



Reformation Evangelical
Lutheran Church
Lenten Devotional 2023

Through daily devotion, we can draw nearer to God. We read our Bible, coming across scripture we haven't read in a while, some we've never read at all, and other passages that are a well-worn path in our brain. The reflections written by members of our congregation allow us to experience scripture through different lenses and perspectives.

Take time for yourself and your faith life by "devoting" a few minutes each day to read the verses of the day, the devotion and prayer.

The front cover is an opportunity to complete some meditative coloring. Coloring can provide stress-relief and help you to relax.

Thank you to all who wrote for our Lenten Devotional.

Wednesday, February 22, 2023

Joel 2: 1-2, 12-17

Psalm 51: 1-17

2 Corinthians 5:20 – 6:10

Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21

“Even now, declares the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your hearts and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and He relents from sending calamity.” Joel 2:12-13

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to Your great unfailing love; according to Your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.” Psalm 51:1-2

Oh, such familiar words we reflect on each Lenten Season as we begin our journey to the cross of our hope and salvation! Today, Ash Wednesday, is all about “ashes all over the place”.

In one of my old paper piles I came across a message with that title written by Pastor James Covert. It appeared in the Synod News, January 2002! It is a 20 year old message, but still very timely for this day, so I’ve decided to share with you before I recycle it.

When we first started the Imposition of Ashes, many were uncomfortable – and perhaps some still are. Pastor Covert said, “This first day of Lent takes us to that innermost part we’d rather leave alone, that dark side we all have that’s captured by sin.” We have succumbed to a visible sign of our sin nature: a black cross on our foreheads for each of us to be able to see on all those around us! Uncomfortable, to be sure! Some of us may even be thinking: “stop getting ashes all over” or “take it off”, as Pastor Covert wrote.

So, here's the Good News from Pastor Covert: "Lent is a time to re-cleanse our souls by recognizing that our ashes of sin are all over the place but that the Cross of Jesus wipes that sin away".

Prayer: Hallelujah! We are so grateful, Jesus, that Your amazing love and sacrifice have covered it all for us! Help us to live as Your redeemed people in our sin-stained and broken world. In Your Holy name we pray. Amen

Judy Plica

Thursday, February 23, 2023

Jonah 3:1-10

Romans 1:1-17

Psalms 51

All three of these verses are about asking for forgiveness or showing repentance to God. God responds – with forgiveness. But the passage in Romans goes further. Paul talks about Christ, or Christ in a "nut shell", according to God. God promised his Good News (of the coming of Christ) a long time ago through the prophets, Christ was born into David's Line, for us. Christ died and was raised, for us. God's promise. As for me, I'm glad he kept his promise.

Paul is asking everyone who hears his call to believe, obey and bring Glory to God's name. The question I think about is: Do we do this? Can we do this?

Prayer: Lord, as Psalm 51 says – "create in me a clean heart and renew a loyal spirit within me." Amen!

Pam Schneeberger

Friday, February 24, 2023

Jonah 4: 1-11

Romans 1: 8-17

Psalms 51

Paul's letter to the Romans will eventually take on many of the major doctrines of the Christian faith including man's sinfulness, justification by faith, redemption through the blood of Christ, and salvation. But here, in the beginning of the letter, two things stand out to me. The first is in his longing to be with the people of Rome so that he can strengthen them but also so that they can encourage him. I have the same feelings about this project of Lenten devotionals. I hope that we are strengthened by reading the Biblical verses and each person's written response about them. But at the same time the writer (in this case, me) is also being encouraged. Sharing my thoughts with you helps me to build my own faith. This leads directly into the other part that stood out to me in verses 15-16 where Paul states that he is not ashamed of the gospel but eager to proclaim it to all. In my life I have been able to share my faith when speaking with other Christians but I have struggled when I am unsure of the others beliefs or know that they are not a believer in Jesus. I am working towards being more confident in my faith and being proud and unashamed to share the gospel.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the community of believers that we can turn to for strength and encouragement. But also give us the wisdom to continue to not be ashamed of the gospel but be empowered to share it. In Jesus name we pray. Amen

Dan Bergey

Saturday, February 25, 2023

Isaiah 58:1-12

Matthew 18:1-7

Psalm 51

“Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me...” We sang those phrases every Sunday many years ago in our old church. Like so many of our songs and hymns, I didn’t know the source material for the words. I have a vague recollection that this particular song came from a psalm, but today’s selections sparked my memory. What I didn’t know was what followed these lines in scripture. The psalmist continues by declaring that with his cleansed heart, renewed spirit and joy in his salvation, he will sing the Lord’s praises and return sinners to the Lord’s ways. We are all marked by sin and the Lord stands ready to forgive and “cleanse our hearts”. When we sincerely repent, we can experience the renewal and joy of forgiveness that we can share with others. The psalmist acknowledges that empty sacrifices aren’t necessary, but repentance, a contrite heart and praise were necessary for our relationship with God.

Prayer: Lord, every day we fall short of your glory. Help us to always praise you for your loving kindness and willingness to forgive. Help us to share your mercy and love with others as you have so generously shared with us. Amen

Joyce Neal

Sunday, February 26, 2023

Genesis 2: 15-17, 3: 1-7

Psalm 32

Romans: 5: 12-19

Matthew 4: 1-11

This verse is very well known; an over-simplified summary of the reading is that Jesus is tempted by the devil numerous times. The devil's temptations are after Jesus, after fasting forty days and forty nights. The devil's first attempt is telling Jesus to turn stones to bread. I believe this is what drew me to this verse. How many of us could fast for so many days, be offered (and have the power) to perform a miracle to feed ourselves? Through this example of the very real power of temptation, we can all attempt to relate to our struggles with sin. The theme between this day's readings in this devotion is sin. Sin was introduced into the human world by Adam and Eve (the Genesis reading). Just as sin was a curse to humankind, Jesus' life and death is the cure to our suffering. As much as we can compare these two events, the Matthew reading shows us that Jesus does not have the propensity or desire to sin. He was "tempted by the devil," but not "tempted to sin." Unfortunately, as humans we are both tempted by others and internally tempted to sin on our own. The following comes from analysis of the Matthew reading on Bible.org. "Make no mistake, Satan is very clever. He tempts you when you're hungry, angry, lonely, tired. Satan also tempts when you had a wonderful, spiritual event in your life. Satan tried to tempt Jesus right after he was baptized by His Cousin, John. The temptations in our life are real. We must be aware and make our own decisions, be it right or wrong. Just as Jesus remained strong in this Matthew verse, James 4:7 gives us strength and trust in God to continue to do the right thing, "So give yourselves completely to God. Stand against the devil and

the devil will run from you.”

Prayer: Lord, please help us to read and live the wisdom you have given to us in the Scriptures. We must remember that the devil tempted Jesus, but Jesus was not tempted to sin. Give us the strength to resist the devil, temptation, and wrongdoing through prayer and trust in you. In this fast-paced and technology-driven world that we live in, teach us ways to help each other resist the temptations of sin as well. In your holy name, Amen

Sherwood Robbins

Monday, February 27, 2023

1 Kings 19:1-8
Hebrews 2:10-18
Psalm 32

“Happy are those whose transgressions are forgiven; whose sin is covered.” Psalm 32:1

A sin is a sin. It is not little or big. It is a SIN; a wrongdoing. I learned this way back in sixth grade. Two of my girlfriends and myself went to an ice cream parlor. For what? ICE CREAM! In those days, ice cream was served with a special little spoon. Many people took that little spoon home and made a cute bracelet to wear around their wrist. The three of us decided to do that very thing. We sinned! Broke a commandment! I didn’t think of it as a sin because we were caught. The proprietor ran down the street after us and yelled, “I think you have something that belongs to me.” We immediately handed the spoons to him. (I think he even said “thank you”.) We quietly walked away.

