

seeking:
honest questions
for deeper faith



ASHLAND PLACE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
HOLY LENT 2026

Introduction

Lent comes to us gently. It invites us to slow down, to breathe more deeply, and to let go of the need to have everything figured out. It is a season that welcomes our questions, our hopes, our prayers and even those places in our lives that feel unfinished. Rather than asking us for certainty, Lent invites us to turn toward God just as we are: open-handed, honest-hearted, and trusting that grace meets us here...especially here.

In this season, we are seeking many things. We are seeking clarity and connection, wonder and justice, balance and belonging. We are seeking our calling, the sacred, and what it means to live as disciples of Jesus Christ in the midst of ordinary, busy, and complicated lives. And even as we seek, we trust that God is already at work – seeking us, shaping us, and meeting us in ways we may not yet recognize.

These devotionals are gifts offered by forty faithful hearts who have shared not only their words, but their wonder, their questions, and their faith. For them and for their witness, we are indescribably grateful! Ashland Place United Methodist Church is richly blessed by a community willing to listen to one another, learn from one another, and walk side by side in faith. Each reflection is an act of generosity, a way of saying that you are not alone in your seeking.

We hope this devotional will help you unpack some of your big questions in ways that are honest and faithful. We encourage you to journey through these weekly readings and reflections at your own pace, returning often to prayer and curiosity. As you do, consider asking yourself: *What am I seeking? What is God seeking?*

As we journey through Lent together, may these reflections draw us closer to God and to one another. May we discover grace in the listening, courage in the companionship, and hope in the simple truth that we do not seek alone. May we discover that God meets us not only in our individual searching, but in the sacred gift of doing life together.

Together we seek,
Rev. Jennifer Porto

Wednesday, February 18, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 51:1-17

Bestowal

"Give, and it will be given to you..." Luke 6:38

Even marked by ash. Even fragile. Even mortal. God chooses us.

I was inspired to write this devotional after reading a novel my dear friend encouraged me to pick up, *Theo of Golden* by Allen Levi.

I had just finished the book when, on January the 18th, as we prepared to honor Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Pastor Darren referenced in his sermon something Dr. King once said: "Anyone can be great, because anyone can serve." He also shared a blessing attributed to Saint Teresa of Avila, written many centuries ago: "Christ has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which He looks for compassion in the world. Yours are the feet for which He goes about doing good. Yours are the hands to which He is to bless others now. Are you looking for him to send someone else?"

Jesus spoke these words in Matthew 25:35-40. Through *Theo of Golden*, Jesus spoke to my heart. I encourage you not only to read it but also to bestow it to a friend.

Each day, we are touched by simple acts of grace – kind words spoken, a thoughtful gesture, or even a brief glance from a friend or a stranger we meet along the way. The next time you greet someone, look into their eyes, for that is where their soul is revealed.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, you touch me daily in countless ways. I am deeply grateful for the life You have given me. Help me to recognize each gift You place before me and to share it freely with others. Guide me to be Your eyes, Your hands, and Your feet in my daily life. Amen.

Reflection: How might you live with a broken spirit and a humbled heart? If you have read *Theo of Golden*, what did you think?

Tomi Sue Mayer

Thursday, February 19, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 51; Jonah 3:1-10; Romans 1:1-7

Good News of Forgiveness

I remember as a child in Sunday School learning about Jonah in the belly of the whale. I don't think I learned much about Jonah other than his "running from God," surviving three days and nights inside the whale, and being vomited up on the seashore. Now I know the Ninevites were called "Lords of Torture" for good reason. Did you know the Ninevites removed the eyes, hands, feet, ears, and noses of their prisoners? I can understand why Jonah was reluctant to go preach to them. Nevertheless, these people did hear God's call to repentance. They stopped, tore their clothes, rubbed their faces with ash, and declared a fast. Then, "When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it" (Jonah 3:10). God has mercy on even the most wicked!

This is good news for us, because we are all more like the Ninevites than we are like God. We must recognize that repentance is not about what we can do but about what God has already done. His mercy is not a matter of merit; it is a free gift. Through His Son, Jesus Christ, we have direct access to God's abundant grace and mercy. "Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy, blot out my transgressions" (Psalm 51:1). Thanks be to God for His profound forgiveness!

It is because of this forgiveness that we are called to a life of obedience. "Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the gentiles for the sake of his name, including you who are called to belong to Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:5-6). We can all rest easy. We are called by God to receive grace; we belong to Him.

How often do we think we are too far gone? We must remember on our worst day. Yes, even then, Christ died for us. His forgiveness is extraordinary to those who believe in him.

Prayer from Psalm 51:10-12:

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

Amen.

Alicia Luttrell

Friday, February 20, 2026

Scripture: Jonah 4:1-11

Jonah is angry! He is so angry at God's compassion for Nineveh that he wishes to die! God asks him if he has any right to be angry.

In response, Jonah goes outside the city, builds himself a shelter, and waits to see what will happen - still hoping for the destruction of the city of Nineveh. God provides a plant for shade, then sends a worm to kill it. Jonah again expresses his will to die.

God points out that Jonah is more concerned about the plant and his own comfort than he is about the 120,000 people and cattle living in the city. Do we ever wish the worst for our enemies and become angry or disappointed when they are treated with mercy?

Our God's love is universal; it is not selective. In Ezekiel 33:10, it is written, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."

Rather than mirroring God's universal love, Jonah's point of view is expressed in this verse by Jonathan Swift:

We are God's chosen few,

All others will be damned.

There is no place in heaven for you,

We can't have heaven crammed.

Jewish tradition has it that after God said the words found in Jonah 4:11, Jonah fell on his face and prayed for mercy, acknowledging his own shortcomings and God's boundless compassion.

Prayer: Dear Lord, we are so grateful that your love is universal, and not selective, as ours often is. Help us to be more like you – slow to anger and abounding in love for all. In Christ's name, Amen.

Reflection: Do we ever wish the worst for our enemies and become angry or disappointed when they are treated with mercy? How might we reflect God's compassion for all?

Averell Stuart

Saturday, February 21, 2026

Scripture: Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 18:1-7

The kind of fasting God wants, as described in Isaiah 58, is not simply abstaining from food. It is also about pursuing social justice and compassion, such as freeing those who are oppressed, sharing food with the hungry, and giving shelter to the homeless. It's a spiritual practice that shifts our focus from personal piety to outward acts of mercy for the purpose of breaking injustice and serving others – making our spiritual lives manifest in practical, loving actions. Matthew 18's message is about humility, forgiveness, and loving care within our Christian community. It teaches us that persevering in God's kingdom comes from serving others, not seeking power. The emphasis here is on forgiveness and restoring those who stray, much like a shepherd seeking lost sheep. Matthew contrasts worldly ambition with divine values that reflect God's own forgiveness – focusing on how believers should treat each other with humility, seek reconciliation, and forgive generously.

I write about social justice, loving care and humility because this is the resounding message my Methodist father and his ministerial friends preached during the era of civil rights, during the Montgomery Bus Boycott and when Dr. Martin Luther King was leading non-violent protests and preaching to us about seeing the mountaintop. Today we are in a unique position to look at our beloved country's history and our faith and ask how Christ would advise us to move forward in the chaos that is our country today.

I think most people would agree that when we observe the violence being carried out in cities by agents of our own government, we can choose to be the people Isaiah talks about in chapter 58 – faithful servants who focus on serving our fellow man, particularly children, the needy, the poor and the immigrant. Matthew admonishes our need for recognition and tells us to commit acts of kindness with humility, not seeking praise. This can be difficult and can lead to hardships for us, but at the same time, we can rejoice in the knowledge that we are doing God's work.

Theologian Michael Adam Beck says, “the Church's calling in moments like this is to embody Jesus. It is to tell the truth...to protect the vulnerable...to embody a kingdom where no one is disposable and fear does not get the final word.”

May this be our prayer today.

Reflection: What does Beck's quote mean to you? How might we, the Church, embody Jesus today?

Kathy McMaken

Monday, February 23, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 32

A Place to Hide

I'm probably not far off from the truth to say that many of us have memories of playing "Hide and Seek" as kids. It could be played inside or out, but outside was the best! Naturally, you wanted to find the best hiding place...in a thick bush, under the house, in the storage room of an enclosed garage, or up in the treehouse. But after a while, you wanted to be found because of a feeling of isolation and aloneness which began to creep in.

Life and age move us along, and wanting to hide becomes an escape we desperately need. Pressure comes from everything from work, family and health to the daily question of "What's for dinner?". Where will we hide that can give us the peace we need? David has a suggestion for us. Psalm 32:7 (NIV) says, "You are my hiding place; You will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance."

