniel 9:3

“Then I turned my face to the Lord God, seeking Him by prayer and pleas for mercy with fasting and sackcloth and ashes”.

What is Lent?

Lent is the 40-day period leading up to Easter (excluding Sundays) that starts on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. Lent involves fasting and prayer to connect deeper with God and as a personal reflection to prepare your heart and mind for Good Friday and Easter. Key days of Lent are:

Ash Wednesday – A time for confession and repentance. Ashes are received in the shape of the cross on the forehead or hand. These ashes remind us of our need for repentance and our human frailty, and symbolize sorrow and mourning over sin.

Palm Sunday – The last Sunday of Lent and begins Holy Week. It marks Jesus’ arrival in Jerusalem, when people welcomed Him with palm branches and recognized Him as their King.

Maundy Thursday – Which remembers the Last Supper, when Jesus shared a final meal with His disciples and demonstrated humility by washing their feet. The word ‘maundy’ means commandment, when Jesus gave the disciples the New Commandment.

Good Friday – A solemn day that commemorates Jesus’ crucifixion and His ultimate sacrifice for our sins. Even though it is a sorrowful day it is called “Good” because of the redemption of our sins by Jesus’ sacrifice.

Holy Saturday – A quiet day of reflection as we remember Jesus’ time in the tomb and anticipate the joy of what’s to come.

Why is Lent 40 days? It is symbolic of significant biblical events:

Noah and the 40 days of rain during the Great Flood (Genesis 7:12)

Moses spending 40 days on Mount Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments (Exodus 34:28)

The Israelites’ 40 years of wandering in the desert (Numbers 14:33)

Elijah’s 40-day journey to Mount Horeb (I Kings 19:8)

Jesus’ 40 days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11)

Gracious God, As we enter our 40 days of Lent keep us mindful of what this season represents and help us draw closer to You. Amen

As we journey together, in this time of Lent, may these daily devotionals bring you encouragement, peace and hope. Jesus fasted and prayed for forty days in the desert wilderness, and called on scripture, the Word of God, to defeat the devil. Let us use this time of reflection and repentance to do the same.



Day 1

Matthew 16:15-16, 21-22

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!”

Looking Toward Jerusalem

(from Kneeling in Jerusalem by Ann Weems, 1992)

The journey to Bethlehem was much more to our liking. We are content kneeling here, where there's an aura of angels and the ever-present procession of shepherds and of kings who've come to kneel to the Newborn in whom we are newborn. The shepherds have left; they've returned to the hillside and to their sheep. The Magi, too, have gone, having been warned in a dream, as was Joseph, who packed up his family and fled. If we stay in Bethlehem, we stay alone. God has gone on toward Jerusalem.

Holy Savior, we do not want you to head toward Jerusalem...not another step. We do not want you to suffer for our sake. But, the Heavenly Father's will had to be done. Jesus, let this ancient story remind us once again of the life you gave for us. In this we praise you eternally. We honor you and we bow down with grateful hearts; knowing that there will be another resurrection morning. For it was in your Bethlehem birthing and your journey to Jerusalem that we celebrate your rising once again. You indeed are the Resurrected Savior! Alleluia! Amen.

Day 2

Psalm 130:5-6

“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning”.

Waiting for God’s Garden to Bloom!

Lent is a difficult time for me because it is 40 days of WAITING. Waiting is not my strong suit. I am a woman of ACTION! Patience is not one of my virtues. Things need to get done and there is no better time than NOW. The Psalmist says, *“I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits and in His word I put my hope”*. We wait during Advent with an excited expectation of the birth of a baby, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Lent is a different kind of waiting because we first have to go through Good Friday to get to the Resurrection of Easter. There is sadness before the joy. I love to garden, and my joy is seeing something I have planted begin to sprout or bloom. Spring and Summer are my favorite seasons because this is when plants, flowers and trees are in their full glory. As a gardener I know that when Fall comes things begin to die, leaves fall, flowers fade, and the world starts to look gray and lifeless, but this is when many plants and bulbs are planted in anticipation of the Spring! Winter is the most desolate of all. Everything that gave color and joy is gone and is replaced with bleakness. We are in our winter of Lent, waiting with prayer and fasting, for the blooming of the “Lily of the Valley” our “Rose of Sharon”, Jesus, our Lord. For me, even impatient me, it is worth the wait.

Creator God, We thank you for this time of waiting as we anticipate, each year, the Resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Your son, Jesus. Until He comes in final victory, we wait. Amen

Day 3

Deuteronomy 6:5, 13-14, 24-25

“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name. The Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he commanded us, that will be our righteousness.”

Obedient Love

God nudged me to give the “Coping With Divorce” brochure from our church to a co-worker who’s going through a rough divorce. He’s not a church guy but he received my offering with gratitude. Thankfully, he is attending the class and making progress! Later I shared this experience in my Class Meeting as a time I saw God at work. A fellow class member said that was more than just a nice gesture, that my actions had shown obedience to God. Obedience. By helping a friend. My simple act was obeying God’s will for me and his people. Jesus quotes the law of Moses to refute the devil in the wilderness, then later demands radical obedience from his disciples. In Mark 12:30-31, Jesus teaches *“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.”* Obedience to God’s commands mean loving one another. It means serving others and confessing and repenting of our sin. Lent reminds us of Christ’s obedience to the Father’s love, even to death. That same amazing love frees us for “joyful obedience” drawing us closer to him and the promise of everlasting life.

Gracious Father, strengthen us throughout this Lenten season. Help us to love others as you have loved us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

Day 4

Luke 15:11-24: The Parable of the Lost Son

“Jesus continued: There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to the father: “Father give me my share of the estate”... Not long after that, the younger son got together all that he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to a citizen... who sent him out to the fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses...here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: “Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.” So, he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, “Father I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son”. But the father said to his servants, Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet...Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found...”

The Unfathomable Love of the Father

I remember attending a Promise Keepers event soon after the turn of the century when one of the speakers read this passage over and over asking the men if they caught its meaning. He would shout out time and time again “No, you missed it”. Finally, he explained that the son had decided on and rehearsed that which he was going to say to his father in 3 parts: 1) Father I have sinned against heaven and against you, 2) I am no longer worthy to be called your son and 3) make me like one of your hired men. But when it came time to address his father with his rehearsed speech, he succeeded in stating parts 1 and 2, but the Father cut him off before he could say part 3, which would be to ask that his father make him like one of his hired men, thereby not allowing the son to demean himself any further. Instead, the father immediately arranged to honor and accept his son with a robe, a ring, sandals for his feet, a feast and a celebration. Stating that while his son was dead, he is alive again and was lost and is found. I learned from a Jewish woman with background under her Jewish heritage that when the son asked for his inheritance and departed from the father with it, it was insulting to the father who was still alive and was the equivalent of announcing that his father was dead to him. Jesus illustrated that regardless of how badly the son had treated the Father for his own selfish purposes, the Father’s endless love welcomed and restored the son back.

Father, thank You for Your accepting love for me when I don’t deserve Your love. This time of Lent reminds me of Your genuine love for me because You sent Your son to die on the cross for me. And like the prodigal son, You love me and welcome me back to You despite my rebellious nature. Amen

Day 5

Romans 8:28a

“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God”.