At the time, I thought I did not sin because I gave my spoon back. Wrong! I sinned. I did something wrong.

After many Sunday School lessons, I had to admit I sinned BUT I was forgiven because of our Jesus who suffered a shameful death on a wooden cross and loves me so much that HE forgives my wrongdoings. (Jesus' blood cleanses us from sin. 1 John 1:7) All I need to do is confess and ask Him for forgiveness. Without hesitation He hears, forgives, and plants joy in our hearts. A wonderful feeling.

Perhaps we don't sin daily, but let's be honest and think about it. Do we judge people, say something unkind to a friend, break a promise, say a naughty word, make phony excuses, take something that doesn't belong to us and maybe even give it back, etc? All wrong doings. Talk with Jesus, confess, ask for forgiveness. You'll receive it and also feel joy.

The bible tells us that God made us like Him. Let's try to be like Him. Spread His love and joy and we will erase this hate around us. Then everyone will be happy.

Prayer: Thank you Jesus for making us happy by covering our sins. We learn from this Psalm that we do feel guilty when we sin; but happiness happens when we confess to you. Many, many thanks. Amen

Ruth Blatt

Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Genesis 4:1-16

Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10

Psalm 32

I'm sure we can think of a time when we were younger and we did something wrong whether it was breaking a window, hitting

a sibling or stealing something small like a toy. When we got caught, we of course lie for fear of getting in trouble. But just like God, our parents knew where we were lying and of course we got in trouble.

But a time out, getting grounded, or having a phone taken away is nothing compared to what God did to Cain. After Cain killed his brother and lied to God about it, God sent him away from his family and the land, the land he always knew and he would have to start on his own. But just like parents punishing their kids to help us learn and protect us, God protected Cain from meeting the same fate as Abel.

No matter how bad we think our sins, our God will always forgive us and protect us.

Prayer: Heavenly God help us to remember that no matter what kind trouble we will get into that you will always love us and take care of us. Amen

Katie Barnett

Wednesday, March 1, 2023

Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28

Matthew 18:10-14

Psalm 32

Verses 1-2: *"Blessed is the one*

whose transgressions are forgiven,

whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the one

whose sin the Lord does not count against them

and in whose spirit is no deceit."

God's grace is overwhelming. In these verses David is expressing relief for honestly confessing his sins to God. He is blessed by God's forgiveness.

In reading a commentary about these verses in *A Clay Jar*, by Ed Jarrett, I was struck by his concise and accurate reflection about repentance and God's forgiveness:

*"Acknowledging our sin before God can be hard. It means admitting failure. Going beyond mere acknowledgement, and repenting of what you have done is even harder. It involves a turning away from what you have done; something that you might find pleasure in. But David's experience, and that of countless others, is that **the restoration of a right relationship with God is better than any pleasure this world has to offer.**"*

A beautiful and challenging goal for us all – to restore our relationships with others, and with God, through our repentance. Blessings await us.

Prayer: Dear Lord, please bring to our minds the sins we need to acknowledge and confess to you. Please help us to honestly repent of our sins and to experience the blessing of a right relationship with you. Amen.

Kathy Austin

Thursday March 2, 2023

Isaiah 5:1-3

2 Timothy 1:3-7

Psalm 121

This letter was written to Timothy to encourage him to be persistent in carrying out the responsibilities of his Christian ministry.

I focused on verse 7, “for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” I like the wording of verse 7 as found in The MESSAGE, “God doesn’t want us to be shy with his gifts but bold and loving and sensible.”

The use of the word BOLD reminded me of the ELCA decal with the words “Love Boldly” that I have on my car window. Earlier this year a woman in the parking lot at Giant admired the decal and asked what the ELCA letters represented. That decal reminds me of my responsibilities to God and my church family.

Lent is a perfect time to encourage one another along our journey of faith, and sharing these devotions is one way we can do this.

Prayer: Lord, help us be bold in sharing our God-given gifts and in encouraging one another in our Christian faith. Amen.

Shelby Rutherford

Friday, March 3, 2023

Micah 7:18-20

Romans 3:21-31

Psalms 12

As usual I find that one of the readings highlights something I read recently. Today it was Psalm 12.

Frank Martela, a Finnish psychologist, was analyzing why the Finnish people are considered the most content population on earth. The Finns do not spend time comparing their lives to others. Neither do they flaunt their good fortune. Even the wealthy live simple lives. The Finns are also trustworthy, as was demonstrated by a social experiment where Finns were more likely to return lost items to their owners.

Psalms 12 is a lament. The writer laments the lies of boastfulness as evil. If you think about it, boastfulness leads to several other sins. It is often accompanied by lies, or at least exaggerations. The goal is either to build self-worth and status or to con others for personal gain. Jealousy grows when comparisons are made, which again leads to coveting and stealing. And trust is lost when people begin to worry about how these sins affect them. Boastfulness is self-centered, not God-centered.

Rabbi Hyman Schachte contends that happiness comes not from having what you want, but wanting what you have. The obsession on knowing the details of the rich and famous only saddens us when we don't meet those standards.

When we live in faith in Christ, center our lives on the gifts we are given and live in trusting support within our community, we can find the joy of heaven here and now.

Prayer: You, Lord, will keep the needy safe and will protect us forever from the wicked, who freely strut about when what is vile is honored by the human race. (Psalms 12:7-8) Save us from this temptation.

Kathy Miller

Saturday, March 4, 2023

Isaiah 51: 4-8

Luke 7: 1-10

Psalms 121

"But say the word and my servant will be healed."

The story of the Centurion and his servant is one of my favorite Gospel stories. You might say the Centurion is humble, you could say the Centurion has a great sense for protocol, or you

could say the Centurion knows his limits. What Jesus knows is that what the Centurion does reflects a depth of faith not often seen among his people.

It's interesting to me that this Centurion is a Roman that the Jews around him are willing to help. We know that he has helped the community, and the community is now willing to help him by being his envoy to Jesus. And we know that he feels a certain unworthiness because of his place in the community. I identify with the Centurions feeling of unworthiness. There have been many times I've prayed within myself at the altar, "Lord I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed." It's not a prayer that is intended to get me praised for my faithfulness. It's a prayer arising from my deep sense of unworthiness.

When I arise from the altar I feel a burden lifted, and I feel strengthened for the week ahead. I hope you do too. Such is our Lord's deep and abiding grace. Though we are undeserving, Christ comes to us and lifts us up.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for reminding us that it is not our worth, but your loving grace that makes us whole. Strengthen us now so we may serve others with that same free gift of love. Amen

Greg Stoddard

Sunday, March 5, 2023

Genesis 12:1-4a

Psalm 121

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

John 3:1-17

As I read this Psalm, I am transported back to my childhood. I smell the musty air lofting up from our old farmhouse basement,

and feel the chilly draft coming through the old original windows in the living room. I'm snuggled in contentedly against the cold and am warmed not only by the fire that's roaring in the fireplace at my feet, but the sounds of my parents rehearsing for an upcoming performance of Leonard Bernstein's "Simple Song," from his larger Mass written in the early 1970's, and based partially on Psalm 121. My mother, at the piano, lovingly following my father's rubato throughout the piece, and my siblings and I not only absorbing the music, but the words of this famous piece. The line that echoes most vividly in my mind, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills from whence comes my help," brings back the most heartwarming of memories for me. I remember looking up at my father, listening to his strong baritone voice proclaim this line, and thinking that he was the both the strongest, but also the gentlest person I knew; and that those words must be about him. He was my "hill" and my "help," and I knew that he would always be there for me, no matter what. When I listen to my father sing this piece now, his voice and mind worn by age; and find myself accompanying him in place of my late mother, I am still moved by these words, but in a much different way. I know that even the strongest of earthly fathers will fade, but that God will never allow his children to be lost or alone, and that our collective "going out and coming in" will be eternally watched over by Him.