Another favorite Psalm of mine is 143:9. The NIV text is "Rescue me from my enemies, LORD, for I hide myself in you." I have found that there are many enemies which seek me: doubt, worry, fear, anxiety, family and health issues, on and on. But in all these things, God is the constant Helper I am seeking. And I want to hide myself in Him.

Lent is the perfect season in which to diligently seek and hide in Him. During this time, we are to ponder the amazing sacrifice of God to give His only Son and Jesus' obedience to say, "Not My will, but Thine be done."

Prayer: Dear God, please help us during this Lenten Season to spend time quietly seeking You so that we may always hide ourselves in You. Amen.

Reflection: What hiding place are you seeking?

Phebe Lee

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 32

Next to Psalm 51, this has to be one of my favorite Psalms for reflection in Lent. The reason being that it offers a clear and navigable map for the journey. But it is not an easy path.

Blessed are the forgiven? I generally like the sound of that; but not when I consider the fundamental steps that are necessary along the way. We all want to feel like we are “covered” before God. But how do we manage to resist the constant temptation and tendency to try and cover our tracks by ourselves? Some of us even think that we’re good at it! *News flash: you’re not.*

If you listen closely during the worship service, you can almost hear an internal cringe sweep across the congregation during the prayer of confession. *What do you mean we have failed to be an obedient church? Not done your will? Not followed your law? Failed to love our neighbor as ourselves? Seriously, God? How did you know?*

When David says the person is blessed “in whose spirit there is no deceit,” what does he mean (32:2)?

In his little book, *Untamed Prayers* author Chad Bird names the issue well:

“To be sure, an honest, non-deceitful man or woman is a blessing. But in the context of Psalm 32, the ‘no deceit’ being talked about is more than truth-telling in general. Rather, it is being honest about something particular: that you are a sinner, forgiven by God. The blessed one is not the sinless one, but the sin-confessing one. He is the one who says, ‘I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity’ (32:3–5). Who is the deceitful person in Psalm 32? The one who will not confess his sin. The one who is silent in the face of his evil and wrongdoing. The one who will not receive the forgiveness of God. Deceitful people are un-confessing people, for they are living a lie.”

As John will say, *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us* (1 John 1:8–10).

Hear the good news, friend. You do not need to fear being a sinner. Carrying such a burden on our own is enough to make anyone ‘waste away’ from within. Blessed are the sinners who are honest about their sin, said the psalm writer. Blessed are those with honesty, vulnerability, and integrity to say, “I can no longer pretend to cover myself. I will confess my transgressions to the LORD.” That is music to the ears of the forgiving Lord Jesus.

Prayer: Our Father, forgive us our trespasses. Have mercy upon us for the sake of Jesus. Thank you that you already have...and do...and always will. AMEN.

Dr. Darren M. McClellan

Wednesday, February 25, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 32; Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28; Matthew 18:10-14

I recently took a trip to visit my sister and help out after the birth of her second child. It was going to be great. I was all set to do light chores and provide a social outlet while the two parents did the heavy lifting with the kids. Then two days into my visit, my 2-year-old nephew got the flu. Suddenly I was whisking him away to grandparents so he wouldn't get his newborn sister sick and was thrust into full time parenting a child who was NOT happy about Mom and Dad not being around. Although he was safe with his grandparents and I, he didn't feel it and he made those feelings known.

I imagine the Israelites of Exodus felt similar. Sure, God saved them from slavery in Egypt, but they did not feel the love while spending the next 40 years wandering the desert in exile. They too voiced their thoughts on the matter ("we're hungry," "we're thirsty," not to mention the whole golden calf incident). But God never left them, just as he never leaves us. David reminds us in Psalm 32 that God remains close, ready for us to turn and find him; Jesus goes further, using the image of the lost sheep to indicate that God the Shepherd comes after us long before we think to search for Him. God's love is not just abundant, it is persistent and unwavering. This is just as true for those who *feel* lost, as for those who *are* lost.

That doesn't mean we always feel the love. Many have wandered the figurative desert for generations, perhaps even turned away from refuge, raided by predators, and persecuted by the powerful. In these circumstances, I wonder if telling them that "the Shepherd is close" is all that helpful. It certainly didn't help to tell my nephew that he would see his parents in a couple of days when he was healthy again. Instead, I let him cling to me with dirty hands and germ laden breath because ultimately helping him feel safe and loved in that moment was more important to him than the promise that Dad would hold him again soon. I wonder what might happen if we did the same in the world around us. What if instead of telling the lost, the least, and the last to wait and look, we held them while they waited? What if we filled in for Dad until such a time that they could leap into his arms again?

Prayer: I often use music as a catalyst and vehicle for my prayer time. I encourage you to use the below lyrics to experiment with this method.

Whatever happens I will not be afraid // 'cause you are closer than this breath that I take
You calm the storm when I hear You call my name
I still believe that one day I'll see Your face
I have this hope // In the depth of my soul
In the flood or the fire // You're with me and You won't let go.

- Tenth Avenue North, "I Have This Hope"

Reflection: Consider for a moment the lost, the least, and the last in your world. Think of someone you know that exemplifies them. Who do you see? What might it look like to be Aunt/Uncle while they wait for Dad?

Daniel O'Keefe

Thursday, February 26, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 121

Today is my 40th birthday. I would be lying if I said I haven't been dreading this day for a while. There is just something about the threshold to this decade that reminds me that I am really, *really* an adult now. Although I've been married for nearly two decades and am the mother to two tween-agers, it's this milestone that really seems to cement this fact for me. For several years, I feel like I've been prone to look around for an "adult-ier" adult as the model for what to do in times of crisis and a moment for decisions. Now, I'm often forced to oblige the finger-pointing back to myself with this reminder that the responsibility does often belong to me.

Today's verses, however, help quell this anxiety within me. The Psalmist inquires "Where does my help come from?" while peering at mountains. In the Message translation, it ponders, "Does my help come from the mountains?" to which comes the answer to these rhetorical questions —"My help comes from the Lord, the maker of Heaven and Earth." We often get so distracted by the seemingly major moments, impediments, and milestones that we miss the reality that God is the maker of all these things. As the Psalmist reminds us, God's providence remains and guides us, not letting our feet stumble from the inevitable struggles and anxieties in our paths. In the face of uncertain realities and at-times seemingly insurmountable stressors and struggles, God continues to watch over us, the ever-present guide through rough terrain.

Today, in the midst of this Lenten season, may we all rejoice that we do not have to have all the answers or directions or responsibilities. We were never meant to. May we lean in to God's omnipotent sovereignty and rest in this reassurance.

Prayer: God, in the midst of all of our unanswered questions and unfinished to-do lists, we thank You that we do not have to have all of the directions or responsibilities. Help us to trust You and to lean in to Your promise that You will not let our feet stumble from the struggles and anxieties in our paths. In Jesus name, Amen.

Reflection: Is there an area of your life in which you need to be reminded that your help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth?

Tiffany Miller

Friday, February 27, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 121

Do you ever hear a song playing in your head when you read the Scriptures? The words become lyrics to a favorite hymn or anthem, amplifying the meaning of the text in ways that only music can do. For me, Psalm 121 will forever be set to the tune of “I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes” by English composer John Rutter. His sacred choral works are emotional, inspirational, and such a joy to listen to and sing.

Many of the psalms in the Bible were composed as songs designed to encourage believers on their spiritual journeys. Psalm 121 is known as a “Song of Ascent” because it is part of a 15-psalm collection thought to have been sung by Israelites traveling up into the hills of Jerusalem to take part in festival days. I can imagine the weary travelers timing their steps to the rhythm of the music while singing praises to their God.

When my journey feels like an uphill climb, the lyrics of Psalm 121 encourage me to sing the hopeful message of a Lord who neither slumbers nor sleeps, promising strength, shelter, and steadiness along the road of life.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for watching over me on my life’s journey. Give me the strength to keep going, transform my fears into faith, my worries into wonder, my hurts and my pain into healing, and my storms into peaceful waters. Teach my soul to sing your praises now and evermore. Amen.

Reflection: When should I listen and when should I sing?

Cindy Roton

Saturday, February 28, 2026

Scripture: Luke 7:1-10

Jesus had just wrapped up delivering the Sermon on the Plain (*cf.* Matthew 5-7) “to the people who were listening” (Luke 7:1). So, you know what that means, right? There were people who clearly were not listening.

Before he could catch a breath, Jesus is called upon by Jewish elders to heal a servant of a Roman soldier, because he deserved it. “This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and built our synagogue,” according to the elders (Luke 7:4-5). Jesus sets out to respond to their request, but the Centurion quickly sends another group to tell Jesus that he does *not* deserve to have him come under his roof, but his servant would be healed if Jesus would just “say the word.” The Centurion knows how the words of those in authority can make things happen. After all, he had authority over his subordinate soldiers who do what they are told (Luke 7:4-5).

“When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, ‘I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel!’” (Luke 7:9).