Turning from our shadows.

The history of shaping America’s future is explained as a theory in the book, “Generations: The Fourth Turning” by Strauss and Howe. Every generation experiences four “turnings” in a recurring cycle of “highs, awakenings, unraveling’s and crises”. This “generational theory” retells the entire American perspective of turnings through time. There’s another book, the Bible, that retells of a new perspective of “turnings”.

Acts 3:26 NIV *“God raised up His servant and sent Him first to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways.”*

James 1:17 *“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights. With Him there is no variation or shadow cast by turning.”* and my favorite, Romans 8:28a *“We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God.”*

There was a significant migration settling in “Arkansaw Territory” looking for land in the 1800’s. When the interstates crossed into Arkansas in the 1900’s, growing pains found a home in the natural state. Now again, when construction demands are being met for an expanding economy in the 2000’s, here in NW Arkansas, we turn to frustration and ease of complaints. We all experience shadows in our lives. It can be loss of a family member, a lingering decline or sudden weather event that changed our everyday lives. We even make our own “shadows on the wall”. I could make a butterfly, barking dog and a rabbit. It would be real to a child when shown with a story using images in silhouette. But shadows can change, growing long in the morning and evening, BUT minimized when the sun is high. When the SON is high priority during this Lenten season, your shadows disappear.

My prayer for you is by “turning” to Him there will be no shadows of “generational frustration” now or the next time you’re delayed in traffic. May the peace of Christ, even on the blackest days, shine upon you. Amen

Day 6

Isaiah 32:3

“And the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken”

Finding Faith in the Wilderness of Your Own Backyard!

I seek my morning haven in the simplicity of my own backyard. No matter the weather, it reminds me each day of God’s promise for beauty and peace if I steadfastly look and listen. I sit with my cup of tea cradled in my hands as the sun rises between the bare branches of still sleeping trees and I think, “Do they ‘see’ the beauty of spring when they waken? Do they sense the songs of birds? I reflect that my sleeping garden simply feels the joy of living and responds. How clearly do I respond to the joy of life around me? How clearly do I see? The sound of birds reaches my ears above the growing hum of morning traffic. Were they always singing as I sat here and only just now I have hearkened to their melodies?

The beauty of God’s word and the peace within it is always here if I seek with eyes that are not dim and hearken with ears that are willing to hear. My sleeping garden feels the promise of God’s presence and responds. Do I?

Thought for the Day: Isaiah shared God’s promise in his words of 32:3. Christ felt that promise in his search for direction as he fasted in the wilderness. He saw with eyes that would not be dimmed by temptation. With ears that heard the word of his Father, he hearkened. Will I see with eyes that are not dim and hear with ears that hearken so I too, can receive the beauty and peace of God’s promise?

“Faith is the bird that feels the light and sings when the dawn is still dark.”
Rabindranath Tagore

Dear Lord, guide me through the wilderness that surrounds me each day with eyes that shall not be dimmed and ears that will hearken. Help me rediscover the joy and peace of your promise through Christ our Lord, Amen.

Day 7

John 15:4

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me”.

Putting God First

I can't remember a time when I didn't believe in God. I grew up going to Sunday School and church with my family every Sunday and enjoyed VBS every summer with my church friends. Scripture passages and prayers were my daily sources of communion with God. I always had faith and trust in Him. These past several years, God has placed it on my heart, that other things in my life have taken priority over Him, such as social media, the daily news, and the business of life in general. I have never stopped praying but I wasn't spending enough time alone with Him to always feel his abiding presence. God's gentle nudges have inspired me to listen and focus on Him, beginning with the early hours of the morning. No longer do I desire to start my day with things of the world like I did in the past. I now immerse my mind and heart with thoughts of Christ through scripture, quiet time and prayers. What a joy it is to have a deeper relationship with Him and to be blessed with His love, mercy and grace, as well as His abiding presence.

Thank you, Dear Lord, for loving and meeting us wherever we are in our spiritual journey. Thank you for sacrificing yourself and giving us your Holy Spirit to be with us always. Thank you for drawing close, as we draw close to you.

Day 8

Psalms 33:20-22

“We wait in hope for the LORD; he is our help and our shield. In him our hearts rejoice, for we trust in his holy name. May your unfailing love be with us, LORD, even as we put our hope in you”.

Lent: A Time for Reflection.

“Wait! Pause! Let’s think about this! This is very important!” These words were spoken to my nursing students many times as we planned daily patient care activities. The planning required REFLECTION on previous knowledge and skills learned in order to be successful. Lent is a time to REFLECT on God’s amazing love for us! He sacrificed his only son, Jesus, so that we could have eternal life. This is very important to remember! As I REFLECT, words from hymns I memorized in youth choir are spinning in my head! I remember:

“Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe, sin has left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow.”

“What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.”

“Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul, each thought and each motive beneath His control, thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love, Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.”

“Jesus completely saves, He will lift you by his love, out of the angry seas, when nothing else could help, Love lifted me.”

“Trust and obey, for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.”

Dear Lord, please help us remember to wait in hope of the Lord, and pause to reflect on your amazing love for us and guide us as we share our love and hope in the Lord with others. Amen.

Day 9

1 John 4:7-12

*“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God...This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him...**No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.**”*

It Takes a Community

The greatest example of God’s love for us is the sacrifice of his only Son so that we might have life everlasting. While we have not seen God, we know that he became flesh through Christ who formed the Church, a community of believers, on earth. It is through our association with fellow believers and through loving one another that we grow to understand the fullness of God’s love.

Connecting to a church community is essential for Christians to exercise their gifts and demonstrate love for one another. I have found my community in our church choir, which has allowed me to use my talents to help others experience God’s word through music. Further, the choir members show love to one another with prayers, support and encouragement in times of need, and celebration when joys are shared. Ours is a welcoming community and we continually invite others to join us as we work together to share God’s word. In the context of an active, loving church community everyone can grow together in our walk with Christ to experience the full power of the cross.

Dear Lord, we confess that our churches are not always the communities of love that they should be. Please help us remember that your greatest command is that we love one another as you have loved us. Amen

Day 10

John 15:1-11

John 15:5 I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (Read John 15:1-11)

Light in the Branches

A number of years ago, my husband, Charles, and I were trimming trees in the woods down the hill from our house. Charles used the chainsaw to cut broken or fallen limbs. I used the loppers to cut smaller limbs so they would lay flat on the ground. Charles moved on down the hill. Wild grape vines clung to nearly all those trees. They could be as big as 2 inches around or small and limber for making wreaths. All of a sudden, the limbs around me lit up! I stood in awe as the neon-like lights flashed through the cut timbers. I was hearing (?) verses from John 15. My understanding was that the new, limber vines are easy to peel off the trees. They will grow and harden with age and will become hard to remove. Just like new believers need encouragement to stay the course. We had taken a Disciple course with Bobby Bell and I hoped God had not given up but was still seeking me. I prayed for a sign to prove I belonged to God. We were beginning a new class with church members we hardly knew. Our church building was new in a new location with a lot of new people. I prayed for these people and our new church every day. In the next class I related God's message to me.