Prayer: Dear God, watch over us. Help us to remember that we are not alone. Help us to sleep peacefully in the knowledge that you are ever watchful. Be our strength even when those in this earthly world fade from this life. Amen.

Heidi Rochlin

Monday, March 6, 2023

Numbers 21: 4-9

Hebrews 3: 1-6

Psalm 128

As we go through life, we confront many situations. Some are happy and we feel good about them. Some are difficult and we are not comfortable or even in pain mentally and/or physically. The Israelites wandered in the desert following Moses for 40 years! Think about that! That's a long time! Knowing myself, I probably would be complaining too. They had manna to eat – but I picture manna as akin to those baby cereal flakes – and years of eating that would be pretty difficult! So they grouched about and complained. And what happened? They were besieged by poisonous snakes! Maybe the manna wasn't so bad, after all. Perspective is helpful.

I had a close friend who succumbed to cancer after a long fight. But she was like the people in Psalm 128. She walked in the way of the Lord. She looked to the Lord for strength and patience and she found a way to bless those around her and receive blessings from them as well. We have choices in this life. We cannot often prevent or avoid troubles, but we do have a choice in how we react to them. And just as God turned a poisonous snake into a staff that would cure a person from snakebite – God can help us meet our troubles and prevail.

Prayer: Holy God, help us to turn only to you and choose to meet life's challenges with the secure knowledge that you are with us and that we need not fear. Help us recognize and receive the blessings we receive from others and also to be a blessing to those around us. Amen.

Teri Stoddard

Tuesday, March 7, 2023

Isaiah 65: 17-25

Romans 4: 6-13

Psalm 128

When he was president of the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, Dr. Rev. Philip D.W. Krey, gave me a book he and his son had edited, titled "Luther's Spirituality." It includes their translation of certain works by Martin Luther and has proven to be a good resource for me over the years.

They cite Dr. Luther's belief that Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans is the "clearest expression" of the gospel and represents "the soul's daily bread. It can never be read or pondered too often."

With that mind, turning to today's reading from Romans, Dr. Luther explains the passage, as translated by the Kreys, "Abraham was justified through faith alone without works...[even] before the 'work' of his circumcision...which God had commanded." Dr. Luther continues, "For just as Abraham's circumcision was an outward sign that attested to his righteousness through faith, so also good works are only outward signs that follow faith and prove...that a person is already internally righteous before God...It follows that only faith can obtain the grace promised to Abraham." Paul provided the example of Abraham "for us so that we should believe." Our soul is indeed enriched by this bread of knowledge!

The Psalmist writes at 128:1, "Happy is everyone who fears the Lord." To "fear" does not mean to be afraid of the Lord. Rather, the Lutheran Study Bible defines the phrase to mean having "a proper relationship with God—worship, love, obey and revere God." By first revering God and having faith, we can then "be glad and rejoice forever" (Isaiah 65: 18) with internal righteousness, doing good works in God's creation as a result.

Prayer: Dear Father in Heaven, we thank You for Your grace—Your love freely given—and thus may we always revere You with faith so that good works shall follow as outward signs of our righteousness. Amen.

Donald F. Smith, Jr.

Wednesday March 8, 2023

Ezekiel 36:22 – 32

John 7:53 – 8:11

Psalms 95

So... Who has not heard of the story about the adulteress whom the Pharisees brought before Jesus to “trap him, in order to have a basis for accusing him.”? I must believe that this story has been told to all Christians early in their religious education. I know that it was one of the first stories that I was taught while going through the RCIA program to become Catholic. That is the story shared by John for today.

For me, it is one of the most fundamental concepts that ALL people should understand and adhere to; however, seems to be one of the more difficult to follow. We are all sinners; yet as humans, we tend to judge and be judged by other humans.

Although not specifically spoken, Jesus shows that we are all loved unconditionally by our God and no one, other than God should be the one to judge us for such sins.

This Lent, let us reflect on our own faults and work to better ourselves while we lift up the people around us rather than looking for faults in others. As Jesus said: *“Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ~John 8:7*

Prayer: Lord, Thank you for the gift of the teachings that Jesus shares. May we learn from those teachings to be better disciples in doing Your will. Amen.

Carl R Kerchner

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Exodus 16:1-8
Colossians 1:15-23
Psalm 95

"Come, let's shout praises to GOD, raise the roof for the Rock who saved us! Let's march into his presence singing praises, lifting the rafters with our hymns!" Psalm 95:1-2, The Message

I love the phrases that The Message used for the beginning of this Psalm. Recently, during lunch at work, the conversation steered toward churches – specifically what some call “mega churches”. One of my co-workers described worship there as a concert with a lecture. I’ve attended a service with friends at an area “mega church” – and that’s not a terrible description – but what’s wrong with that? Praise bands are such named because they are outwardly praising God. Why shouldn’t we be “raising the roof” and “lifting the rafters” with our exclamation of faith and joy?

As a member of the choir, I see the beauty in our quiet, contemplative pieces, but also our bombastic and upbeat songs too! We may not have drums and electric guitars, but we are loudly praising God. Some of the times I’ve felt the deepest musical connection to my faith were at the Youth Gatherings – 30,000 people in an arena, singing together – raising the roof!

Prayer: Dear Lord, help us to remember to praise you loudly, both in song and not. Shout to the Lord! Amen.

Sarah Dobroskey

Friday, March 10, 2023

Exodus 16: 9-21

Ephesians 2:11-22

Psalms 95

In the verses in Exodus, the Israelites are concerned about not having enough food to eat. They voice their complaints to God. God provides them with food, but includes specific instructions. When the Israelites disobey, their hoarded food spoils and is wasted.

We, too, worry about not having enough. We hoard milk, bread and toilet paper whenever there is the slightest threat of snow. We worry if we have enough saved for our futures. We work hard and think of ourselves first before others. Are we taking care of our neighbors in need?

God told the Israelites to take as much as they needed and there would be enough for everyone. Each family that took just as much as they were allotted had plenty. Should we be thinking in the same terms today? When we shop, if we only bought what our family really needed, there would not be a shortage in the store. As we prepare for our futures, will we have enough if we take care of those around us? It may be scary but God will provide for us just as we are caring for our neighbors in need.

Prayer: Dear Lord, It's hard to not worry about the future. Our first instinct is to think about ourselves. Open our eyes and our hearts to the needs of those around us. Help us to share our many blessings with those in need. Assure us that you will provide for our needs, too. We ask all this in Jesus' name. Amen

Karen Hawk

Saturday, March 11, 2023

Exodus 16:27-35

John 4:1-6

Psalm 95

The word that struck me as I was reading this psalm today was ‘rock’ – as in verse 1, “...let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation.” That may be because in this week of early February I was thinking about Jesus’ parable at the close of the Sermon on the Mount about a house built on rock versus a house built on sand; it might also be because my car was hit by a rock on Route 422 on my drive in to the church earlier this week, making a big ding in the paint on the roof (better than the windshield, I guess).