Jesus was amazed. It seems to me that we should pause to reflect on the things that amaze Jesus...Jesus was not amazed by the Roman officer’s respect for the Jewish nation or his philanthropic donations that built the synagogue and made him worthy in the eyes of the religious elders. Jesus was not impressed by the Centurion’s humility, which was noble and from the text appears to be genuine. Jesus was not awed by his military stature or effective authority over men.

Jesus was amazed by the officer’s *faith and recognition of the true authority of the Son of God*.

There is only one other time in scripture where we are told that Jesus was amazed. Early in his ministry when he is teaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus is amazed at the lack of faith of his hometown neighbors (Mark 6:1-6). Those Jewish parishioners knew him very well yet questioned and actually took offense to Jesus’s authority. Isn’t this the carpenter and Mary’s son? - they asked. Their unbelief stymied the display of Jesus’s full power and authority (Mark 6:5).

But the outsider Centurion’s great faith ushered in the healing miracle of the servant by Word alone and revealed Jesus’s divine authority.

Prayer: Lord, like the Centurion, we recognize that we do not deserve your grace, but we thank you that you freely offer it to us. Forgive us when we miss or question your authority in our lives. Please increase our faith tenfold that you might be amazed by the love we extend to others in your name. Amen.

Reflection: Think of a time - past or present - when your faith felt especially strong. What circumstances, spiritual practices, or experiences with God contributed to that *amazing faith*?

Lisa Cooper

Monday, March 02, 2026

Scripture: Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 3:1-6

Lent invites us into the wilderness, not as punishment, but as a place of honest encounter. Israel's journey in Numbers mirrors our own fatigue, frustration, and the temptation to believe that God has abandoned us. Yet, God's response is not to abandon His people but to draw them back to trust. The bronze serpent lifted high became a sign that the very thing that wounded them became their means of healing. It is a foreshadowing of Christ who takes on our sin and brokenness and becomes our salvation.

Just as the Israelites looked at the bronze serpent for healing, Hebrews calls us to fix our eyes and thoughts on Jesus, the faithful Son. Moses was a servant in God's house, but Jesus is the builder of the house itself. Where Israel faltered in trust, Jesus remained steadfast. Where we are prone to wander, He remains faithful.

During Lent, we are invited to look up – away from our complaints, our fears, our self-reliance – and fix our gaze on Christ. Healing comes not from our efforts but from our willingness to look to the One lifted up for us.

Prayer: Holy God, in the wilderness of our lives, turn our eyes toward Your Son. When we grow weary or impatient, remind us of Your faithfulness. Lift our gaze from the things that wound us, and draw us toward the One who heals. Remind us daily to whisper, "Jesus, I look to You." Amen.

Reflection: Have you looked up today?

Marian Loftin

Tuesday, March 03, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 128:1-4; Romans 4:7, 13

A Father's Love

Thought for the day: Listen to your father for the insight and wisdom you need for life.

Today, March 3rd, is my father's birthday. If he were still with us, he would be 117 years old today. My father was a wonderful, caring, devoted provider for our mother, for Jane, and for me. He placed a strong emphasis on education, and he and our mother sacrificed greatly their personal desires so that Jane and I would be fully educated, each with a post-graduate degree.

Our father was a banker and was one of the founding members of Ashland Place Methodist Church in 1939. He loved this church and served as church treasurer for forty years. He took pride in the growth of the Church and loved to see its ministry reach beyond its four walls. He stayed active in Ashland Place until his final years. He was truly a man "who feared the LORD and walked in obedience to Him."

One other activity he cared deeply about, and worked very hard for, was the Boy Scouts of America, where he served the local council as treasurer. My father was an Eagle Scout, an award he worked tirelessly to achieve. I was a Boy Scout, but never attained the rank of Eagle, something my father wanted me to do. My failure to do so is a true regret that I live with to this day. My father forgave me for that failure, just as our Heavenly Father forgives us.

I write these words to implore each of you who still have fathers here to seek out what your father would have you do. Their love, insight, and wisdom will guide you to the right path. I implore all of us to seek out what our Heavenly Father would have us do. Because His Way is always the right path.

The prophet Isaiah wrote, "See, I will create a new heaven and a new earth...[You will] be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create" Isaiah 65:17(a), 18(a). Ask God for His direction, and He will create for you true gladness and joy through belief in His Son, Our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Prayer: Father God, let us listen to the wisdom of our earthly fathers, or their legacies, and let us all the more seek what it is our Heavenly Father would have us do. Amen.

George N. Hardesty, Jr.

Wednesday, March 04, 2026

Scripture: John 7:53-8:11

Showing and Receiving Grace

This passage begins with a group of men bringing in an adulterous woman to a council of their peers with the purpose of testing Jesus “so that they might have some charge to bring against him” (v. 6). The men were not so much concerned with the actual sin that the woman had committed, but more so the reaction of one of their peers. How many times do we find ourselves discussing the actions of others in a group of friends, family, or on social media? Often, these conversations lead to strong opinions on how someone should react or how the offender should be punished. Despite the provocation of the men to condemn the woman, Jesus did not fall into this trap. Instead, he reacts with a clear stance on our authority to judge and punish: “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (v. 7). Since “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,” who are we to pass our judgment on others? (Rom 3:23, Rom 2:1). Luckily, Jesus ends the passage with an alternative: repentance. The human men did not have the authority to condemn the woman for her sins, but God does. In this moment, Jesus showed the grace of God and allowed her, and us, to turn away from sin and live in His light.

Prayer: Dear God, I know that I have sinned and fallen short of your commandments. Therefore, please help turn my heart away from passing judgement and engaging with condemnation of your precious creation. Thank you for your constant grace, the opportunity to turn away from sin, and the chance to live in your light. Please guide me to walk in your patient and loving example. Amen.

Reflection: Jesus makes a clear depiction of the grace he shows to us and the grace we ought to show to others. How might you show grace like Jesus today?

Morgan Taylor & Jackson Quinn

Thursday, March 05, 2026
Scripture: Colossians 1:19-20

“For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross” (Col 1:19-20).

I deeply love these verses of Scripture. In them, I encounter a God who suffers to make peace. A God who has reconciled all things to God’s very self. How I ache for peace today, in an age where it feels increasingly out of reach. We live in a culture marked by extreme polarization, distorted truth, and a version of justice that often feels anything but just. Each day grows more exhausting under the relentless flood of headlines and social media posts.

And yet, through Christ’s blood poured out on the cross, peace has been made with everything in heaven and on earth. Living into that peace is not easy, but something deep within me cries out, “Yes!” with profound longing. Part of me wants to plead that we do not have to continue choosing violence, degradation, and dehumanization, because peace is already available to us. At the same time, I know how seductive power can be and how often projected shame becomes a survival strategy for what we refuse to face within ourselves.

Eugene Peterson’s translation in *The Message* beautifully highlights this vision of reconciliation when he writes: “So spacious is he, so expansive, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. Not only that, but all the broken and dislocated pieces of the universe – people and things, animals and atoms – get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies, all because of his death, his blood that poured down from the cross.”

The image of God as spacious and expansive, making room for everything without crowding, stirs my imagination. All of creation, across all of time, has always been intended for reconciliation, with a place prepared and waiting. What a glorious truth to sit with.

Prayer: Jesus, I confess that I have often understood your redeeming work as a way of separating people into categories of saved and unsaved. Help me to see how you are reconciling all that you have created to yourself, and how you invite us to live within the peace you have already made. In your expansiveness, expand my theological imagination so that I may grasp something more true—and more radical—about what you accomplished on the cross. Amen.

Reflection: What if God reconciling everything truly means *everything*? And, how might this reshape my imagination when Scripture invites me to pray for those who persecute me or to love my (perceived) enemies?

Steven Booker

Friday, March 06, 2026
Scripture: Exodus 16:9-21

Every Sunday in worship service, we pray the Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9–13), saying, "Give us this day our daily bread." Way back in the book of Exodus, the Israelites asked for something similar as they grumbled and worried about starving to death while wandering in the wilderness after escaping Egypt. God heard their grumbling and provided a daily source of food: in the evening, quail; in the morning, a flaky white substance called manna that tasted like a wafer made with honey. But God was absolutely literal about the "daily" part. Through Moses, the Lord instructed the wandering Israelites to gather only the amount of manna needed for *their* family for *that* day – and not a morsel more.

But did the people listen? Some did not. They gathered more than they were instructed to, intending to save some for the following day. But that plan didn't work...the next morning, they awoke to a smelly, wormy mess of spoiled manna that wasn't good for anything.

