The background of the entire page is a textured, purple-toned brushstroke pattern. The strokes are vertical and vary in intensity from dark purple to light lavender, creating a sense of movement and depth.

Lent

DEVOTIONAL

2021

maple avenue ministries

Wednesday, February 17, 2021

Beloved MAMily,

Welcome to the season of Lent. Lent is a time in the church calendar stretching from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday, a forty day journey of preparation, reflection and repentance. It is commonly a season in which followers of Jesus decide to fast from something (chocolate, social media, etc.) or to enter into a new, intentional practice (daily prayer, scripture reading, etc.).

During this Lenten season, as we continue to navigate the world as affected by a global pandemic, we wondered about a way to bring the Maple Avenue Ministries community

together in a creative way. And so, the following is a daily Lent devotional written by the MAMily, for the MAMily. Each day includes a scripture reading from the day's lectionary passage, and a short reflection, question for pondering, and a prayer from a member of the MAMily (of all ages!).

We are excited to invite you into this daily practice with us and with the great cloud of witnesses from within the MAMily who have shared their reflections and prayers in the coming pages. I'd like to acknowledge the diligent and faithful work of our current seminary interns, Anna Christians and Nathaniel Ryan, as they have collaborated with me, and taken on leadership with the organization and

heart of this project. We are also grateful for the beautiful cover art by MAMily member, Celeste Ryan. I give special thanks to these three individuals, as well as each person who contributed in writing, for sharing their gifts in these ways.

And now, let us enter faithfully into the word of God and prayer- across time and space- together, always together.

Much love,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Pastor Emily". The word "Pastor" is written in a cursive style, and "Emily" is written in a more fluid, cursive script.

Pastor Emily

Wednesday, February 17

Written by: Pastor Emily

Psalm 51:1-17

¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.³ For I
know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass
judgment.

⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,

a sinner when my mother conceived me.

⁶ You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.

⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.

⁹ Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.

¹¹ Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from

me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your
salvation,

and sustain in me a willing spirit.

13 Then I will teach transgressors your
ways,

and sinners will return to you.

14 Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,
O God of my salvation,

and my tongue will sing aloud of your
deliverance.

15 O Lord, open my lips,

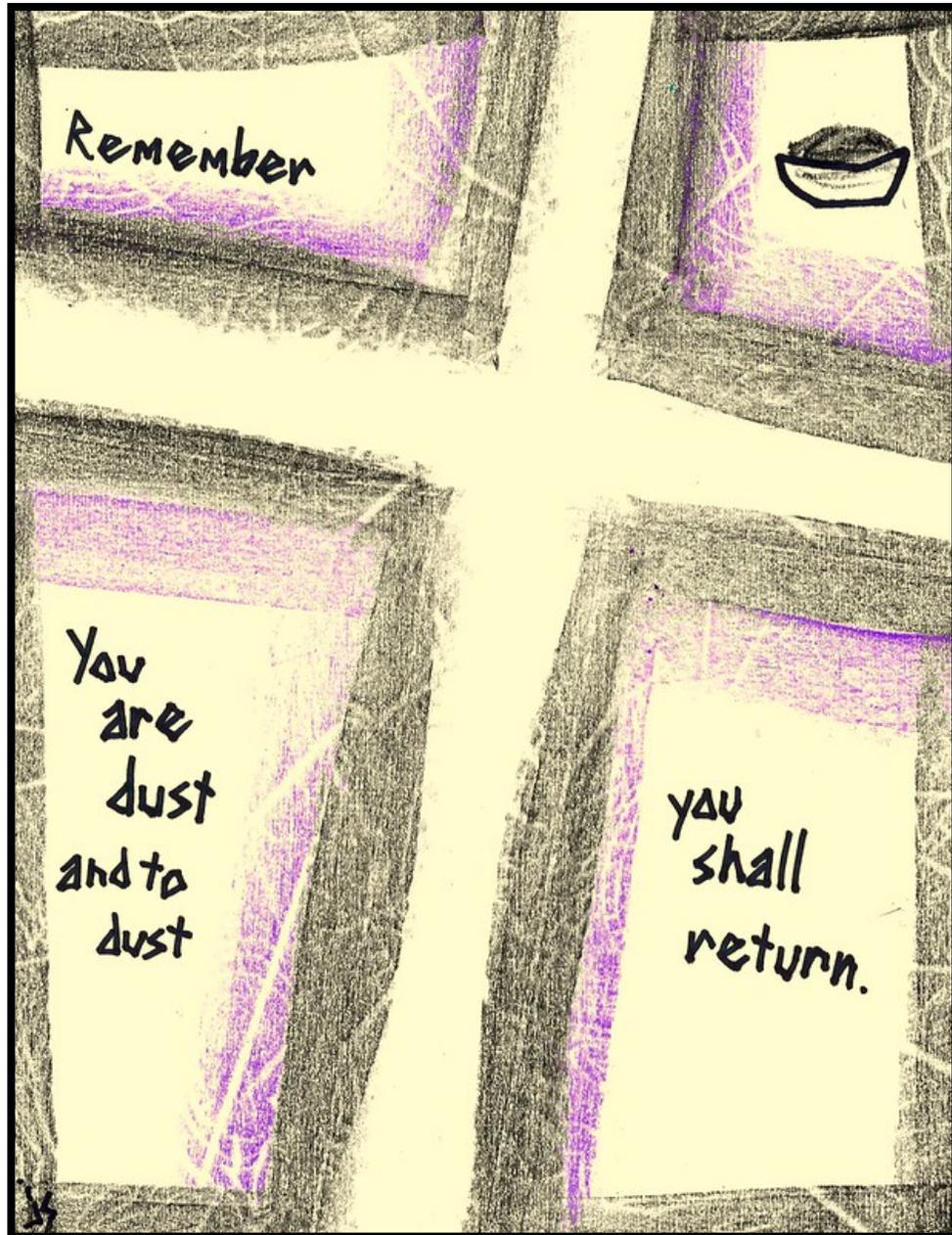
and my mouth will declare your
praise.