And that raises the observation that rocks have lots of different attributes, some good, some not so good. I’m not a geologist, and I’m speaking in general here, but if we’re using rocks as images, it’s important to realize what we’re implying. Rocks are hard, so it’s bad to be hit with one, but by the same token, if a rock is big enough, then it’s going to be strong and firm and solid – a good foundation for a house. Rocks can be used for building things (some Roman roads, built thousands of years ago, are still in good shape), but can also be used for killing things (ask Stephen, who was stoned in Acts 7). Jesus highly praised Peter once, after he realized and clearly said that Jesus was the Messiah, and called him a rock – the Greek word for Peter, in fact, means rock. But the phrase ‘Dumb as a box of rocks’ isn’t really a compliment. Even the account of Massah and Meribah in Exodus – that the last section of the psalm is about – has a conflicted image of a rock; what that the people need (water) comes out of one, but the peoples’ complaints show their lack of faith. The point is, then, that – like most things – it’s complicated. Even something as simple as a rock.

Prayer: God, help us to be guided by your wisdom, and solidly founded on your love. Amen.

Paul Metzloff

Sunday, March 12, 2023

Exodus 17:1-17

Psalm 95

Romans 5:1-11

John 4:5-42

Exodus 17:2 - *"So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."* My study bible has a footnote for this verse that reads: "Some problems can be solved by careful thought or by rearranging our priorities. Some can be solved by discussion and good council, but some problems can be solved only by prayer." During breakfast before our congregational meeting, some recent tragedies in the news were mentioned at our table. Sadly, it was a tragedy that has been a frequent occurrence. A question arose, "What can be done to stop this?" It's a question that can be applied to every problem that exists in our society. What can we do to stop the evil? There is not an easy solution like the one God provided to Moses; yet, God "simply" provided the water when Moses talked with God about it.

We can be overwhelmed by thinking about all the horror that exists in our world, or we can put our energies into prayer. There are no simple solutions, but solutions may be revealed through prayer.

Praying to God about our concerns, praying with intent and consistency is never wasted time. It gives us purpose and control over our thoughts when we focus on what God is capable of, not when we focus on our own helplessness.

Jesus overcame death! Although horror exists in our world and people constantly suffer tragedies, God can overcome in ways we can never imagine! There are countless books written about the grace and mercy of God experienced by thousands of people after 9/11! We can either focus on our helplessness or put our Hope in Jesus Christ to take our mess and turn it into something miraculous.

Prayer: Dear God, Please help us to put our HOPE and TRUST in You. Amen.

Kathy Austin

Monday, March 13, 2023

Genesis 24 1-17

2 John 1-13

Psalms 81

It's possible to go through the motions of religion outwardly yet remain inwardly stubborn, self-willed, and disobedient to the Lord. The way to avoid a wasted life is to walk in obedience to God. The story of how the Israelites failed to trust God should come as a lesson to us all.

We need to trust that God will provide for our needs—we often grumble about the route that is taken and give off a feeling of ungratefulness. We need to be careful not to idolize false gods. Not that we make golden calves, but...many times we put self, pleasure, money, power and a lot of other things ahead of God. There is no mistake that God has told us how to live in this evil world, so as, to please God and avoid things that would destroy us. Religious people disobey God because it seems like disobedience will get them where they want to go. Sin deceives us into thinking that we can get what we want apart from God.

Our sinful nature has us seek the comforts of life—but God’s word is clear—seek Him first and He will take care of our comfort and needs. God disciplines us by letting us pay the consequences of our sin but will restore us and bless us.

Prayer: Let us pray. Lord give us the strength to see that following Your word will ultimately give us what we need. Always remind us that You are abundantly gracious. Amen

Rich Hawk

Tuesday, March 14, 2023

Genesis 29:1-6

1 Corinthians 10:1-4

Psalm 81

When people think of the Lenten season, the first question they ask themselves is, “What am I going to give up for Lent?” I believe the first question that people should ask themselves is, “Why am I giving something up for Lent?” We are reminded that Jesus died for our sins, but what are we thinking of during the rest of the year? Jesus took the world off of our shoulders. He has removed us from bad places, but we may continue to sin and steer into our temptations.

Psalm 81 is a great example of the selfless acts that God has done for us, but it also shows how we don’t always listen or pay attention to what is given to us. Psalm 81 personally reminds me of how much people truly take for granted. I know I take the fact that I can go to work and come home to my family for granted. I have a home to go to with my favorite people and pets. I can cook almost any dinner that we want that night and run to the grocery store whenever I need. So many people don’t have a

home to go to, or can't go grocery shopping whenever they want. Even though this season is only 40 days, how can we remind ourselves during the remainder of the year of the things we may take for granted that others do not have?

Prayer: Dear God, please be with us as we navigate our way through various levels of temptation. Help us remember the sacrifice you made for us, and continue to help us see what we take for granted in our everyday lives. Amen.

Maddie Klinikowski

Wednesday, March 15, 2023

Jeremiah 2:4-13

John 7:14-31, 37-39

Psalm 81

The last verse in the Jeremiah reading immediately caught my attention because it is quoted in dialogue from a series I've been watching – perhaps you know it – “The Chosen.” It's a historical drama series about the life of Jesus. In this episode, the character Simon (the disciple, Simon Peter) helps to repair a broken cistern in the town of Capernaum. He remembers and quotes from memory this prophecy from Jeremiah chapter 2:

*“My people have committed two sins:
They have forsaken me,
the spring of living water,
and have dug their own cisterns,
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.”* (vs. 13)

Peter's partner in the work, Gaius (a Roman), says that this sounds like a riddle and tries to guess it. “Sounds like your god identifies as a source of water, and the broken cisterns are a sign

that you turned your back him. So have you? I mean, forsaken him?"

It's an interesting metaphor. Why build a cistern when you have a source of fresh water, living water? But Gaius was right. God's people don't trust God to provide for their needs and try to provide for themselves. But all that they get from their efforts is dirty cistern water that runs dry.

Prayer: Merciful God, you are the source of living water. Our lives are dry and broken when we turn away from you. Pour out your spirit upon us to quench our thirst and wash away our sin. In the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, Amen.

Elisha Barnett

Thursday, March 16, 2023

1 Samuel 15:10-21

Ephesians 4:25-32

Psalm 23

Ah, good old Psalm 23 – the most familiar and beloved of the Psalms, the subject of countless pictures and paintings, words both beautiful and comforting (and, as a result, very often used at funerals and burials). It conjures up images of green rolling hills and dark, forbidding valleys, and brings to mind Jesus' description of himself as the Good Shepherd.

Another of the images that this psalm uses is that of the tools of the shepherd – the rod (like a club, to fight off any predators – it's not for use on the sheep!) and the staff (the longer, thinner one, often with a crook on one end). However, there's another meaning of the word 'staff' that has always had meaning for me, with my particular background and experiences. And that's the idea of a staff as a group of people that all work together for

some common end – the staff of a hospital, for example, or of a school. I’ve been a staff officer several times back when I was in the Army: an operations officer, a supply and logistics officer, an executive officer.

And it’s worth realizing, I think, that there are people acting as God’s staff today as well: our denominational staff of the ELCA, mostly based in Chicago; our synod staff, in Allentown; and quite a few folks in our own congregation taking care of the office and the finances and the building and music. And that’s only from our point of view, not counting chaplains or other denominations or all sorts of other things! God’s staff can be thought of as a living community as well as a stick with a curl on the end.

Prayer: God, may we be comforted by your staff – in all of their many shapes and forms. Amen.