It's the same when we hoard the blessings that God provides for us, stashing away far more than we need at the current moment, as if we don't trust God to ever replenish our supply. Our time, talents, money, and physical possessions just sit there, gathering dust and being utterly useless – like spoiled manna – when they could be a blessing to someone else if we'd only loosen our grip on them. God wants us to depend wholly on Him, having faith that He will supply all of our needs as we need them, instead of trusting in our own self-sufficiency or worrying about future days. We can cultivate this mindset when we truly realize that God's mercies *never* come to an end. Like manna, they are new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23)!

Prayer: Father God, how great is Your faithfulness! Morning by morning, new mercies I see. All I have needed, Your hand has provided. I know this is true, but my faith can be weak. Please strengthen my faith so that I trust in You alone and am as faithful to You as You are to me. In Jesus' holy name I pray, Amen.

Reflection: Would I be more generous with my...money? physical belongings? time?...if I truly had faith that God would always provide my daily bread?

Tiffany Norton

Saturday, March 07, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 95

Psalm 95 appears to be in two parts – one which invites us to worship God and, secondly, to be obedient to God regardless of our circumstances. We hear of praising God and to humbly bow to him. We are told to listen to God and not allow our hearts to harden.

I think of my mother when I read this because she believed we were supposed to make the most of every day without falling to any unkindness, meanness, or hatred coming our way.

I can recall conversations with her about someone having said or done something unkind, even mean, to me. She would say, “What did you do?” “Did you cause this?” “No,” I would say. “Tell me how you responded,” she would ask. She would listen and say, “Let it go” “LET IT GO!!!” “BE AN EXAMPLE!!”

We are required to do the right thing and to ignore unkindliness and ugliness. Return them with kindness and move on. Do not waste time. Do the right thing and learn to make the most of what you have been given. LIVE RIGHT – In other words, be obedient to God regardless of our circumstances.

Thank you, Mama, “LET IT GO!” Let’s worship and be obedient as in Psalm 95.

Prayer: Faithful God, help us to let it go and give it to you. Guide us in obedience and teach us how to be an example so that we may reflect your love. Amen.

Reflection: Are there any circumstances in your life in which you need to remind yourself to LET IT GO?

Nancy Seibt

Monday, March 09, 2026

Scripture: 2 John 1:1-13

Obedience to Christ

As followers of Christ, we are called to lives of obedience. Sometimes this can feel difficult, as obedience and devotion to Christ and His teachings means walking a path apart from the world. The many distractions of everyday life can deter us from hearing God's call and following His plan for our lives. We can feel God's presence around us, and can hear His call for our lives, but oftentimes we get caught up making excuses to ourselves or justifying our actions of disobedience to God.

In our scripture reading today from 2 John, John writes to a congregation very dear to his heart about walking in obedience, love, and truth. He says, "And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love" (v 6). As we read in the verse, an obedience to Christ means walking in love with Christ, with each other, and with ourselves. Obedience means seeking the kingdom of God first (see Matthew 6:33). Jesus gave us the perfect example of love, as he laid his life down for us, and we should have that same willingness to sacrifice for each other. Being obedient to God and loving Him and our neighbors becomes easy when we remember the cross and the sacrifice that we did not deserve but was done for us anyway, because God loved us first.

Prayer: Father God, we thank you for the unfailing and unconditional love that you have for us. Jesus, we thank you for being the perfect example and guide for love and what it means to love. Father, we pray that since the truth has been given to us, and the Holy Spirit resides in us, we would walk in full obedience to you always, especially as we remember the grace that is given us by you. Amen.

Jaren Cook

Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 81; Genesis 29:1-14; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

While reading these three passages I want you to keep in mind direction and guidance.

In Psalm 81, God reminds His people that He rescued them and wanted to bless them, but they wouldn't listen. That hits home for me. There are times I pray for God's help but still want things my way. I move ahead without waiting, thinking I know what's best. Lent invites me to pause and really hear God's voice.

In Genesis 29, Jacob is traveling unsure of what's ahead, but God guides him step-by-step right to the well where his future begins to unfold. It wasn't luck; it was God directing his path. This reminds me that even when I don't understand where life is going, God is already positioning me where I need to be. When I let go of control and follow Him, He leads me better than I ever could myself.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says Christ was the Rock that sustained God's people in the wilderness. They weren't surviving on their own strength. God was carrying them. That's true for me, too. Even when I've been stubborn, God has still provided, protected, and stayed faithful. It's scary letting go of control; however, there is so much to come if you just trust in God.

Prayer: Oh Heavenly Father, as we walk through this season of Lent, guide our hearts and our steps according to Your will. Help us to follow You faithfully and to be shepherds of love, patience, and grace to others. Draw us closer to You each day and renew our spirits. In your name, Amen.

Reflection: During this time of Lent, ask yourself with an open heart...Lord, what direction do you want me to go and show your love and glory to others?

Joseph Griggs

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Scripture: Jeremiah 2:4-13

We grew up hearing, “You are what you eat.” In the case of my household, my siblings and I really ought to be Froot-Loops and hot dogs by now! It’s not that my mom couldn’t cook, but at the end of the workday, dealing with everyone else’s children leaves one a little sapped for serving one’s own brood with the most complex and nutritionally diverse menus. Honestly, I still like Froot Loops and hot dogs, so I’m not sure that it’s the end of the world.

Now according to Jeremiah, the Lord did better by his children, Israel. He gave them a land that overflowed in abundance, bringing them from a land of deserts and ravines to one with rich and fertile produce. They had an abundance given to them. They had every good thing to eat. Yet, they wandered away from the Lord anyway.

They weren’t mistreated. They weren’t overtaxed. They weren’t in need of, well, anything. But as the prophet describes it: They defiled the land, started pretending they could meet their own needs, and forgot about the Lord. They stopped asking each other “Where is the Lord?” Even the priests stopped asking it. God hadn’t made himself less available; they just stopped looking for him.

If they looked for him, they might feel compelled to follow. They might remember how good they had it, walking in his footsteps. The people might not go chasing after the idols their neighbors fashioned or be content to watch the water trickle out of the broken cisterns they’d dug. And more than the truth of their history, their reality, and their hope, they wanted to do what they wanted to do. They valued freedom to roam over faithfulness.

They had the best stuff to eat, but it didn’t make them good. Maybe you aren’t what you eat, but...maybe you do reflect what you follow?

This Lent, do you need to turn aside from the way you’ve been going? Have you been following all sorts of things, but forgetting to ask, “Where is the Lord?” You aren’t what you eat, but your faithfulness reflects what or Who you’re following.

Prayer: Holy One, there is none like you, and all we have ever needed is found in you. Forgive us for wandering away, for defiling good gifts, and for pretending that we can do what you alone are capable of. Help us to follow you better, beginning with our very next step. In your Name, Amen.

Reflection: Have you been following all sorts of things, but forgetting to ask, “Where is the Lord?”

Calvin Montgomery

Thursday, March 12, 2026
Scripture: Ephesians 4:25-32

“Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.”

Ephesians 4:25

As I seek honest answers to questions for a deeper faith, I am aware that communication continues to be challenging when emotions are involved. Jesus’ ministry created numerous controversies. It is noted that Apostle Peter was impulsive and emotional, Paul was scrutinized for contradictions and John had a fiery temperament. Our Scripture reading for today speaks to the importance of faithful communication and building one another up. It also calls us to be truthful in speech while controlling our anger and avoiding harmful language. Let us pray to avoid the aggressive urge to express emotional, impulsive and/or insensitive comments without regard for facts and other’s opinion. May God help us also to be a good listener when discussing our faith and strengthen our ability to faithfully communicate a belief and trust in God.

Prayer: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer (Psalm 19:14).

Reflection: How might you build someone up today?

Notes: Rev. Leo Brannon’s “Doing the Faith” book has a chapter titled closing the gap between how you talk and how you walk.

*As Training Director for numerous agents in 17 states I instructed them to present convincing facts about our product, to be aware of the tone of their voice and negative body language while avoiding any impulsive unrelated remarks.

Paul Fox

Friday, March 13, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 23

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff – they comfort me.

Let's be honest: life can be full of so much noise – so many distractions, so much busyness – and the temptation for many can be to just get swept away by all of it. There are meetings to be at, functions to attend, demands to be met, and if we're not careful, we can be in danger of drifting away from our Lord. Though we live in a society that seems to continually clamor in both speed and noise, our passage today reminds us of a bygone era when the pace was a bit slower, and the noise was a bit less. The Psalmist's words invoke an image of peace, rest, and tranquility taken next to a stream of quiet beauty – an image that has resonated with souls over millennia.

I count myself blessed, having experienced in nature my soul being rejuvenated next to peaceful pastures and streams of quiet waters. And though I don't always have the means of picking up and physically traveling to a location where this image can be experienced, I do have the ability of reading the passage, closing my eyes (wherever I am), and imagining myself in this place Scripture reveals. On many occasions, even during the busyness and distractions of life, I have recalled the words of the Psalmist, imagining myself in this place of tremendous beauty and peace, and there I center my spirit and quiet my soul.