Dear God, hold on to us like a vine wraps itself around a tree. Help us live a better life. Help us to encourage each other to grow closer to you. Show us how to further your kingdom. Amen

Day 11

Isaiah 41:10

"Do not fear, I am with you, Do not be dismayed."

“The Righteous Hand of God”

I AM your God
Who strengthens you
each and every day.
My righteous Hand
WILL uphold you,
As you go your way.

There may be times
when you have fears
and become dismayed.
You will be supported
by my Hand,
This PROMISE I have made!

As we enter into LENT,
We deny ourselves
Certain "things,"
We focus on God and Christ,
Such peace to us
This brings!

Thank you, Heavenly Father,
For sending us Your Son,
We praise Your Name,
and we bow down to
YOU, OH, HOLY ONE!

Father God, we love and worship you. We ask that you guide our paths daily. You alone know what is best for us in our lives. We thank you for the many blessings that we have received and will continue to receive. Forgive us where we have failed you. Continue to envelope us in Your love. It is in Christ's Blessed Name that we pray this prayer. Amen

Day 12

Matthew 6:33

“Seek the kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need”.

What Information Are You Seeking First?

How do you begin your day? Growing up, I watched my parents get up early, make coffee and read the morning newspaper front to back. Daddy would many times circle items of interest with his carpenter’s pencil. My mother would expressively read the editorials out loud. Watching them faithfully drink in the news for over 20 years taught me that, clearly, the world and local news held important information, and needed my attention at the beginning of my day! I ‘ve followed in their footsteps, the difference being their morning news was print, mine is electronic. My mornings unfold with the brewing of coffee, assembling my husband’s healthy lunch and feeding our old cat, Mr. Louis (who meows loudly until he is fed)! The information in the news and that first cup of java await me. More and more it seems that the news leaves me feeling distressed and disquieted (a loss of sense of security or peace of mind). As we approach Lent God is guiding me to reach for HIS information/Word, first. God’s information is timeless. The world’s changes hourly. God’s information is a steadfast guide. The world’s information is trendy. God’s information provides peace. The world’s information too often provides unrest and confusion. God’s information seeks to unify humanity in love. The world’s information seems to want to pit us against each other, a tearing away from each other. Lastly, God’s information is the TRUTH, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The world’s information is a “changing truth” depending on who is reporting at the time. *Psalm 25:5 Guide me in Your truth and teach me, for You are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.* Will I still look at the world and local news?? Yes, however God’s information will be first.

*Dear Lord, let us seek Your word first, each and every day. Let Your guidance and love greet us each morning giving us hope and assurance that leads to a peace that surpasses all understanding.
Amen*

Day 13

Philippians 2:1-11

Phil 2: 1-2 “Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.” NIV

The Humility of Christ

This Philippians passage is one of my favorites in scripture. It speaks of complete joy—not complete happiness, but of the joy we can experience in Christ when we show Christ’s love with compassion and love. During the time that Paul wrote this letter to the church at Philippi, they were experiencing challenges from non-believers and disunity within the church. Paul isn’t suggesting that everyone must have the same opinions. Paul is encouraging the Philippians to love one another as Christ loved them and to live out their faith in bold ways, together – for that is what will bring joy. Christ displayed ultimate humility by taking the form of a servant and submitting to death on a cross. We are invited by God to embody humility in our own relationships and actions as we set Christ’s example for the world. During this season of Lent, identify new areas where you can serve others selflessly like helping a neighbor with a task, serving in a way that usually goes unnoticed, or going out of your way to show kindness to someone in need, especially if they are different from you.

Lord Jesus, You humbled Yourself in love and service—help us to follow Your example with joy and unity. Teach us to serve selflessly, love deeply, and reflect Your grace in all we do. Amen.

Day 14

Psalm 100:1-3

“Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. Know that the Lord is God.”

Psalm 101:1

“I will sing of your love and justice; to you, Lord, I will sing praise.”

Make a Joyful Noise

I have always envied anyone with musical talents. This gift was simply not in my DNA. As I became a parent and would sing to my children, they would beg me to stop. Not gifted even from a child’s perspective. I grew up hearing jingles from TV commercials and to this day, using a jingle is how I spell bologna, and I know the exact order of a big mac sandwich. If I hear the opening music to movies or TV shows, I know what to expect before I even see the screen. One of the greatest forms of praise is to lift our voices and sing. I remember so many of the hymns sung each week at church. At the time I had no idea I was learning scripture and/or biblical stories as I sang. *“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me...”* based on Psalm 23, has become one of the most popular hymns for centuries. How amazing is it that while we were sinners, we received the ultimate gift of sacrifice and given eternal life through the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ! *“Christ the Lord is risen today. Alleluia! Earth and heaven in chorus say. Alleluia!”* *“Holy Holy Holy! Lord God Almighty. Early in the morning our song shall rise to Thee...”* *“O for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer’s praise, the glories of my God and King the triumphs of his grace!”* I’ll bet you’re singing silently even now as you read this! Praise God! During this season of Lent, spend time in praise, worship and reflection of what God has given us. No matter how you worship, and if you are like me without harmony or melodic voice, know that our God hears beauty in our sounds/noises and adores our efforts.

Dear Heavenly Father, I will praise on the mountain. I will praise You when the mountain is in my way. During this season and beyond, I will praise you, Lord. In the busyness of our day-to-day distractions in life, I pray for You to restore our souls. Remove the barriers that cause us to drift. Allow us the ability to slow down and reflect on your gift as we enter the season of Lent. Holy Spirit come to us and provide us with an unending melody to comfort us and bring us closer to You. Let us be grateful for the time and talents for those who have given us words and songs that we can worship in songs. “Bless the Lord oh my soul, oh my soul. Worship His Holy name. Sing like never before, oh my soul, I’ll worship Your Holy name...” Amen

Amazing Grace; John Newton; 1779

Christ the Lord is Risen Today; Charles Wesley; 1739

Holy Holy Holy; Reginald Heber; 1783

O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing; Charles Wesley, 1739

Highlands (Song of Ascent); Benjamin William Hastings; 2019

Day 15

John 3:16

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

Then Sings My Soul

Since I have been singing from the United Methodist hymnal for the past couple of decades, I look at it as my musical Bible. Many hymns in our hymnal are based on scripture passages or reflect a hymn writer’s relationship with God. While deciding what to share for this devotional, I started looking through the Lenten hymns. I kept coming back to a hymn not in that section, “How Great Thou Art.” I know this is a favorite hymn for many (it was my Grandma’s and we sang it at her funeral). As I think of our 40-day journey through Lent, it reminds us of Jesus’ mortality and our own. When we sing “How Great Thou Art” I know I sing through the first two verses with a lot of joy. Verse three gives us a reminder of Lent. *“And when I think that God, his Son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in; that on the cross, my burden gladly bearing, he bled and died to take away my sin.”* Sometimes Lent might seem a little depressing, but it does give us time to remember all that was done on our behalf. We know how the story ends — Jesus was obedient to God, and God was faithful. The refrain after each verse reinforces our obedience as well “Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee; how great thou art, how great thou art!”