Paul Metzloff

Friday, March 17, 2023

1 Samuel 15:22-31

Ephesians 5:1-9

Psalm 23

Psalm 23 is probably the most well-known of all the psalms. It is a comforting image, a peaceful image – often used as part of funeral services. “Surely, goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.”

My sister loves sheep. Or rather – she loves the images of sheep. Cute, fluffy, sociable with all the rest of the sheep. I don’t think she would really like to be in a close encounter with a real sheep. David knew all about real sheep. In one of the first

sermons that Greg ever gave – he talked about real sheep – smelly, often dirty and matted, sometimes infested with pests and generally not too bright. I think about that sermon whenever the image of the shepherd occurs in the Bible reading – because that is what we are likened to – not the cute and fluffy images – but real sheep. But God loves us with all our unsavory characteristics and seeks to lead us to make good choices and live according to his law - in harmony with one another. And He is with us as we travel through the paths of this life, seeking to lead us in the right path but supporting us when we inevitably take a wrong turn.

Prayer: Holy God, help us to pay attention to your words and directions as found in scripture and fulfilled in the life and death of Jesus. Help us to find the right paths. Thank you for understanding our brokenness and working to make us whole, clean and working for your kingdom. Amen.

Teri Stoddard

Saturday, March 18, 2023

1 Samuel 15:32-34

John 1:1-9

Psalms 23

John 1:5 – *“The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”*

My study Bible offers this explanation: *“‘The darkness has not understood it’ means the darkness of evil has never and never will overcome or extinguish God’s light.”*

Jesus is our light! What a promising visual to hold in our hearts. Seeking daylight, basking in the sun, being warmed by a campfire, lighting a candle, turning on lights in a darkened room

– these are all small but powerful images of how Jesus can bring us out of the darkness. A little bit of light can illuminate a dark space, but even a lot of darkness cannot extinguish light. We see evidence in the stars and glowing moon at night.

When we study the gospels and spend time reading about Jesus, our minds and hearts are transformed; we come out of the darkness into the light. ALPHA is a course pioneered by Nicky Gumbel; a program that helps people understand the truths of Jesus Christ. Nicky Gumbel was the most unlikely person to become passionate about spreading the light of Christ. He was an intellectual atheist who denied the existence of Jesus – until he did research – and came to believe. He then expanded the ALPHA course which ultimately led millions of people into a relationship with Jesus.

Light in the darkness – that is Jesus in our world. We can reflect that light as well, even in the smallest ways. An encouraging word, a smile, a random act of kindness. The smallest kindness can lead to huge impact. We may never know how Jesus will use our good deeds to spread His light.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, help us to shine your light and love throughout our day. Amen.

Kathy Austin

Sunday, March 19, 2023

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Psalm 23

Ephesians 5:8-14

John 9:1-41

I've always found this Psalm to be both poetic and inspiring. I love the acknowledgement that we walk through a valley with

green grass and still waters, but also shadows and evil. That is life: the light and the darkness, the beauty and the tragedy. As I journey into parenthood, I'm already balancing the innate desire to shield my child from harm with the understanding that my role is really to coach him through pain and hardship. Caution him against danger, of course, but also kiss the boo-boo and help him stand back up. For me, that is the message here. There is real evil and hardship in this world, but we can keep walking through it because we aren't alone. God is there to shield, at times, but also to teach, to support, and to help us find our way back to light.

Prayer: Dear God, as I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, help me to not fear but instead look towards the light, lean on my community, and rest in my faith. In Your name I pray, Amen.

Angie Peechatka

Monday, March 20, 2023

Isaiah 59:9-19

Acts 9:1-20

Psalm 146

This is one of five 'hallelujah' psalms – those focusing on praise – that come at the end of the book of Psalms (which ends at either 150 or 151, depending on what version/translation you're using). And, logically enough, it begins with the words 'praise the Lord,' which is what hallelujah means in Hebrew. And while I debated using this devotion to discuss the nature and purpose of praise (I think it's for us and for our neighbor far more than it is for God), this particular psalm is also useful to point out the overall coherence of scripture. That's based on

verses 6-9, which not only praise God as the creator of all (6), but also as one who is concerned with justice and hunger (7), frees the prisoner and gives sight to the blind, lifts up the bowed down and loves the just (a far better word than righteous) (8), and watches over strangers, widows, and orphans (9).

All of those are themes that run throughout all of scripture.

From the commandments to the laws of Deuteronomy, from the words of the prophets to the words of Jesus, these keep showing up. For a collection of books spanning thousands of years, scores of authors, and several languages, I find that consistency extremely comforting. This is what God cares about.

Prayer: God, help us to be agents of your justice and heralds of your kingdom. Amen.

Paul Metzloff

Tuesday, March 21, 2023

Isaiah 42:14-21

Colossians 1:9-14

Psalms 146

Scripture tells us to Praise God. A great hymn says, "Praise God from whom all blessings flow!" Praise is to compliment, admire, and appreciate.

Practice by starting the day with Him; as we open our eyes.

Thanking and praising Him for another day. We have another chance to be more like Jesus. This will help us to have His light shine through us to others. Thank and praise Him all day long. Jesus has conquered this world. Our struggles and problems become not as important or complicated.

As we lay our heads down at night to fall asleep, thank him and

express our love for the day's blessings. Better than counting sheep! Peace will be given as you fall asleep.

Prayer: Continual focus on the heavenly things makes worldly issues better to overcome. Continual refocus and repentance can change you. "There will be showers of blessings, this is the promise of love." Try it! Amen

Kathy Galbraith

Wednesday, March 22, 2023

Isaiah 60:17-22

Matthew 9:27-34

Psalms 146

I read a commentary on this passage and the writer referred to the "outside" Jesus and the "inside" Jesus. I thought this was a very interesting way to define Jesus in this passage. The blind men following Jesus in this passage were crying out to him and he did nothing. However, when Jesus enters the building, He proceeds to heal them. We reach out to Jesus in prayer and sometimes feel that our prayers are not being answered in the way we were hoping or as fast as we would like. We could be tempted to say that the "outside" Jesus wasn't listening. We should remember that Jesus is always listening to us and answers in ways we may not understand ("inside" Jesus). Sometimes this means trusting in Jesus even when He is silent.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to remember that you are always listening to us and that you will answer us when you feel we are ready. Amen.

Melanie Bechtel

Thursday, March 23, 2023

Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3

Revelation 10: 1-11

Psalm 130

Ezekiel 2:8...“But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious house, open your mouth and eat what I give you.”

Ezekiel 3:3...“Then he said to me, ‘Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.’ So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.”

We live in a culture that spends a great deal of time, energy, and money focused on the food we eat. A wide array of books, videos, diet plans, and supplements promise to show the dietary secrets for everything from losing weight to improving energy and brain function. Yet, while nourishing our bodies healthfully is very important, is it not even more important that we properly “feed” our souls?

When God spoke to Ezekiel, assigning him the task of delivering His message to the rebellious Israelites, He knew Ezekiel needed to be well-fortified spiritually to do so. God instructed him to open his mouth and “fill” himself with God’s spiritual food, His Word, knowing that would give Ezekiel wisdom, courage, and faith for his difficult task ahead.

We, too, need to fill ourselves regularly with this same spiritual food if we are to live our lives as God intends and effectively share His message with others. We must be open and committed to spending time reading God’s word with focus and praying for the Spirit’s guidance to help us understand and apply God’s truths. God understands there will be times when this commitment is challenging for us, just as daily exercise and healthy eating can be also. However, if we remain dedicated,

God's words of strength, peace, hope, and love will provide us with all we need to live our lives in faithful service to Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, inspire in us the desire and dedication to draw closer to You through Your word and prayer. Help us to resist other worldly distractions and make this a priority in our daily lives during this Lenten season. Amen.