I encourage you, in this season of Lent, to take a moment today and ask our Good Shepherd to lead your spirit next to a place of green pastures and quiet waters – so that He may restore your soul.

Prayer: Good Shepherd, today would you help to quiet the noise and limit the distractions so I can hear your still, small voice? Lead me in the way of green pastures and quiet waters, and guide me in your paths of righteousness – for your kingdom and your glory. Amen.

Reflection: How might you walk at a bit slower pace today – taking a moment to spend time with God next to a stream of quiet beauty?

Valencia Montgomery

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Reflection: John 1:1-9

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

John 1:1-4 (ESV)

I’ll take a little poetry at the start of a good story. It gets the juices flowing and brings a heart of worship as we focus our minds on what follows. Plus, for me, I can’t help but hear Reverend and Norman Maclean’s voices blending with John’s: “Long ago rain fell on mud and became rock. Half a billion years ago. But even before that, beneath the rocks...are the words of God. Listen.” “And if Paul and I listened very carefully all our lives...we might hear those words” (*A River Runs Through It*).

And with any good story, there’s usually a moral. Many in this case, but did you notice the one active verb in those four verses? After meditating on the very being and omnipresence of Jesus in and with the triune God (lots of jam-packed theology in three sentences!) see also Genesis 1-2 and Colossians 1:15-20...pondering Word, God, life, light – what does the light do?

Shines – the light shines in the darkness! Have you ever spent time outdoors surrounded by true darkness away from city lights? Then you know how unexpectedly wide a space is brightened by something as small as a single flame or headlamp. The God who made us and gave us life is our light. He allows our eyes and hearts and minds to see – to see him and to see beauty (all made by him!) and to experience joy and peace in our well-lit space. As we reflect and meditate during Lent, let us not forget what follows. Having been filled with the light of Christ, may we let it shine through us to pierce the veil of darkness around us. It seems no matter your own political or doctrinal leanings, for different reasons we all think the world seems darker than ever. Yet we know what a little flame can do. Imagine the light of the God of the universe! Let there be light.

Prayer: Lord, you are before all things, and in you all things hold together. Shine in us and through us, for your glory. Thanks be to God.

Reflection: What dark space in your heart are you trying to keep shielded from God’s light? Who in your life is God showing you needs a little light in theirs? Will you let it shine?

Zack Wolf

Monday, March 16, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 146; Isaiah 59:9-19; Acts 9:1-20

We Shall Be Changed

I chose this date because it is our youngest son Wes's birthday. He would have been 44 today, but he left us much too soon by any parent's measure. I've heard that the loss of a child often prompts a parent to search for and reexamine the meaning of life. I'm sure that is true, and perhaps that search leads to a life change in the most extraordinary, beautiful way, like it did for Saul as he walked the road to Damascus described in Acts. At that most difficult time for our family; however, I found myself seeking peace and comfort from what Christ showed us, and Paul told us, about the meaning of death, not life (at least this life on earth). Many times I thought, "Where is Wes?" "Is he the same?" "Will I see him again?" Then I heard a whisper, "Caine, Easter."

Through the Easter story, God has answered these questions for me, and perhaps for you, unequivocally time and time again. The Cross. The Empty Tomb. The Resurrection. And the Ascension. With unparalleled eloquence and truth, Paul told us: "Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:51-52). Yes, it is indeed a mystery around which we will never wrap our feeble minds. Eternal life? But I believe with all my heart it is true. I (and we) affirm that belief every Sunday: "I believe in ... the communion of saints, ... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

For me, my family, and everyone who has experienced the death of a loved one, I can think of no deeper comfort. With a tip of my cap to John Magee (and President Reagan), we will have "slipped the surly bonds of earth to touch the face of God." We will have shed all infirmities of this world and become whole, imperishable. There can be no change more profound, more certain. Thank you, Lord, for Easter!

Prayer: Our Father, who art in heaven, thank you for Easter and for all the Easter promises fulfilled. Bring us comfort and peace, and help us to fully know that our loved ones reside with you today and for eternity, as one day will we. Amen.

Reflection: Do you truly believe in eternal life?

Caine O'Rear

Tuesday, March 17, 2026

Scripture: Isaiah 42:14-21, Colossians 1:9-14; Psalm 146

Busy! We are all so busy. So many times you hear the pleas of needing volunteers or help to make something work, but most of us cannot handle the burden of another commitment.

Several years ago this was the case when The Joseph Project was in search of additional leadership. There are so many moving parts to make the pantry work – order food, coordinate volunteers, pack food, solicit donations, advertise our needs, communicate our efforts with the church to share with the congregation, just to name what immediately comes to mind. With these things mentioned over and over I kept feeling a nudge to help and accepted the role to be the Pantry Administrator. Once again, my friends and family thought I was crazy for taking on something else!

Few things outside of my family and friends have brought me greater delight than The Joseph Project. The satisfaction of accomplishing an overcrowded distribution day or finding one more space for an additional can of green beans donated from school children is exciting. The amazement of our devoted volunteers showing up time and time again is always surreal. The enjoyment of serving beside Megan and Stephanie is fulfilling and brings me happiness. But nothing ever could have prepared me for the pure joy in serving my neighbors.

The administrative work of The Joseph Project is no longer about me. At first, I was nervous to worry and relate to the clients. Do they feel shame to ask for a box of food monthly? What are their other needs and how do we quickly move them along but treat them as we care? Our clients are regular. They are friendly and kind. Colossians tells us these neighbors have been given endurance, patience and strength and that they, too, are qualified to inherit the kingdom of God. Psalm 146 reminds us that these neighbors of ours who are hungry and poor are not alone. The Lord, who remains faithful forever, upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry. Isaiah 42:14 tells us God does care. He describes the depth of his feelings for his people.

The Joseph Project has become one of my biggest blessings that I am beyond happy to share with my family and friends. I am forever grateful that my neighbors there have taught me what matters most.

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve my neighbors. Please Lord, continue to give me the vision and purpose to recognize the value of these neighbors and let them truly know that their confidence in us to brighten their day or help them out is reciprocal. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Reflection: How can you serve your neighbors today?

Cammie Singleton

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 146

Praise the Lord, O My Soul!

“I will praise the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.”

Psalm 146:2

The responses that children have to God’s word are innocent, nonjudgmental, and often spontaneous. Jesus knew that and wanted adults to praise God in the truly honest way children praise. This devotion is to share some of the thoughts of the young voices of our church. We can learn from our children. Their insights are important!

Psalm 146 is a joyful psalm that speaks to giving praise to the Lord for all the wonderful gifts of His love. After hearing it read aloud while we were at Blue Lake Winter Retreat, we asked the children: “What does it mean to praise the Lord all your life?” Some of the responses were: “God does a lot of things for us, and we should praise Him forever.” “It is important to praise God.” “It is good to praise Him.” “God is good to us, so we should let Him know we are thankful all of our life.”

We also asked them, “How can you show your praise and gratitude to God every day?” They answered, “You should pray and thank him.” “You should pray every day.” “Go to church.” “Invite people to church.” “Tell people about God.” “Be a good example.” “Be kind.” “Help others when they need a friend or when someone has been mean to them.” “Read the Bible.” “Love each other.” “Be good.”

Lastly, we reminded them of how God is described in Psalm 146 and encouraged them to share what their favorite description of God is and why. After thinking quietly for a moment, one sweet girl, totally unprompted, began to sing: “Way Maker, Miracle Worker, Promise Keeper, Light in the Darkness! My God, that is who You are!”

And so, I end with Matthew 21:16 as both a call to prayer and reflection:

“Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked Him. “Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read, from the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have called forth your praise?”

APUMC Children

Thursday, March 19, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11

During this season of Lent, we are reminded that waiting, grief, and uncertainty are not wasted when they are placed in God's hands.

Psalm 130 speaks directly to the depths – the moments when we feel overwhelmed, burdened, or unsure. Yet, even from the depths, the psalmist cries out with hope. God's steadfast love is consistent. It does not change based on our emotions, our failures, or our circumstances. Throughout Lent, we are invited to let our grief be at ease...not because everything is fixed immediately, but because we trust that the Lord is faithful and that He will redeem the world. Waiting on God is not passive; it is an act of trust.

In Ezekiel, obedience stands out. Ezekiel is called by God in a confusing, overwhelming time. God asks him not only to listen, but to receive and act. Rebellion can easily get in the way – sometimes loudly, and sometimes quietly through distraction or fear. Ezekiel reminds us that obedience often requires us to step back, truly listen, and then consider doing what God is asking, even when it's uncomfortable or unclear. Obedience isn't about perfection; it's about surrender.