Everlasting God, because of your tender mercy toward all people, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to take upon himself our flesh, and to suffer death upon the cross, that all should follow the example of his great humility. Mercifully grant that we may follow the example of his patience and also be made partakers of his resurrection; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. (the Book of Common Prayer, USA, 20th Cent., Alt)

Day 16

Philippians 1:3

“I thank my God upon every remembrance of you”

Thankful

Many years ago, my friend, Carole Baker, led a class I attended and read the above Scripture. She told about an Aunt that put this verse on all her cards and letters she sent. This verse and the meaning behind it have made an impact on my prayer life ever since she introduced it to our class. Paul was thankful for the believers in Philippi. His relationship with this church opened his heart and their hearts to have a partnership in the gospel together (Phil 1:5). He found joy in praying for those he loved. Knowing what we are taught in the letters from Paul strengthens my heart and my trust in Jesus Christ. All believers are united in the gospel, in our Savior the Triune God. I am committed to intentional prayer. During Lent, as we wait for Easter, be committed. Journal. Pray. Fast. Partner with a friend. Be accountable. Pray for Central, our church, our people. As we pray for each other we are filled with love, trust and peace “that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6). Find that same joy Paul expresses as you put those in our church family first in your prayers. Pause in gratefulness.

Holy Father, we praise you, we thank you for your love and protection every day. Lord, help us focus our prayers on those who need you, who love you, your children who are lost as well as those who are found. Help us not forget to be intentional and to rely on you and only you. In Jesus name, Amen.

Day 17

Matthew 4:1-2

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterward he was hungry.

Temptation

Jesus was fully God but also fully man. This scripture shows us that He shared the same humanity as we do. He was tempted and He was hungry. Why did God allow Him to be tempted, or to be hungry? I think it was so Jesus could be fully aware of how we feel. I also think this scripture is important because Jesus is our example of how to overcome temptation. No matter what the devil tempted Him with He responded with God's Word from the Bible. The devil knew Jesus was fully God and fully man, so he appealed to His human side. He knew Jesus was hungry so he TEMPTED Him with : ³*And the tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread."* ⁴*But he answered, "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.'"* The devil was appealing to the human weakness of being hungry. When that failed, he tried the human weakness of importance and pride. ⁵*Then the devil took him to the holy city, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple,* ⁶*and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge of you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'"* ⁷*Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God.'"* Finally, the devil tried one last trick, the human thirst for power. ⁸*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them;* ⁹*and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me."* ¹⁰*Then Jesus said to him, "Begone, Satan! for it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.'"* The most comforting part of this scripture is the following sentence: ¹¹*Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and ministered to him.* We are fully human and the temptations we face are many and often. Our example in Christ Jesus should be to utilize the power of God, though His Word, and cause the devil to flee from us. I do, as often as I can.

Merciful and Loving God, We ask for Your protection and care in this evil and sinful world. Help us to remember we only have to call on Your Word, in the name of Jesus, to keep us from being tempted. Amen

Day 18

John 20: 11-15 NLT

Mary was standing outside the tomb crying and as she wept, she stooped and looked in. She saw two white-robed angels, one sitting at the head and the other at the foot of the place where the body of Jesus had been lying. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" the angels asked her. "Because they have taken away my Lord," she replied, "and I don't know where they have put him." She turned to leave and saw someone standing there. It was Jesus, but she didn't recognize him. "Dear woman, why are you crying?" Jesus asked her. "Who are you looking for?" She thought he was the gardener. "Sir," she said, "if you have taken him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will go and get him."

In the Garden

Mother: "Time to help with the dishes".

Little girl: "Do I have to"?

Mother: "Yes, come on, we can sing together".

Little girl: "Okay. Let's sing the garden song".

*I come to the garden alone, While the dew is still on the roses.
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear The Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me, And He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.*

This very well-known gospel song was written by an American songwriter, C. Austin Miles (1868-1946), a former pharmacist who served as editor and manager at Hall-Mack publishers for 37 years. This song reflects upon Mary Magdalene's witness about the resurrection of Jesus at The Garden Tomb. This hymn is beloved by many and has been sung in churches for many years. It is especially dear to my heart because I learned to sing all three verses while doing dishes with my mother or while we were driving through the countryside. In my continuing journey of faith, I know every day that I need a "garden" — a place of quiet where I can talk to our Heavenly Father. We are surrounded with so much noise I wonder how He hears any prayers. Sometimes my "garden" is simply singing our beautiful choir music, reading the scriptures, walking in nature, or sitting on the screened porch overlooking a wee flower garden. Do you have a "garden" — a quiet time with our Lord Jesus? I hope you do.

Dear Lord Jesus: Thank you for the quiet times in the "garden" and all of our conversations and the joy you have given me. Thank you for prayers answered and prayers being considered. Thank you that I am your own and we will continue to walk and talk together on our journey. Amen

Day 19

Genesis 3:9 (NKJV)

Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?"

Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend into heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the morning, And dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, Even there Your hand shall lead me, And Your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," Even the night shall be light about me; Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, But the night shines as the day; The darkness and the light are both alike to You. Psalm 139:7-12 (NKJV)

Where are you?

The first question God asks in the Bible may seem a bit strange. We might think God would ask, "What have you done?" since Adam had disobeyed God's instruction not to eat from the tree in the middle of the garden. But the question God asks is "Where are you?"—and, of course, God knows exactly where Adam and Eve are. God's question makes clear to us that we cannot hide from him (*Psalm 139:7-12*), that we belong in his presence, that he made us to walk with him. But the guilt of our sin pushes us to try to hide. We try to cover up or run away, not wanting to face up to what we've done. The time of Lent, the forty days before Easter, gives us an excellent opportunity to focus on the "where" of God's question: our walk with God. The Bible uses the word "way" for the first time in Genesis 3:24, saying that the "way" back to the garden was blocked by an angel with a sword. But God loved the world so much that he provided the way back to him, and to full life again, through Jesus Christ, who said: *"I am the way and the truth and the life."*

Walking with the Lord means constantly answering the question "Where are you?" and emerging from our hiding places—that we may see ourselves in the light of God's grace. It's a good question to ask at the beginning of each day this week.

Have your own way with me, Lord, and keep my feet on the path that leads to eternal life. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Day 20

Romans 38-39 (NIV)

"For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord".

It Is Finished!

In Matthew 27:50 he wrote *"And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit."*(NIV)

It is finished! There is no more! How can we pray when our Lord and Savior is gone, no longer here to lead us and save us? But, the story continues much beyond giving up His spirit. The mother of Jesus did not know. The disciples did not know, the people did not know. 2000 years later, we, the people of God, *know* that our Lord and Savior lived, even through that horrible sequence of events leading to his earthly death. It is not finished. There is more. If they, His people, had only known. In Job 42:3, we read, *"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? 'Therefore, I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.'" (NSRV)* What had Jesus been preaching all these years. What acts of faith and healing had he been showing. He told them, yet they did not comprehend. Jesus the Christ is man. Jesus the Christ is from God. Jesus Christ *is* God. How wonderful is the continuation of "The Story". You and I have hindsight. We take joy in singing "Up from the grave He arose", "Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia"! "Easter people raise your voices." The blessing of it all is we can sing twelve months of the calendar. When you sing our worship hymns and songs this coming Sunday, I challenge you to raise the rafters and let your voices be heard, Praise God!