Nadine Blackburn

Friday, March 24, 2023

Ezekiel 33: 10-16

Revelation 11:15-19

Psalm 130

TO FORGIVE – Many times we find it difficult, and sometimes, all but impossible. In “A Place at the Table,” the Communion Hymn we sang each week in January, we were presented with a real forgiveness challenge in verse 4. It asks us to reach out with a mindset of mercy – not only to the just and abused, but also to the unjust and abuser. We read the paper, watch the TV news, or maybe there's a situation closer to home, or to our family. Our first reaction might be to dig in our heels and set ourselves up as judge. How can we ever forgive what we have deemed indefensible?

In Ezekiel, God promises to those who turn from their sin and do what is lawful and right, that none of the sins they have committed will be remembered against them. As Christians, we are called to share that promise in our daily interactions. We ask to be forgiven as we forgive others. Are we ready to live up to the perfect example that has been set for us? Probably – well, definitely not. But we are asked to strive to do better each day - to reach out with gentleness, compassion, and forgiveness. Each

new day gives us another opportunity to try and to grow. To quote that same hymn, in our dealings with others, may we always look to “create justice and joy.”

Prayer: Gracious God, We trust in your promise of mercy. Guide us in ways of compassion and understanding. Strengthen us in our striving to forgive others as you have forgiven us, and grant us grace to live our lives in your image and service. Amen.

Joanne Scattergood

Saturday, March 25, 2023

Ezekiel 36: 8-15

Luke 24: 44-53

Psalm 130

I liked Ezekiel the best because God is basically making a promise to rebuild a land that was devastated by starvation, war, and suffering. He promised that all the people will come back and the towns will be rebuilt from ruin. He promised that the land will be plowed again, fruit trees and animals will multiply, and families will feel safe and prosperous. He's saying to have faith and continue your belief in God. Everything that is missing in your life currently will be filled again.

I like the image of rebuilding and a new fresh start. It gives hope for a better future because people didn't have enough food and were starving. Other neighboring nations would belittle and laugh at them because they had very little. This is similar to when you leave something or some place because of an issue or conflict and you decide to revisit that moment in life with a new outlook or perspective. It resembles leaving things in the past and starting a new chapter in life – one of hope and faith with an optimistic vision for the future.

Prayer: Lord, when we are down and struggling, help us to have faith and hope that you will provide a better future for us. When we feel that there is something missing from our lives, help us look to you, Lord, for a renewed and full life. Amen

Kayla Karasek

Sunday, March 26, 2023

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Psalm 130

Romans 8:6-11

John 11:1-14

Death and taxes. That's what we're guaranteed in life, and not much, if anything, else. We know both are unavoidable, and we know both are inevitable, and yet, the former still finds ways to surprise us. Over the past four months, I've twice been met with the unpleasant news of a very unexpected death. One was a close family member, and the other was the father of a close friend. I'm not sure anyone saw either coming. I know I didn't. Sudden, unexpected deaths like these have a unique sting to them because they don't allow for closure, or an opportunity to say goodbye. So what can we do to avoid the sting of the unavoidable? I'm not sure of the answer to that one, but not even Jesus could escape it.

John's gospel for today tells the story of the death of Lazarus, and later in this story, we hear how deeply it affected Jesus. Even knowing how the story of Lazarus would transpire, Jesus was disturbed and upset, some of the same emotions we experience. It's a powerful and important reminder that Jesus was, above all else, human. On Sunday mornings in our sanctuary, we hear how there's always some form of "good news" in the gospel. It can be difficult to find "good news" in

death, but I think there's a good lesson here. And much like Jesus used the death of Lazarus to demonstrate the power of belief to a crowd of people, there are positive things that can be brought forth from death. Though we can't escape the death of those close to us and the pain that comes with it, we can affect how we allow it to shape us. It's taught me that time is precious, and you never know how much of it you have. It's taught me that nothing should be taken for granted, and that you should take advantage of the opportunities you have when you have them. It's taught me to be conscious of, and prioritize, the people and things that are truly important. And it's taught me that time spent on things like anger and jealousy is time wasted, and time that we can't afford to lose. Forgive and seek forgiveness. If you love someone, tell them now, because you don't know if and when you'll have another opportunity. I missed an opportunity to say thank you to someone before it was too late, and I won't make that mistake again. I've found that if things like these are done proactively, it helps ease the sting of death and retroactive regret. So reach out to the people you're close with to tell them you care, and also reach out to the people with whom you need to repair a relationship. Don't let differences and disagreements be what keeps you and others apart. Not saying I have it mastered or that it's easy, only that it's easier than living with the pain of regret. The good news here is that these are all choices that we can actively make. And that sense of control is an element of hope and positivity in death.

The most effectively I've heard it said was from Andy Dufresne to his friend (and fellow Maine State Prison inmate) Ellis "Red" Redding in the movie *The Shawshank Redemption*: "I guess it comes down to a simple choice, really. Get busy living, or get busy dying." So what's your choice?

Prayer: Lord, give comfort to us when we're faced with the pain brought on by death, give us the wisdom to recognize what is most valuable in our lives, give us the strength to take action on the opportunities we have to make our lives the fullest they can be, and remind us that, even when it's most difficult to find hope and positivity, death is not the end.

Andy Dobroskey

Monday, March 27, 2022

1 Kings 17:17-24

Acts 20:7-12

Psalm 143

Verse 5: *"I remember the days of long ago;
I meditate on all your works
and consider what you have done."*

Today's readings from 1 Kings 17 and Acts 20 are similar in that they are both resurrection stories of boys brought back from death. God's mercy and healing are recorded in these verses. We may experience different types of death in our lives – death of our spirit, our faith, our mobility, our purpose, etc. We may understand the feeling when someone kills our enthusiasm, our confidence, or our hope. Life is hard and it can cause a lack of faith. It is easy to lose our trust and assurance in God, in others and in ourselves.

But God gives us a true gift and blessing through the Bible. Every human trial has been recorded with evidence of God's love, grace, and mercy triumphing over evil.

Psalm 143:5 reminds us to remember and meditate on the blessings we receive and to acknowledge God's goodness. For years my Bible Study group recorded our prayers and petitions

to God in journals. It was astonishing to see how many blessings were received, and how many prayers were answered when we looked back through the journals. Without a record we could easily have forgotten how God provided us with renewed spirits and faith as our hurts were healed and prayers were answered. Many spiritual leaders recommend keeping a list of our blessings so we can reread these truths in our lives and rebuild our faith in Jesus. I encourage you to give it a try.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, as we journey to the cross during Lent, please help us to remember all that You have done for us. Thank you for our answered prayers and the blessings provided. When our spirits are crushed, please help to renew our faith by meditating on the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the blessings You provided us in our past. Amen.

Kathy Austin

Tuesday, March 28, 2023

2 Kings 4: 18-37

Ephesians 2: 1-10

Psalm 143

I chose this date for my devotion because today is our 25th wedding anniversary. I have been reflecting quite a bit lately on these last 25 years. I could write for days. The “high” was our intimate and beautiful wedding at the Reading Country Club surrounded by our close friends and family. Pastor Mike was our officiant and performed part of our service in Hebrew. The “low” was on July 18, 2018 at 1:30 pm when I received a call that my son Gregory was found passed away in his apartment.