Then in Revelation 10, the angel declares that there will be no more delay. God's plans are not stalled. Even when it feels like nothing is happening, heaven is still moving. God's timing is intentional, and His promises will come to completion.

When asked about Revelation 10, one of our youth (Max McClellan), responded, "Animals that live on land cannot live in the sea, and animals that live in the sea cannot live on land. When the angel places one foot on land and one on sea, it shows God's power to unify what we believe cannot coexist. God is not limited by the boundaries we see. He brings heaven and earth together. He works in the in-between places – our doubts, our waiting, our obedience, and our hope."

Prayer: God help us to live in awe of Your power to unify what we believe cannot coexist. Guide us in our waiting, grief, and uncertainty. May we place it all in Your hands. Amen.

Reflection: Where is God asking you to trust His steadfast love? Where might obedience require you to stop, listen, and act? What delay are you being asked to surrender, trusting that God is still at work? In what ways are fears of your own limitation keeping you from spreading His word? What is God trying to speak into your life right now, and are you willing to receive it and live it out – even when it's uncomfortable?

APUMC Youth

Friday, March 20, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 130

Psalm 130 is a great reminder to seek God out no matter what we may be going through in our day-to-day lives. Work, School, Projects, Relationships. All of it can create stress, some of which may feel like too much. So, what does this have to do with Psalms 130, you ask? Well, there are four key points to this passage. Let's break it down:

1. God Invites you to come as you are

In verse one, the author of our Psalm cries out to the Lord from *the depths*, which represents a place of discouragement and guilt, which is a place we have all been before in life. The author begs for mercy and reminds us that there is forgiveness with the Lord. This serves as a reminder that no matter how low of a place we feel like we are in, we can (and should) always seek out the Lord.

2. God Transforms

In verse four, the psalmist declares that there is forgiveness in the Lord, which transforms him into serving God in reverence with no shame.

3. Faith in the Lord

Verse five reminds us to put our hope and faith in the Lord. But what does that look like? At times, we can be impatient. I want what I want, and I want it now. This Psalm reminds us that, while we may want something, we need to maintain faith in God and trust that everything that is intended for us will come on his time. We must maintain faith that God is working even when nothing seems to move. We must maintain our faith in God, especially when times are hard.

4. God's Redemption is Plentiful

Verses seven and eight remind us that God has enough redemption for all of us, should we choose to come to him. Our Psalm says God's unfailing love will redeem us if we put our hope in him. Finally, verse eight might be the most important one of them all: ***Only God can provide redemption.***

After spending time in prayer, reflect on these questions:

What is the first thing you do when things get tough? When things don't go your way?

When you feel like your back is up against the wall and there is no way out? Do you seek out God? Or do you seek out the world? Only one can provide the help that you are looking for.

Aubrey Copes

Saturday, March 21, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 130

Psalm 130 is about calling out to God during a difficult time and waiting patiently for His forgiveness. It teaches that even in hard times, people can find hope through faith. In verse one, the psalmist is at a low point – emotionally and spiritually – and is calling out to God for His guidance. The author is asking God to really listen to their prayer and take it seriously. Later on in the Psalm, the author realizes that if God kept track of all sins and punished everybody equally, no one would be able to survive. God forgives, and that forgiveness leads people to respect and honor Him – not be terrified of Him.

The psalmist chooses patience and trust, believing God’s promises even when waiting. They’re waiting for God with intense hope – like someone desperate for the night to end. The message: everyone should trust God because He loves us and offers complete forgiveness. God will fully save His people and free them from their sins. In conclusion, this beautiful scripture is about God’s forgiveness and how our faith should reach through all our doubts and fears to reach His forgiveness.

For our time of reflection, I invite you to listen to “I Will Wait for You (Psalm 130)” by Keith and Kristyn Getty... because if you’re like me, you understand Scripture better when you hear it in music.

May this song be our prayer.

Caroline Miller

Monday, March 23, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12

While reviewing the remaining available devotional dates, I experienced a brief moment of anxiety. So, I wrote all the dates down that were still open and left it in God's hands to give me the one that He had set for me by letting Aj pick one. The one Aj chose was for Psalm 143, 1 Kings 17:17-24, and Acts 20:7-12. After reading all three, I definitely found it very fitting. As I sat and read it, I could not help but think about when I left Aj's dad. Psalms 143:3-4 says, "the enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in the darkness like those long dead. My spirit grows faint within me; my heart within me is dismayed." I remember feeling like that...if I stayed, I would be dead by the hand of a man that I thought loved me as much as I did him. I felt like my heart and spirit were crushed, and I honestly did not know where or what I was going to do. So, I prayed just like David did, and I asked the Lord for help. I asked God to give me courage to do what I needed to do in order to give myself and my son a life. I realize now that the Lord had (and still has) great plans for me and Aj. Today I fully leave my life in God's hands. I know by trusting in Him that I will have the life of which I have only dreamed.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for all that you do and for always looking over me. I pray that You continue to guide me in the direction that You have set for me. I pray that You will keep myself and Aj safe and grounded in your Word and the work You have set for us. Amen.

Reflection: Where would your life be if you gave all your trust and faith to God?

Crystal Roberts

Tuesday, March 24, 2026
Scripture: Ephesians 2:1-10

Grace

Paul begins his letters with a greeting of *grace*. In its simplest meaning, *grace* is the unmerited gift of God's favor, the undeserved gift of God's love. We can do nothing to earn God's *grace*.

In Wesleyan theology, there are many stages of *grace*, beginning with prevenient *grace*. It is God's gift of the stirring within us, our conscience that leads us to recognize, in our sinful state, our need for God. We are more inclined to recognize this *grace* when we are suffering or feeling lost and low. This is the *grace* that opens us to salvation and leads us to respond to God's greatest free gift – the *grace* that is Jesus Christ. We often sing of this *grace* in John Newton's (1779) words, "Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved."

Once we are open to it, we can receive (free and not of our own merit) *saving grace*. That is the gift of Christ. It is not a matter of some one-time super spiritual experience for us, but is continual, throughout life. Our response is manifest in a growing faith and the changed ways we live and serve others.

God continues to give *grace*. We should appreciate and avail ourselves of the means of *grace* in our midst – the sacraments, the Bible, worship opportunities, prayer, music, and the fellowship of other believers.

Julia Johnston, in 1911, asks the most important question that we desperately need to answer:

*"Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
freely bestowed on all who believe!
You that are longing to see his face,
will you this moment his grace receive?"*
The United Methodist Hymnal, #365

Prayer: Gracious God, nurture my faith in you, and guide me to accept fully your gift of grace, that my embrace of you may be manifest in my thoughts, words, and actions. In thankful praise, Amen.

Reflection: Will you, this moment, his grace receive?

For further reading and reflection:

Christian Believer: Knowing God with Heart and Mind Readings, Abingdon Press, 1999, Readings 107 through 118 for insight of various theologians.

Harper, Steve, *John Wesley's Message for Today*, Francis Asbury Press, 1983.

Kalas, J. Ellsworth, *Christian Believer: Knowing God with Heart and Mind Study Manual*, Abingdon Press, 1999.

Jane Finley

Wednesday, March 25, 2026

Scripture: 2 Timothy 1:7

Fear at the Threshold

Lent has a way of bringing us face to face with what we would rather avoid. It strips away noise and distraction and leaves us standing at the threshold of our own hearts. And very often, what greets us there is fear.

I don't know about you, but I don't always know what to do with fear. I try to ignore it, explain it away, or rush past it. And sometimes, I assume that if fear shows up, something must be wrong, either with me or with my faith. But Scripture tells a more honest story. Fear shows up even in holy places. Fear appears in gardens, before obedience. Fear rises just before truth is spoken. Fear is often not a sign that something is wrong, but that something sacred is at stake.

Paul writes to Timothy from prison, a place where fear would have been entirely reasonable. Yet he does not deny fear's presence, he names its limits. He says: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." Fear may show up, but it does not get the final word. God gives us something else, the power to act, a love that moves us outward, and a sound mind to discern what faithfulness requires.

Lent is not about eliminating fear. It is about learning to listen differently. Fear can be loud, dramatic, insistent. But it is not authoritative. Fear does not have the final word, but when it shows up...what if it is pointing each of us to the edge of transformation, the place where obedience costs something real?

As we journey through lent, we are reminded that Holy ground is rarely neat. It is often cluttered with unfinished prayers, difficult truths, and lives still in process. And the beauty of it all is that God is still right there with us.

Prayer:

God of courage and truth, meet me at the places I am afraid to enter. Quiet the voices that distort

and strengthen what is faithful. Give me the courage to step forward even when fear comes with me. Amen.

Reflection:

What fear have you been treating as a wall that God may be using as a doorway?

Rev. Sheila Bates
Southwest District Superintendent

Thursday, March 26, 2026
Scripture: 1 Samuel 16:11-13

I love King David!!! According to the Bible, God loved him, too. God described David as a man after his own heart (1 Samuel 13:14, Acts 13:22).