Dear God, thank you for your greatness. It grieves me that I am a sinner. The sacrifice of your son Jesus Christ on the cross gives me hope for the future. We pray that Your unbounded love for all mankind will prevail as we ask for strength to fight oppression, and forgiveness of the wrongful acts that we commit. Help us to love our neighbor, lead others to You, and learn with our hearts as well as our eyes. It is in the name of Jesus Christ that we offer this prayer. Amen.

Day 21

Leviticus 25: 8-11

"In addition, you must count off seven Sabbath years, seven sets of seven years, adding up to forty-nine years in all. Then on the Day of Atonement in the fiftieth year, blow the ram's horn loud and long throughout the land. Set this year apart as holy, a time to proclaim freedom throughout the land for all who live there. It will be a jubilee year for you, when each of you may return to the land that belonged to your ancestors and return to your own clan. This fiftieth year will be a jubilee for you. During that year you must not plant your fields or store away any of the crops that grow on their own, and don't gather the grapes from your unpruned vines.

Trust Above All Else.

When January came around this year it seemed natural to simply start again with a Bible reading plan. Using The Bible Recap format last year solidified the habit of reading God's word each day for me. So, as I write this, I am reading Leviticus, reading about all of the laws and sacrifices. There have been some bright spots, though. The year of jubilee sounds like it would have been amazing, every fifty years an entire year when everything and everyone rests and things are restored to their starting points. Like a reset. But then for me, the practical part of my brain kicks in. Wait, the jubilee comes the year after the sabbath year. God's people don't plant any crops during the sabbath year OR during the year of jubilee. Two whole years without meal planning plus a third planting season to wait for the harvest, that would require an incredible amount of faith in the One who is asking you to do this. And God, who is always faithful, says in verse 21, *"Be assured that I will send my blessing for you in the sixth year, so the land will produce a crop large enough for three years."* When God asks us to do something that seems hard or scary or unpractical, He always makes a way for us to have what we need. He is our Provider and worthy of our trust.

Provider God, you show us in Your Word that you give us all that we need over and over again. Help me to trust in that daily. In the name of the One who gave it all, Amen.

Day 22

Genesis 4: 3-4

When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. Abel also brought a gift - the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock.

Giving Our Best.

What is most dear to us? The first year I really understood what Lent was all about was a year I didn't really give something up. I had tried giving up candy, even coffee but always felt like it was simply an accountability project, not something that brought me closer to God. Then one year I decided that I would only listen to praise music during Lent. I turned to a radio station in my car and left it there. When I would go for a run, it was TobyMac, Citizen Way and MercyMe in my ears. And for the first time I understood that Lent is not about giving something up simply to give something up, or to make us suffer. It is about replacing something that keeps us FROM God with something that will draw us NEAR to God. Abel understood that the One who created us, formed us and loves us beyond measure deserves the best of whatever we have. Cain simply thought he needed to give something. Even though Lent has begun, consider this: what are you doing in this season to draw near to the One who gave His best for you?

Oh, merciful God, I long to be near to you and so many times allow the things of this world to get in the way. Clear those things from my mind and my heart and fill them with your love and grace. In Jesus' name I pray, Amen.

Day 23

Matthew 6:31-34

Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

Seek God First and He Will Provide

As a husband and father of two (with one on the way) sometimes I find myself stressed about the unknowns. How will we pay for the kids' college? Is my job stable enough to pay for my mortgage? How will we afford unknown things like doctor bills? We all could go mad thinking about the unknowns. These worries can consume us to the point that we aren't living in true freedom that we have through Jesus Christ who died for our sins. Lent gives us the opportunity to focus on spiritual renewal and to let go of worldly concerns. We need to focus on trusting God's plan for us and seek him first. Jesus has a simple message for us: as Children of God, we need not doubt, fear, or worry. Focus on today, seek God first, and he will provide for us.

Dear God, help us to trust in you. Help us to not worry, fear, or be anxious and realize that you love us and are in control. Help us to realize that you have the power to provide for all our needs.

Day 24

1 Kings 19:3-4, 8-9

“Elijah was afraid, and he ran for his life. He went to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and he left his servant there. But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness. There he sat down under a broom tree, where he prayed that he would die. He said, “I’ve had enough, Lord. Take my life, for I am no better than my fathers.” “So he got up and ate and drank. Then, with the strength gained from that food, he walked for forty days and forty nights to Horeb, the mountain of God. He came to a cave and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord suddenly came to him, saying, “Why are you here, Elijah?”

“Why Are You Here?”

Why do so many Bible heroes go to the wilderness? Abram meets God in Genesis 12, in the wilderness, as does Moses in Exodus 3. David flees to the wilderness in 1 Samuel. Matthew 3 tells of John the Baptizer’s ministry in the wilderness, which is immediately followed in Matthew 4 by Jesus’ trials, in the wilderness. 1 Kings 17 tells of Elijah, afraid for his life, weak, frightened, and praying that he would die, fleeing into the wilderness. God meets all of the above, in the wilderness. God meets them at their lowest time, along with their fears, doubts, confusions, hurt, anger, and pain. Likewise, God meets us in the deepest, darkness deserts of our souls and asks us, “*why are you here*”? Maybe we, like Elijah, have done all we could to live a Godly life and bring others to Him, and we are still broken, dismayed, and ready to give up. Maybe we need to realize we are not the answer to this world, God is. And hopefully, when we stand in our “wilderness moment”, we meet God, feel his love and accept his promise of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord. Scripture tells us the wilderness is a place of solitude, confession, repentance, and forgiveness. So, let us go to the wilderness this Lenten season. And, when God asks “why are you here?” our response is to humbly ask Him to create in us clean hearts and renewed spirits.

God of the wilderness, pour out your spirit on those that spend time seeking you in the wilderness. Meet us all right where we are, Father, and help us to draw closer to you this Lenten season. Amen.

Day 25

2nd Corinthians 8:9

For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

Grace

Grace is Jesus Christ giving up all He had as God and coming here to be with his people who mistreated Him so. Do you understand the magnitude of his Love for us? Try to imagine the agony He suffered on the cross. He was arrested, all of His closest friends deserted Him, then His people shouted, "Crucify Him"! Just this much alone would have hurt you and me. Then to be beaten with whips and nailed to a cross to die. All because of His great Love for you. He wants you to have these riches and wealth which is freedom from sin. He became poor so you could become rich. Can you accept this gift? Because without God's grace, you are lost and empty.

Dear Lord, thank you for the free gift of salvation brought to me by the work of Jesus Christ's crucifixion, death, and resurrection. May I always appreciate what you have done for me and may I live out that same love for those around me. In the name of the One who gave his life for me. Amen

Day 26

Luke 6: 36-37

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven.”