The “constant and the amazing” is God’s mercy and Grace. We have been saved through faith. This is not our own doing. *It is the gift of God.*

He will not leave us. He will take us by the hand and reassure us that we will be strengthened to persevere.

Are the storms easy? No. Even the celebrations are not always easy.

I believe that our storms and our celebrations have all been prepared beforehand by God. Through the mercy and grace of a loving God we can pay forward many mitzvahs (good deeds) as we live through our storms and our celebrations.

Prayer: God of mercy, thank you for the gift of your Grace. In our highs and our lows hold our hand and help us to remember you are walking with us even though we don’t see your footprints. Amen.

Lisa Sokoloff

Wednesday, March 29, 2023

Jeremiah 32: 1-9, 36-41

Matthew 22:23-33

Psalm 143

Jeremiah was not one of the happier prophets. This was probably because the era that he worked in was a difficult one of the People of Israel; the fall of Judea at the hands of the Babylonians was coming as a result of their faithlessness and injustice. So Jeremiah’s messages, as a result, were largely negative, and nobody much wanted to listen to him.

One of the things that he did, then, was – instead of simply talking – take symbolic actions to try and show the people things. He buried a set of linen undergarments, until they rotted,

then dug them up and wore them around (interesting). He smashed a clay bottle in front of a crowd (slightly violent). He wore an ox-yoke in front of the city leaders (odd – everybody thought he was a bit odd). These were all fairly negative actions, obviously.

But Jeremiah also took a positive action, which is what this text was about. With the Babylonian invasion – which he said was going to succeed – impending, Jeremiah took the strange action of buying a field. A piece of land, of real estate . . . making the point that while things were bad, and going to get worse, they wouldn't be that way forever. There would be punishment, there would be exile, but there would also be return and rebuilding. God was about forgiveness as well as about justice, and that was worth illustrating with an action too.

Prayer: God, let our actions speak louder than our words. Amen.

Paul Metzloff

Thursday, March 30, 2023

1 Samuel 16:11-13

1 Philippians 1:1-11

Psalms 31:9-16

Reading this passage made me think of how some of us felt during the Covid pandemic. Prisoners in our own homes, wanting to see our church family in the flesh, desiring to go out in the public for meals, a movie, school sports and the list can go on and on.

Praying for each other and our faith and trust in God and Christ gave us the strength to go on knowing God will bring us better days ahead and our life will slowly return to the normal we once knew and loved so much.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for listening to our prayers as we pray for those listed on our Prayer Chain and around us. You may not give us the exact request we ask for but You know what is best for us and in the end we are cared for by Your love. Amen.

Judy Zettlemoyer

Friday, March 31, 2023

Job 13:13-19

Philippians 1:21-30

Psalms 31:9-16

Sister Andre' recently died one month before her 119th birthday. Born in France in 1904, she survived the Spanish flu in 1918, celebrated the return of her brothers after WWI, became a nun at age 41 during WWII, and would be the oldest person to survive Covid 19. Sister Andre' spent 31 years at a hospital in Vichy tending to patients, but after retiring, continued working until age 108 comforting other residents of the nursing home even after going blind and confined to a wheelchair. In an interview in 2020, she stated she would be better off in heaven with her brothers. Yet Sister Andre' accepted that God had not yet called her as she continued to inspire others in faith.

The writers in these readings also have suffered and are trusting in God's will to relieve them of their misery. But Paul, like Sister Andre', writes to the Philippians that though he longs to be in heaven with God where he would be better off, he is thankful that he can continue to serve in prison. Paul and Sister Andre' both see their situations not in a negative way but rejoice that they can continue serving God. Their faith in the Lord sustains

and comforts them, while they comfort others. When life becomes hard remember that faith in God will sustain us.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, be with us when life gets hard. Renew our faith in You, that we too can continue to inspire belief in Your undying love.

Kathy Miller

Saturday, April 1, 2023

Lamentations 3: 55-66

Mark 10: 32-34

Psalm 31: 9-16

*I called on your name, LORD,
from the depths of the pit.*

*You heard my plea: "Do not close your ears
to my cry for relief."*

*You came near when I called you,
and you said, "Do not fear." (Lam. 3: 55-57)*

The reading from today's Psalm and the passage from Lamentations are similar in tone and subject. The writer is feeling oppressed and beaten down by enemies. We never really learn who or what the enemies are, only that the situation has left the writer feeling bereft and alone. When I feel like this, like our writers, I cry to God for relief. When I was younger I had a harder time seeing where the hand of God was holding me up and helping me. Whether its age, or the benefit of hindsight, as I look back over my life I can see those times when God responded to me in my distress, and even carried me when I could carry myself. I've never found the question, "Why are you doing this to me God?" as if God were the enemy, very helpful. It never

takes too much digging on my part to see where my responsibility in my troubles lay. So, it's good to be reminded, when the chips are down and all else seems lost, call on the Lord. As in both our readings and the Gospel for today...God will be there caring for you.

Prayer: Lord, when we cry out in our distress you hear our prayer and attend to our suffering. Give us voices to call on you and eyes in faith to see you working. Amen

Greg Stoddard

Sunday, April 2, 2023

Matthew 21:1-11

Isaiah 50:4-9a

Psalms 31:9-16

Philippians 2:5-11

Matthew 26:14 – 27:66

“Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus”

Philippians 2:5

Wow! How do we ever begin to accomplish this?? It seems to me that a key word is attitude. Webster's describes it as “position assumed or studied to serve a purpose.” Once our purpose – to have the attitude to Jesus – has been determined, what's next?

As I meditated, I kept being drawn to Isaiah 50: 5-7 in particular. There's a note I wrote in my Bible in 2021 bracketing verses 6 and 7 that reads, “Jesus is Holy Week is for Us!” What might Jesus' attitude have been at that agonizingly painful moment? I think there's a clue in “Sovereign Lord” used twice in these verses.

Are you able to join me in thinking that Jesus in humility “modeled” for us His recognition and acceptance of the Sovereign (Supreme) plan of His Father?

“He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – on a cross” Philippians 2:8

Let’s define humility! Webster’s says it is the “act of submission.” Jesus, in humility, submitted to His Heavenly Father’s Sovereign Plan for His life!

How did the witnesses to Jesus’ commitment to carry out His Father’s Supreme plan react on that long-ago Palm Sunday?

Many cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David; Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.”

Matthew 21:9. “However, the chief priest tore his robes and said, ‘What do you think?’” Matthew 27:66a

Is this still a valid question for us in our day? What do we think about our Savior and Lord? I invite you to ponder that throughout this next week called Holy, as we journey to the Cross and beyond to Resurrection Day!

Prayer: Help us, Lord Jesus to slow down this Holy Week and deeply consider Philippians 2:5. The Good News is that Paul helps us with these encouraging words: “I can do everything through Christ who gives me strength” Philippians 4:13. “The glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in You, the Hope of Glory” Colossians 1:27b. Hallelujah! Amen and Amen

Judy Plica

Monday April 3, 2023

Isaiah 42:1 – 9

Psalm 36:5 – 11

Hebrews 9:11 – 15

John 12:1 – 11

Of the 4 readings for today, I was particularly struck by the verses depicted in Hebrews. For those who may not know me well, I am a scientist. A chemist to be specific and I enjoy mathematics as a hobby. I like things to be precise, calculable, and real. Yes, both science and math contain elements that are unproven and imaginary; but that's the purpose of being a scientist...to try to make those 'elements' tangible. As part of my nature, Faith is a struggle point of mine. I must believe in something that I cannot touch, which is the basic definition of Faith. The verses in Hebrews help me to see Faith as a veritable concept. Throughout the reading, there are comparisons made relating worldly, man-made actions to concepts that are analogously divine and for me that is helpful in allowing me to 'keep the Faith.' Even with all of that said, the more dynamic and profound idea that I found in this reading is the very last sentence: "*...now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*" ~ Hebrews 9:15. Ever since attending Via de Cristo, the concept that 'His blood was shed for me' has been one of the most powerful ideas that humbles me every time I read, hear, or think about it and I am genuinely sorry that Jesus was put on the cross for my sins.