However, as anyone who reads the Bible knows, David was a very flawed man. He committed adultery and arranged for his mistress's husband to be killed to cover it up (see 2 Samuel 11). He also failed at parenting his many sons who committed rape, incest, and murder battling for power. So, why did God still love David? The answer is that David had great faith.

The Bible tells us that faith is a gift from the Holy Spirit, and that we are saved by faith (1 Cor 12:9, Eph 2:8-9, Lk 7:50) Today's Old Testament passage shows us how and when David received his faith.

Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; this is the one." So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David (1 Samuel 16:12-13).

Wow! The Holy Spirit came powerfully upon David and never left him. At that moment, David was born of the Spirit (see Jn 3:5-8). He received the gift of faith becoming a child of God saved by grace (Eph 2:8).

However, faith is a struggle. As demonstrated by today's Psalm reading, it is a battle raging inside of all of us (Psalms 31:9-16). In this passage, we see David humbly repenting, suffering, in fear of his enemies, and pleading with God for help. In the end, he acknowledges that he will only find peace through faith in God's grace. Maybe life's struggles were intended to humbly bring us to faith without which we would all be lost (see James 1:2-4).

So, why is faith so important? The answer is that you belong to whatever your faith is in. If your faith is in money, you belong to money. If your faith is in power, you belong to power. But, if your faith is in Jesus, you belong to God, and you will be saved by grace (Eph 2:8).

In our New Testament reading from Philippians 1, Paul and Timothy begin their letter by offering God's "grace and peace." Isn't that what we are all looking for? Grace and peace are the gifts of faith. They are God's offer to you no matter how bad you have sinned. All God asks of you is to seek faith in Jesus (Matt 7:7).

So, who do you belong to? Where is your faith? (Lk 8:25).

After spending time reflecting on those questions, I invite you to spend time in prayer.

Banks Ladd

Friday, March 27, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 31:9-16; Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-30

Sarah and I have been blessed with growing up surrounded by a strong church community. We have experienced a lot in the church together, from being best friends in preschool, through getting confirmed outside together during Covid, to many Blue Lake trips, and now active Senior members in the Youth group. I remember bawling my eyes out because Sarah and I would not be going to the same school after our last year at Ashland Place. Having a friendship and a church community to lean on has definitely supported us throughout our middle school and high school years.

Psalm 31:13-16 says, “I have heard the gossip of many; terror is on every side. When they conspired against me, they plotted to take my life. But I trust in you, Lord; I say, ‘You are my God.’ The course of my life is in your power; rescue me from the power of my enemies and from persecutors. Make your face shine on your servant; save me by your faithful love.”

Throughout middle and high school, we both share similar experiences dealing with drama and gossip, especially in middle school. Our youth group was always an open space to get away from these things. Youth group always reminded us that we were not alone and that pain is temporary. We have learned to not look at things from an earthly perspective, realizing that putting your faith in the Lord is more important than the small argument we got in with a friend that seemed like the world was ending.

Job 13:14 says, “I will put myself at risk and take my life in my own hands.” Job was basically saying, why should he risk his life to speak up? Similarly, in high school, talking about our faith is not the comfortable or “cool” thing to do, but this verse shows us honesty and transparency are crucial in your relationship with God.

Philippians 1:25 says, “Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith.” With the transition to college from high school drawing closer, we recognize that there is a choice to make in continuing to pursue growth in our relationships with God. While it is going to be easy to get wrapped up in all the fun things in college, it is important that we continue to grow in our faith. We are grateful that the youth group has set us up to do that.

Prayer: Dear God, I pray for the Youth Group at Ashland Place United Methodist Church. I pray for Joseph and his leadership and selflessness. Please be with all of the children, showing them your light through the relationships they make at church. I pray for all children and teenagers who are going through hard times, and that they have a place to be themselves. I pray for the small numbers at Youth Group, and for growth in all of the children. In your name we pray, Amen.

Reflection: How can we trust and focus more on God's plan for the youth group and us?

Sarah Cooper & Lamey Singleton

Saturday, March 28, 2026

Scripture: Mark 10:32-34

If someone ever asked what kinds of stories I try to avoid, they might assume I would say horror movies or anything filled with blood and violence. While those are definitely on my “no thank you” list, the truth is I struggle most with stories where the entire plot is about traveling from point A to point B with endless obstacles in between. The destination always feels just out of reach.

A childhood example that still comes to mind is *Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey*. It is a classic about pets trying to find their way home, and if you have seen it, you know how long and treacherous that journey is. As a kid, I remember growing increasingly impatient with every setback. I wanted them home already. What I did not understand then, and laugh about now, is that these kinds of stories actually make me feel physically hungry. It is as if I am on the journey too and someone forgot to pack the snacks.

Even now, if I am watching or reading about a long journey, I make sure I have eaten or have something nearby. There is just something about a journey that makes my stomach rumble.

In Mark 10, Jesus and the disciples are on the road to Jerusalem. Jesus is walking ahead of them, and the disciples are both amazed and afraid. Jesus knows exactly where the road is leading. He speaks plainly about suffering, rejection, and death, yet he keeps walking.

Lent places us on that same road. We often want to rush past the difficult parts or skip ahead to resurrection joy, but Jesus does not bypass the journey. Instead, he invites us to follow, even when the road is unsettling and the destination feels heavy. Along the way, we discover what we are truly hungering for. Not just comfort or certainty, but courage, trust, and a faith that can sustain us and be shared.

The practices we take on during Lent are not meant to simply fill us up for ourselves. They shape us to walk behind Jesus with open hands and willing hearts, ready to pour out what we receive in love, compassion, and service to others.

So grab your snacks, or at least your courage, and let us continue along this path. The journey to the cross is not one we walk alone. Christ goes before us, filling us with the grace we need and calling us to carry that grace into the world.

Prayer: Gracious God, you go before us on every road. Give us courage when we falter and trust when the way feels uncertain. Fill us with your grace and guide us to pour that grace into the lives of others. Amen.

Reflection: As I follow Jesus on the road this Lent, what am I hungering for, how am I being filled along the way, and where is God calling me to pour that fullness out for others?

Rev. Chelsey Brown
Director, USA Wesley Foundation

Monday, March 30, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 36:5-11

“How excellent is thy lovingkindness, O God!”

Psalm 36:7

This Psalm was written by David to the chief musician of his court. It speaks to God’s endless, unmeasurable love to all His children. This magnificent love that extends to each of us is mercy, grace, justice, righteousness, and abundance. I often wonder what I have done to deserve this kind of love, but all God asks in return is that we love Him and love others. It seems like a small price to pay for the loving kindness He extends to us every day in all areas of our lives.

My sweet daddy was the music director in small Baptist churches most of my life. He and my mother loved to sing, and they taught me all the old hymns and gospel songs. Psalm 36 reminds me of one of Daddy’s favorite songs, “The Love of God,” written by Frederick Lehman. I can still hear my dad singing this song, especially the third verse which was my favorite:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

Oh, love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure—
The saints’ and angels’ song.

When I first came to Ashland Place United Methodist Church, I was immediately impressed by the hearts of the people and how they extended God’s love to those they barely knew. I could feel the spirit of God at work here. I am so very thankful to be a member of a church family that loves God and others, because love is the greatest gift of all.

My prayer is: God help me remember that all good things in my life come from you.

My question to myself is always, “What else can I do to share God’s love?”

Linda Noble

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Scripture: Psalm 71:1-14

We are now in the midst of Holy Week. Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem with palm fronds and fanfare and in a few short days will be arrested and murdered. He knows what waits at the end of the week and yet he still goes. In John 12:27, we see the humanity of Jesus. His soul is troubled. This is no doubt an exceptionally reasonable and perfectly human response to knowing what he is to face at the end of the week. But he also knows his purpose and chooses to glorify God. In this instance, I find myself thinking of Jesus like a duck swimming in a pond; a serene and calm demeanor on the surface, but below the surface he is furiously paddling.

Our souls may be troubled, too. I know mine is. With the never-ending firehose of news of devastation and oppression both in our own country and abroad, it is easy to run out of energy to address the injustice, to bury our head in the sand and say, “it’s just too much.” As with the author of Psalm 71, our strength may be spent, and we may feel that God is far from us. We may feel the darkness surrounding us, maybe even beginning to overtake us. But it is precisely at this moment that we should fight the natural instinct. We cannot turn a blind eye to the darkness, especially that which is spreading in our own community and country. We are to be the light by caring for others simply because they are human, too. This is part of Jesus’ reason, and if we are to build his kingdom here, then it must be ours too. So, we channel our inner duck. Despite how we present on the surface, we can and should put in the work behind the scenes and under the surface to be the light to bring the Kingdom here with us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, when we are spent, when we are troubled, when we are consumed by doubt, let us continue to look to you, our hope and our protector. Give us the strength to keep fighting and the courage to persevere and protect the vulnerable. Help us to know our purpose, that we are here for a time such as this. And that even if we don’t have the words for our purpose, we are not paralyzed by indecision but called to action. Amen.