To Become Compassionate

To become compassionate, we must first become a new and different person. We are required to give up our doubts, fears and selfish ways. When Jesus Christ enters us with great love and mercy it allows us to feel true compassion. We should pass it on. Go to those who are broken and hurting. In comforting them you'll be surprised the comfort you will feel. Instead of being so quick to judge and condemn someone, for you may not know what they have been through, try praising. See how good it feels. Forgiving is sometimes hard to do but try to remember that holding a grudge is in a way selfish. Learning all these ways are good, and best of all, the Lord will do the same for you.

Lord, thank you for your mercy toward me. Your love extended to me is so very undeserving, but you forgave me and now call me your child. Help me to have the heart of the Father to forgive and extend mercy to those I am prone to judge harshly and condemn out of my own self-righteousness. Amen.

Day 27

John 3:16

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

God Gave His Only Son because he loved the world!

Our children have grown to become adults. They are beginning to live their lives independent of our influence. That was our aim in helping to raise them. They indeed still occupy a great part of our thoughts. We have gladly sacrificed to provide for their needs and wants. We certainly would not hesitate to sacrifice all we have, yes, including our lives to see their lives continue. The dilemma would arise if we had to sacrifice one of our children's lives. While contemplating the chosen verse and the consequences of it, we would have difficulty in making, and indeed would not be able to make such a great sacrifice. The beginnings of understanding of this sacrifice by God comes out at the very thought of sacrificing a child of our own. What a remarkably awesome decision. What an even more remarkable act. Look at what it has meant for all of us.

Wonderful God, it is difficult to comprehend what it must have been like to see your Son suffer on the cross for my sin. Thank you for your tenacious love for me that you were willing to watch your Son carry our sins to the cross. And thank you also that you resurrected your Son to demonstrate power over sin and death. Amen

Day 28

Psalm 8:1

“Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.”

Our Sovereign Lord, “Who are you Lord?”

When we look at God’s creation we stand in awe and ask “Who are you Lord?”, that you have created such beauty and are still creating. Thankfully, you have removed the blinders from our eyes and now we are beginning to see you in all things.

We see you in the faces of our children, when we first hold them. We see you in their laughter and their tears. And we continue to see you in them as they grow.

When we see your ocean, we feel your presence so strongly there. We delight in listening to the seagulls chanting their songs; to hear the water slapping the sides of the boat; to know that below the boat lies a magnificent world that is alive and full of who you are; to watch the sunset with its brilliant colors striking the evening sky; to have the light of the moon and stars guiding our ocean journey back home; to realize that you have gifted human beings with the works of your hands.

You are love, Lord. You are the rhythm that flows through life and as we continue to grow, we keep asking: “Who are you Lord?” Let us see more of you.

Day 29

Psalm 139:1-3; 7-10

“You have searched me, Lord, and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways... Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there. If I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.”

Settled in His Presence

The Lenten season requires that we shed any notion of hiding, any fear of being found out, and bare our soul to Christ so that we may be renewed and restored, cloaked in His infinite grace and washed pure, emerging as a new creation. Psalm 139 is a beautiful reminder that being intimately known and seen by God isn't something to be ashamed of, that it's not something we should deny or diminish, but something that is truly awe-inspiring, humbling, and wonderful. We have a Creator who “created our innermost being, knit together in our mother's womb” (139: 13) and cares so much about us that he searches our thoughts, discerns our comings and goings, and guides our very ways, knowing fully well our shortcomings and sins, and accepting us as we are, day in and day out. Our spouses, our children, our parents, and our friends may know us, but how worthy of praise is it that we are completely and truly known by only one person: God. For forty days, we are challenged to reflect on the majesty, splendor, and wonder that is our Savior and the ultimate sacrifice he gave for the atonement of our sins. For forty days, we are challenged to get to know Him better, and to remember how well he knows us. For forty days, we are challenged to let our walls down, and let our Savior in. And for all the days after, no matter if we are up in the heavens or down in the depths, how wonderful would it be if we allowed Him to stay?

Lord, help us to be like David and worship and cherish Your thoughts of us. Help us to sing out in praise, awe, and wonder that You created us, that You know us, and that You love us so much you sent Your one and only Son to die for our sins so that we may live in eternity with You. This knowledge truly is “too lofty for us to attain” (139:6), but how comforting to know we don't need all the answers, we just need You. Lord, help us to bare our hearts, shed our shame, and walk in Your love and light, not only for the next 40 days, but for all the days to come. Amen.

Day 30

Matthew 4:4

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

Luke 4:1

“Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness”

Led By the Spirit

Do you wonder why the Holy Spirit, soon after descending upon Jesus after his baptism in the River Jordan, would lead him into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil himself?? The wilderness narrative in Mark even says the Spirit “drove” Jesus into the wilderness. Did the Spirit push an unwilling Jesus into a showdown with the Prince of Darkness? Hardly. As one commentator puts it, “The spirit led Jesus to the wilderness, through the wilderness, and out of the wilderness.” Jesus is obedient to God and the Spirit, and through the power of the Spirit, easily defeats the devil with the ultimate weapon, God’s eternal, powerful word. Jesus emerges in the power of the Spirit, ready to begin his ministry and fulfill his Messianic mission. Mountaintops exist only if there are valleys below. As Christians, trials and temptations are inevitable, especially when we are weak, hungry, and in a dark place. Through baptism by water and the Spirit, like Jesus, we can defeat temptation and emerge victorious through God’s truth and grace. God is in the wilderness, too, making us stronger to serve him to the fullest.

Loving God, help us to find victory in our wilderness, emerging triumphant and empowered to fulfill your calling for us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Day 31

Hebrews 12:1-3

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endures such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

Run the Race

In a world filled with so much despair, despondency, and destruction, it is easy to see why we often lose heart. It is easy for our eyes to fixate on earthly things and lose sight of what truly matters. It is easy to see how we get entangled in sin, emotionally hindered by doubt and anger and shame. But what a beautiful reminder it is that we are not alone. Yes, things in this world are hard, and overcoming them is hard, but God asks us to turn our eyes, and our hearts, to the One who overcame it all and who is with us through it all: Jesus. The Lenten season is a time just for this. When we focus on the sins of the world, and the sin within our own lives, it feels unbearable. But Jesus took that burden from us when he died on the cross for our iniquities, so we are able to throw off the heavy hindrances and the entrapments that confine us and run forward to the freedom of eternity that’s been promised with Him. We were never promised a life of comfort, ease, or peace. We were never promised a life void of obstacles, roadblocks, or detours. We were never promised a life of abundance, security, or perfection. But we have been promised of a God whose comfort, ease, and peace endure forever. Who is with us through the obstacles, roadblocks, and detours. Who provides us a life after death that is abundant, secure, and perfect. Therefore, how could we grow weary or faint of heart knowing the Prince of Peace has us in his hands?

Lord, when we stumble, as we inevitably will, help us to lift our eyes to you, “the pioneer and perfecter of faith.” During Lent and all the days after, we pray that when we feel weighed down by the hindrances and entanglements of the world, we remember what you did for us on the cross. Fill our hearts with joy, knowing that we have a seat with you at the finish line, so we may run with perseverance the race set before us. Amen

Day 32

Matthew 26:56b

“Then all the disciples deserted him and fled”.