Prayer: Lord, Thank you for the gift of your Son whose ransom has set us free. Let us not take that sacrifice lightly so that we may act more honorably to do Your will always. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Carl R Kerchner

Tuesday, April 4, 2023

Isaiah 49:1-7

Psalms 71: 1-14

1 Corinthians 1: 18-31

John 12: 20-36

It's obvious that these passages were paired together for a reason. One asks for God's protection; one asks for God's leadership; one asks for wisdom; and the final passage speaks of how to live life – walk in the light and serve others. It seems that you can't do one without the other. That last part though can be such a struggle for some and seemingly easy for others. Serving others doesn't have to be a struggle. It can be as simple as getting a glass of water for someone or calling them on the phone to ask how their day was. It can be also something more involved as a long-term commitment to charity or being a Sunday School teacher; but either way, the fundamental thing we are asked to do as Christians is to love our neighbors and what better way to show that love than to serve them. In serving others, we will definitely need God's protection, His leadership, and wisdom. Protection to keep us from harm. Leadership to see the path, and wisdom to know the 'when' and the 'how'. In serving others, we learn more about God's love and bring a little piece of His kingdom to earth. As Jesus said, "If you lose your life in this world, you will be given eternal life."

Prayer: Dearest Jesus, we can learn so much about serving others from your examples. Please guide us, protect us, and give us the courage to make the choice to serve others on a daily basis. Amen.

Michelle Karasek

Wednesday, April 5, 2023

Isaiah 50:4-92

Psalm 70

Hebrews 12:1-3

John 13:21-32

When I first read the Hebrews passage, the first thing that came to my mind was a race, a foot race. Keep your mind on the goal, don't change course.

I've never run a race, but I have run behind a "barn sour" horse, encouraging him to run. Why, he chose to walk, unless it was returning to the barn. I know this was not a race, but there was a lot of running and a goal in mind. My sister and I would take turns riding or running behind. There was a lot of clapping hands, waving and assorted odd noises going on. But we reached our goal – a trot. And he became a very dependable horse.

Following Jesus can be a similar path. Keep heading toward him and we will be rewarded. He is the goal. We have plenty of people around us to help us stay the path. He is all our main goal.

Prayer: Lord, please keep us on track to follow you. Help us to lose all the things that slow us down, all that unwanted baggage. My wish is for all of us to cross that finish line. Amen!

Pam Schneeberger

Thursday, April 6, 2023

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14

Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

I love Holy Week. Each day has its own distinct feel. Maundy Thursday is all about communion and washing feet. I don't know about you but I've never washed anyone's feet (except various little children). While in Biblical times, it was a necessary thing. We now wear better footwear, have better roads and better transportation. So our feet don't get so dirty. But one of my favorite anthems from Maundy Thursday is Wash Their Feet by Pepper Choplin. Here are the lyrics:

There one night in the upper room, He laid aside His robe. He wrapped a towel around His waist like a servant's clothes. Then my Master, Lord and King kneeled to do this amazing thing, He washed their feet...

The Lord said, "As I come to wash your feet to make you pure and clean, go out now and touch the world, do what you have seen. Hear My call and live it true, do for them what I do for you, Go, wash their feet.

When the Lord left heaven to come down, He laid aside His glory and His crown. He did not cling to power or follow after fame. Still all heaven sings the glory of His name.

Be a servant, humble and meek, wash their feet. Hear My call and live it true, do for them what I do for you.

And this I believe is the important message. Be a servant, humble and meek. Do for them what I do for you. It's not about washing feet, it's about taking care of those around you. Humble means to lower yourself. It's about putting others before yourself. Jesus gave them the Great Commandment, to love each other as He loved them. So our mission is to put others first, humble ourselves, and reach out to those in need.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, in a world that rewards the proud and assertive, it's hard to lay that aside and serve others. Help us to follow your example. We may not be able to wash other's feet but show us other ways we can love those around us as You love us. Amen.

Karen Hawk

Friday, April, 7, 2023

Isaiah 52:13-53:12

Psalms 22

John 18:1 - 19:42

Hebrews 10:16-25

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" The opening words of this Psalm were some of Jesus' last words, and there are several references in the text of the Psalm which correspond to the details of what Jesus suffered that Friday. Beyond the prophetic overtones, Jesus' choice of this poem gives us some insight into his mindset during his last moments. It evokes a heart-rending sense of loneliness and inescapable impending doom, but not hopelessness. The only hope in the poem lies with God, that He might remember and save the petitioner. Yet this hope seems far off early in the poem, a desperate plea which may go unanswered. Late in the poem, however, the tone changes as it appears that the petitioner's prayer was answered and that somehow, God had revealed a path to victory. Jesus knew that his time of testing would pass and that by remaining faithful, God would hear his cries and ultimately use what he went through for a great purpose. This reminds us that while sometimes the evil around us seems insurmountable, but we need to hold on to the hope that God will hear us, save us, and use what we go through for His purposes as well.

Prayer: Dear God, please strengthen us for the challenges that lie ahead and be with us, always. Empower us to play our parts in your plans which we cannot hope to understand ourselves. Guide us through the dark times in our lives and help us to remember the good things that are to come. Amen.

Bradley Rhodes

Saturday, April 8, 2023

Romans 6:3-11

John 20:1-18

What happens in your life when you get upset and feel out of control? Do you react by crying as Mary did at the tomb when she found the tomb empty and Jesus was gone and she thought someone had taken his body? Maybe you react by getting very angry with yourself or others that may have hurt you. Do you believe you need the approval from other people in order to be happy? God wants us to behave correctly, so He gives us what we need in order to do that. God never requires us to do something without giving us what we need to do the task. God has given us the free gift of righteousness so we can become righteous in what we think, say or do. Our sins are great but his righteousness is far greater. Our righteousness is not found in what people think of us, it is found in Christ Jesus. You are righteous in Him and because of that God is pleased with you.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father: I ask for your strength every day to help us to react to our everyday lives with righteousness and grace. Amen

Cindy Shirey

Sunday, April 9, 2023

Acts 10:34-43

Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24

Colossians 3:1-4

Matthew 28:1-10

“This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!” Who else remembers belting out those words during Sunday school choir rehearsal as Spring was just breaking through the winter cold; and having that excited feeling in their stomach knowing that the Easter bunny would soon be visiting with all sorts of fabulous treats? Even though most days I can’t remember what I had for breakfast, I can still remember every word to every bible school song I ever learned. This is the power of the Psalms, and music for me. The word of God reaches every person in a special and unique way. For me, the words of the Psalms, and the verses in the Bible are all brought to life through music. Music is how I rejoice in God’s name, in the coming of his son, and Jesus’ death and rising for our sins. Whenever I sing, or make music with my family and friends, I help to not only spread the great news of Easter, but rejoice in the days that He has made possible. Through this day, and all others, I rejoice! How do you rejoice?

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for creating a space in which we can rejoice in your name. May all of our days bring us reason to rejoice, and on those that do not, help us to take refuge in your strength. Amen.

Heidi Rochlin