Reflection: Even when we appear serene and put together above the surface, are we striving toward the kingdom? How do we ensure that our “furious paddling” propels us forward? How can we ensure that we are the light at Ashland Place, in Mobile, and in the world?

Sarah Allred

Wednesday, April 01, 2026

Scripture: John 13:21-32

In the thirteenth chapter of John, we see one of the greatest acts of love met with the most malicious acts of treachery. It is the Thursday of Jesus' last week on earth, and He is sharing a meal with His disciples. He has just washed the disciples' feet. Jesus, God in the flesh, is showing the disciples how to serve – by becoming a servant.

During the meal, Jesus exclaims that one of the disciples will betray Him. Peter motions to John to ask who it is. Jesus says, "It is the one to whom I give the bread dipped in the sauce." Jesus knows who, and He knows when. So does Judas. Both of them know that the other knows. As soon as Judas eats the bread, Jesus tells him to, "Hurry. Do it now." When Judas leaves the room, Jesus says, "The time has come for Me, the Son of Man, to enter into My glory..."

The wheels have been set into motion. There is no turning back. Jesus knows the agony of crucifixion is hours away. He knows that there is no other way. His crucifixion on the cross is the ultimate act of love. The Creator has become the sacrifice.

In these verses, Jesus continues to teach the disciples about how to glorify God once He is gone...to love one another. This is the last lesson Jesus teaches His disciples. "Just as I have loved you, you should love each other," and we glorify Him when we do. Jesus knows He is on His way home. He knows He will suffer. He knows His mother will suffer. He knows His followers will face dark days. But Jesus came to earth for this moment, and it is time.

The ultimate glorification of the Son is His death on the cross, His resurrection, and His ascension. Christ hanging on the cross with blood streaming down from His face, His hands, His side, and His feet is not the end of the story. Jesus shed His blood for our salvation, and He arose on the third day as He said He would. Upon that fact hangs our redemption. Without the resurrection, there can be no hope of salvation. Our hope lies beyond this broken world. The world will never know peace until it finds it at the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ. We will never know peace until we identify ourselves with Christ by faith. There is the secret of salvation and peace.

Prayer: Thank you, God, for loving us so much that You sent your Son to die for our sins that whoever believes in Him will have everlasting life. Amen.

Reflection: How do we glorify God?

Susan Bedsole

Thursday, April 02, 2026

Scripture: John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Maundy Thursday

In John 13, during the Passover meal, Jesus kneels on the floor and washes the feet of his disciples. Not because they deserved it or had earned it. Not because it was comfortable or impressive. But because love, in Jesus' hands, always turns into action. This action tells us more about Jesus than it does about the disciples' worthiness.

Peter resists. The moment feels awkward and unsettling. And maybe that's because Jesus is showing them – and us – that love is more than kind feelings or good intentions. Love gets down low. Love serves. Love stays, even when it sometimes makes more sense to walk away.

Then Jesus says something that reaches far beyond that upper room: “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

How we love shows the world something about us. It sets us apart. It tells people Whose we are.

And before the night is over, Jesus will show just how far that love goes. The table where they break bread will be left behind. The road ahead goes beyond service and leads ultimately to sacrifice.

So, a question we could ask ourselves this Maundy Thursday is: If this is where love leads Jesus, where might it lead us?

As Lent draws us closer to the cross, we are reminded that deeper faith isn't found in perfect understanding, but in trusting this command: to love one another, even when it costs us something.

Prayer: Dear God, You have shown us what love looks like in Jesus. Through his example, we see that love is humble, generous, and willing to serve. Teach us to love one another as you have loved us, even when it is hard. Lead us where you would have us to go, and give us the courage to follow. Amen.

Jon Miller

Friday, April 03, 2026
Scripture: John 18:1-19:42

Good Friday

When I was a boy, I didn't understand the Good Friday Holiday. We got out of school which was as good a reason as any to call it a "Good Friday." I can't remember anyone ever explaining what it was really all about. I always thought it had something to do with other religions, and we got the day off as a bonus.

Today I wonder if sometimes it is still just a bonus day off. A day to catch up on spring yard work, maybe an early season trip to the beach, binge a Netflix series, or just a day to laze around the house.

I'm older now, no longer a boy, and I know a little bit more about the Good Friday holiday.

It's about Jesus and His death and His complete sacrifice for our sins...which is the actual Good of the Good Friday.

So, maybe I should spend some of this bonus day seeking Him. I could take some quiet moments and meditate on His sacrifice, on His death, and on His resurrection. I could spend a little time just looking for Him and calling out to Him in prayer.

I recall from our Scripture reading today in John, when people were seeking Him, He didn't shy away. When called upon He answered:

"Who is it you want?"

"Jesus of Nazareth," they replied.

"I am he."

Prayer: Lord, let the bonus of this Good Friday be more about You than me. You called...I answered. I called...You answered. Let it be so, Amen.

Reflection: How might you spend this bonus day seeking Jesus?

Melton Luttrell

Saturday, April 04, 2026
Scripture: Matthew 27:57-66

Holy Saturday

This week is one of those weeks where it is not easy to name what we are feeling. We do not just feel one emotion. We feel many. We feel the joy and fear of Palm Sunday, the grief and love of Maundy Thursday, the pain and injustice of Good Friday, and now...here we are...sitting with Mary Magdalene and the other Mary on Holy Saturday feeling, well, all of it. We know that Jesus said this would happen and that he would be raised to life on the third day; yet, knowing the promise does not soften the silence or shorten the waiting (Matt 20:17-19).

Matthew 27:57-61 tells us that once Joseph of Arimathea had placed Jesus' body in the tomb and rolled a great stone against its entrance, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting there...and stayed...facing the tomb. I wonder how long they sat there. Did they talk to one another about all that had happened, or did they sit in silence? Did they eventually stand? Pace back-and-forth? I wonder about their breath. Were their exhales few and far between? I wonder these things, because we all have our own stories of moments that felt like they lasted for hours...days that felt more like weeks or maybe months. It is no secret that waiting well is not easy, especially when we do not know how long the waiting season will last.

Holy Saturday meets us in the waiting breath of our lives – the spaces where we do not yet know what comes next. We want to know when we can exhale, when the waiting will end, and what life will look like on the other side. We hold this breath between illness and recovery, between uncertainty and clarity, between strained relationships and the slow work of healing. Looking back on my own waiting seasons and reflecting on the one I am currently in, I am learning that in these moments, faith is less about answers and more about staying present. It is about learning to wait with God while holding grief and hope together – trusting that the story is not finished.

That being said, I believe that the Marys were not the only ones waiting. All of creation – the soil, the stones, the air – was holding its breath for what was coming, though no eye could see it yet. As we, too, wait in the quiet at the tomb today, we are invited to sit with grief, to trust God with our questions, and to acknowledge the breath we are holding – the weight of the waiting. This is the sacred pause, the holy silence...the moment before resurrection breaks through.

Prayer: Faithful God, we bring you our grief, our questions, and our hope. As we wait in the stillness, remind us of your abiding presence. Hold us as we hold our breath. Teach us to seek you and wait with you, trusting that your steadfast love is still at work. We love you, Lord. Amen.

Reflection: Where in your life do you feel the weight of the stone, the pause of the world, the silence of the tomb? What would it look like for you to wait with God while holding grief and hope together?

Rev. Jennifer Porto

OBSERVING A HOLY LENT 2026

February 18 Ash Wednesday

6:00pm - Ash Wednesday Service - Sanctuary

February 22 - March 29

Lenten Sunday Sermon Series: *Seeking*

9:00am - Ascension Service

11:00am - Traditional Service

March 29 Palm Sunday

9:00am - Ascension Service - Fellowship Hall
Palm Processional and Children Sing

11:00am - Traditional Service - Sanctuary
Palm Processional and Children Sing

Noon - Churchwide Lunch - Fellowship Hall
Please bring a salad or cold side dish to share

After Lunch - Children's Egg Hunt

March 30 - April 2 Holy Week Prayer Opportunity

10:00am - 3:00pm - Sanctuary is available for prayer

April 2 Maundy Thursday

6:00pm - Maundy Thursday Communion - Sanctuary

April 3 Good Friday

Field trip to Legacy Museum and worship at
First United Methodist Church Montgomery

April 5 Easter Services

7:00am - Sunrise Service - Courtyard

9:00am - Ascension Service - Fellowship Hall

11:00am - Traditional Service - Sanctuary
Children Singing