He Took On My Guilt

Have you ever felt abandoned? Have you ever been left alone to bear the consequences of a situation for which you were not prepared to answer? One sunny fall afternoon my friends and I decided to go dove hunting on some private land in Oklahoma. One of the friends said it was okay to hunt on the land because he knew the guy who owned the land. We were all separated in the field in which we were hunting. A pick-up came around the bend to where I was standing. It was the owner of the land. He asked me who gave me permission to be on his land and I told him my friend who he knew. He drove back around the corner and turned around and came back and said that there wasn't anyone there. The realization began to set in that I was deserted by my friends! My friends had seen the truck coming and ran and hid. I was left alone to have to deal with the situation that made me appear to be a liar. Can you imagine Jesus watching all the disciples run away as he is being arrested? We know this moment begins the events that will lead Jesus to the cross. I had to bear the consequences of my behavior that day standing in the field hunting without valid permission. Jesus, on the other hand, was innocent and went to the cross for our sins. Alone, he took on the consequences of our sinfulness. Jesus went to the cross that we might not have to answer for our transgressions.

What a privilege, wonderful Savior, that you were willing to stand in for me when I deserved the punishment for my sin. Thank you for your willingness to be obedient to the Father's will to be the sacrifice for my sin that I might go free. In your name we pray. Amen.

Day 33

Matthew 4:11

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

Comfort

This scripture always gives me comfort. It follows the 40 days of Jesus trials and temptations in the wilderness. Even Jesus needed help in one of the trials of His earthly life. It doesn't say that He asked for help, or prayed for help. God just sent the angels to comfort Him. In different translations the angels "took care of Him", "waited on Him", or "came to help Him". I like the RSV translation of "ministered to Him". That's what we do as Christians when we help or comfort someone, we minister to them. It's a comfort to know that we don't have to ask or pray for help because God knows our needs and will answer them. Of course, He does want us to pray to Him and find answers in His Word. That's how we communicate with God. The 40 days of lent are for fasting, prayer and repentance as a way to connect deeper with God. Instead of "giving up something" for lent we should seek out those who need our comfort and minister to them in the name of our Lord and Savior, our Comforter, Jesus Christ.

Holy and Loving Father, You are our Comforter and a very present help in times of trouble. We ask to feel Your comforting presence in our lives and the lives of all who follow You. Help us to reach out to others in need and show them Your love this Lenten season and always. Amen

Day 34

Luke 5:4-11

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught so many fish that their nets began to break. So, they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man!" For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men." So, they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

What if we put aside the tired old excuses and instead said "Yes"?

In this passage Luke tells of Jesus preaching to the multitudes from a boat. He tells Simon where to go and put down his nets. Simon tells Jesus they had worked all night without success but did as Jesus instructed. Soon the nets were bulging with fish. Jesus tells them not to fear and that soon they would be fishing for men! This passage tells us so much about the nature of Jesus and the kind of relationship He wants with us. He wants to be in ministry with us. He called disciples to work with Him so that they not only learned from Him, but from each other. He did not act alone and does not expect us to do it alone. We are called to be part of a faith community: to study, worship, work, evangelize and pray with and for each other. The passage also reminds us that Jesus meets us where we are and enables us to use our skills and gifts for ministry. Jesus uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary! Here, Jesus calls fisherman to be His disciples. He uses the boat, net and even the fish to demonstrate the glory and power of God. Whatever gifts we have each been given, they are sufficient for ministry when we work with Jesus. We also see in the passage that Jesus calls them to take a risk. Being a disciple is not always easy! Simon must first make the decision to follow Jesus' instructions, go into the deep water and experience the fear of being in a sinking boat before his eyes are opened. We too, are called to trust Jesus. And sometimes take a step "into deep water" before Jesus reveals His objective. Perhaps we are being called to participate in one the ministries at Central. What if Simon had said no to Jesus? What if the other disciples declined the invitation to follow Him? How many times have we said "No" to Jesus? Do we use excuses such as time, family, commitments, prior plans and "others will do it" to avoid using our gifts? How is Jesus calling us and to do what? What if we put aside the tired old excuses and instead said "Yes"?

Dear Lord, when I am afraid to trust you, please be patient with me and help me to learn to trust you. When I am hesitant to follow, please give me the strength to step out in faith and not make excuses but instead say, "yes." Amen.

Day 35

1st Corinthians 1:22-23

“Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles.”

The Passion of the Christ

Lent is a good time to think about some of the things that we generally avoid. One is the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus the Christ. The temptation is to move too quickly to the resurrection, and to forget or bypass with little thought the historical fact that the man, Jesus, went to the cross. Our faith is diminished when we do this. We can forget that our sin is among that which nailed him to the tree. We can forget that Jesus calls us not only to the power of the resurrection, but to the power of the cross. This is a season for remembering, confession, and a real turning to God. Only then will we know the power of Easter. I will never forget seeing in a public theater together with many other church members, Mel Gibson’s movie “The Passion of the Christ”. The horrendous torture, beatings and suffering assaulted on Jesus before and through his death, was so heart wrenchingly emotional that it was difficult to even talk after departing from the theater. And to think that he went through it all for me and you, and to erase our sins. Such a gift from God is so wonderful as to be almost unfathomable, but he gave it freely to us.

Dear Lord, the thought of Jesus dying on the cross in such a horrible way makes me sad to even think about such pain and agony. But I know it was necessary to make atonement for my sin. Therefore, I thank you that Jesus was willing to suffer and die for me and purchase my pardon that I might be free from the punishment of my own sin. Through Jesus Christ my Lord I pray, Amen.

Day 36

Romans 6: 10-11

“The death He died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives for God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

Consider yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus

We cannot help but think about the meaning of suffering when we look at the cross. Why did Jesus have to go to the cross? Why is the suffering so necessary? One theologian offered this thought: “The glory of God does not consist of human suffering...the glory of God consists of human life and happiness...Christ died that we might know that not everything is permitted.” In his death we are compelled to look at what our sin is like.

If suffering is not God’s will for us, the cross is a radical call to turn away from anything and everything that we do that harms other people or us. We are called to turn from sin and live toward God. Why? Look into the face of the one who was crucified and know that Jesus is there because of our rebellion and sin. The suffering Christ teaches us that sin cost him his life. The resurrection teaches us to live in victory through Christ.

Dear Jesus, May I always look upon the cross as a reminder of the cost for my sin. But, also, may I remember that through your death and resurrection, I am alive with You to live victoriously over sin. May I always live in the shadow of the cross rejoicing that you gave me life by giving up your life. Amen.

Day 37

Luke 24:1-5

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead.””

An Incomprehensible Event

A dynamic that is present in all the resurrection stories is this: everyone is convinced that Jesus is dead. The disciples are in hiding. The women go to the tomb to anoint the body. They are in despair and grief. He is dead. And at the first encounter with the fact of the resurrection there is terror, fear, confusion. The resurrection is incomprehensible. It is beyond what can be conceived. The witnesses are awestruck. Slowly its reality begins to sink in and slowly the power and joy of it become theirs. This incomprehensible event is at the center of our faith. He is risen. He is not to be found among the dead. As Thomas Mintou has written. “This resurrection is not a doctrine to be argued about, it is not a “thing” to be proved. It is the power and action of God at work in our history and our lives. We are resurrection people who are to know the living power of the resurrected Christ in our midst as community and in our hearts as the children of God.” Our hope is not in a collection of stories or an ethic that will make us better people. Our hope is in the Risen Lord, the one who was crucified, God has raised up. He is our Lord. We are His. He is risen.

Thank you, most holy God, for the resurrection of Jesus! As difficult as it was for the disciples to believe, it is true! He is risen indeed! Praise God that we serve a risen Savior! Amen

Day 38

Mathew 27: 30-37

“They spit on him and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. As they were going out, they met a man from Cyrene, named Simon, and they forced him to carry the cross. They came to a place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). There they offered Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall; but upon tasting it, he refused to drink it. When they had crucified him, they divided up his clothes by casting lots. And sitting down, they kept watch over him there. Above his head they placed the written charge against him: ‘THIS IS JESUS, THE KING OF THE JEWS’.”

How blind we are to the suffering Christ?

Skull Hill, today, stands above a very noisy bus parking lot, outside a bustling gate into the Old City of Jerusalem. So much like the hustle and bustle of that day – people yelling at each other; the anger and hatred go on. *“Father forgive them”*. How blind we are to the suffering Christ. *“I thirst”* as long as we are first in line and get our due. We ignore the Gift. We laugh at Him hanging there; bleeding; we spit on Him. Every time we ignore or laugh at the pain we inflict on life—be it plant, human, earth, animal— we spit again. How opposite the tomb: embraced by the earth, in a quiet garden? Dark and silent except for the birds and insects singing, leaves and grasses rustling. Nature respects Him. He left the hate behind and absorbed the seeming dark of death. Nature understands and celebrates, sharing new life—flowers and nests. He is alive!

Generous God, help us to recognize your gift in the suffering of all forms of life. Help us to respect and celebrate Your life. Amen.

Day 39

Matthew 26: 56, 59

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

There In the Garden

For those of us who read these scriptures now we know how the story unfolds and ends. But, in that moment, in the garden, I don't imagine even Jesus knew all the details of what was about to happen to him. Certainly, the disciples did not. I know that Jesus knew he was heading toward death and probably knew He was to be hanged on a cross, but did He know all the details leading to His death? I raise the question here because I think it adds significance to the agony of the prayer Jesus prayed in the garden to His Father. There is something about the uncertainty of the future that can leave us with extra dread and fear. I know Jesus knew the outcome but the journey to the cross wasn't an easy one either. The whole account is filled with suffering and shame. I am thankful that we have an account of the garden of Gethsemane. It lets me in on the fact that Jesus indeed suffered greatly! His God-ness didn't spare him from the pain of his humanness. He greatly suffered for you and me! His agony in the garden to comply with the Father's will for him to suffer in death is our privilege to be in a restored relationship with our Creator!

Lord, thank you for giving your life for me. I see the agony you went through to get to the place to do the will of your Father. What amazing love, you have shown me by being obedient to die on the cross for my redemption. Thank you! Amen

Day 40

Psalm 25: 4-5

“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my savior and my hope is in you all day long.”

Meditating on the Psalms

Lent is a season of reflection, prayer, remembrance, repentance, sometimes sacrificing - acts of fasting, giving up or doing without something. It can also include the practice of adding something new to your life such as community service and/or volunteering as part of Lent. Lent is a time for a spirit and a soul lift. During moments of reflection, when all is quiet and still, when a person can fully engage with their inner thoughts, emotions are at their peak. We are intense and focused. Psalms, has been quoted by John Calvin as *“an anatomy of all parts of the soul.”* Psalms is a book of expressed emotions – grief, joy, hatred, compassion, praise, thanksgiving, doubt, hope, love and more. Meditating on the Psalms is a powerful way to engage in prayer through Lent, a season when Christians seek to foster a deeper spiritual connection. Key points about meditating on Psalms during Lent – 1) Reflect on our sin and seek forgiveness. In Psalm 51 David is grieving his transgressions and openly pleads for God’s mercy. In Psalm 32 we are assured our sins are forgiven and do not count against us. 2) Connect with your emotions and express your praise for Christ. Psalm 103 David rejoices and gives praise to the Lord *“all my inmost being, praise his holy name.”* In the NIV version, the word Praise is used 357 times indicating the value of praise in our daily lives. 3) Prayer – In the first books of the Bible we read about the need and commands for prayer. Psalms is filled with examples of prayer. Psalm 116:1-2 *“I love the Lord, for He heard my voice; He heard my cry for mercy”* an example of God hearing our prayers. During this year’s Lenten season, include the practice of meditating on the Psalms. Prayerfully seek for God to show you, guide you and teach you, His ways.

Dear Jesus, we offer you praise and worship and know you are holy. We pray for our hearts to be filled with your wisdom as we seek to learn more about you and share your love. Please forgive us of our transgressions, strengthen us to resist temptations, and provide us guidance as we witness to others to build the body of Christ. We enter this Lenten season renewed, refreshed, and ready for your work through the power of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

I want to thank all the members of our congregation who contributed devotions to our 40 Days of Lent Devotional. As I read through so many of the stories, I sensed a deep connection each of you have to your faith in Christ.

Each devotion is filled with inspiring and thoughtful words to lead our Central family in their daily devotional throughout the Lenten season. The scriptures, stories, and prayers will serve as a fresh reminder of God's love and Jesus' sacrifice for us.

I hope you, the reader, find in each of these devotions meaningful insights that inspire your walk with Christ. As you follow along each day during the Lent season, remember you are taking a journey that leads to our celebration on Easter of the empty tomb. The empty tomb is where we find hope in Christ's death and resurrection that we too shall triumph over this world's troubles and sorrows.

To everyone that made this devotional possible, I say a big thank you! Without each of you taking time, effort, and prayer to develop these devotionals, this project would not have happened. Also, a big thank you to Angel Shaw who compiled and edited all the devotions. She worked diligently with me to make this devotional to our church families by the beginning of the Lent season.

Blessings,

Kerry Turnbow, Pastor of Congregational Care

Notes/Prayers

Services During Lent

Lent Begins

Ash Wednesday - March 5th, 6PM, Sanctuary

Community Easter Egg Hunt - Saturday
April 12th, 2-4PM

Palm Sunday - April 13th
(8:15 & Processional at 10:20 & 10:30)

Maundy Thursday - April 17th,
6:30PM, Chapel

Tenebrae Service - Friday April 18th,
6:30PM, Sanctuary

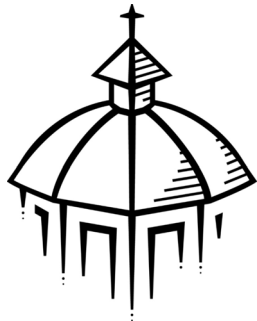
The Great Easter Vigil - Saturday April 19th,
8PM Chapel

Lent Ends

Easter Services Sunday April 20th
8:15-9:15 AM Traditional, Chapel
9:00-10:00 AM Contemporary, Sanctuary
11:00AM-12:00PM Traditional, Chapel

Riding at Mt. Harbour

The Journey Continues.....



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