16 For you have no delight in sacrifice;

if I were to give a burnt offering, you
would not be pleased.

17 The sacrifice acceptable to God is a
broken spirit;

a broken and contrite heart, O God,
you will not despise.



by John Stuart,
used with permission via stushieart.com

Reflection:

Today marks the first day of the season of Lent. It is known as *Ash Wednesday*, a name that comes from the practice of marking a person's forehead with the sign of the cross in ashes while reciting the words, "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (from Genesis 3:19). It is a day of repentance that begins the slow journey of reflection and fasting towards the Cross on Good Friday and culminating in the triumphant Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

But before we arrive victoriously at the Empty Tomb, we walk intentionally through the 40 days of Lent to prepare, to repent, and to pray. This begins on Ash Wednesday with confession. Psalm 51 gives us words to speak that admit

our wrongdoings, and own our failures to love God and love our neighbor. The psalmist cries out to God not only for forgiveness, but to “create in me a clean heart, and put a new and right spirit within me.” As we confess the ways in which we fall short, let us also pray for a renewal within us that fills us with God’s spirit, God’s heart, God’s wisdom, and God’s ways.

Question:

In what specific ways or areas of life would you like a clean heart and a new and right spirit within?

Prayer:

Have mercy on me, O God. For I know the ways in which I have failed to love You and love my neighbor. Create in me

a clean heart and put a new and right
spirit within me. Amen.

Thursday, February 18
Written by: Nathaniel Ryan

Daniel 9:1-14

¹In the first year of Darius son of Ahasuerus, by birth a Mede, who became king over the realm of the Chaldeans— ²in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, perceived in the books the number of years that, according to the word of the Lord to the prophet Jeremiah, must be fulfilled for the devastation of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. ³Then I turned to the Lord God, to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. ⁴ I prayed to the Lord my God and made confession, saying, “Ah, Lord, great and awesome God, keeping covenant and steadfast

love with those who love you and keep your commandments, ⁵ we have sinned and done wrong, acted wickedly and rebelled, turning aside from your commandments and ordinances. ⁶ We have not listened to your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, and our ancestors, and to all the people of the land.

⁷ “Righteousness is on your side, O Lord, but open shame, as at this day, falls on us, the people of Judah, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and all Israel, those who are near and those who are far away, in all the lands to which you have driven them, because of the treachery that they have committed against you. ⁸ Open shame, O Lord, falls on us, our kings, our officials, and our

ancestors, because we have sinned against you. ⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercy and forgiveness, for we have rebelled against him, ¹⁰ and have not obeyed the voice of the Lord our God by following his laws, which he set before us by his servants the prophets.

¹¹ “All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. So the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses, the servant of God, have been poured out upon us, because we have sinned against you. ¹² He has confirmed his words, which he spoke against us and against our rulers, by bringing upon us a calamity so great that what has been done against Jerusalem has never before been done under the whole heaven. ¹³ Just as it is written in the law of Moses, all this

calamity has come upon us. We did not entreat the favor of the Lord our God, turning from our iniquities and reflecting on his fidelity. ¹⁴ So the Lord kept watch over this calamity until he brought it upon us. Indeed, the Lord our God is right in all that he has done; for we have disobeyed his voice.

Reflection:

Keeping watch over calamity.

Daniel begins his prayer as we would expect, praising God in humble submission and admittance of guilt. However, Daniel's prayer takes an interesting turn when he goes on to justify God's judgement on Jerusalem. This isn't a prayer of deliverance, asking for God to receive Jerusalem and the Israelites from the suffering and calamity that they are receiving during the exile

and destruction of their cities. Daniel understands this suffering as judgement and immediately turns to confession. While it would be dangerous to assume that God's judgement is always in response to our own wrong-doings, we know full well that pain, suffering and calamity occur. Whether its the wilderness or exile, destruction or loss, we have all this calamity, and will continue to experience it while we live in a fallen world. The promise of the Lord still stands, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." God is present, giving us hope amidst our hardship, and through his Son has shared in our suffering. It is for this reason that we can say with confidence that the Lord keeps watch over our calamities.

Question:

Our natural tendency is to avoid difficulty, pain and calamity; how might God be calling us into a posture of humility so that He can make Himself so incredibly present amidst our pain?

Prayer:

Lord God, you are close. You have made your promise to be with us from the highest heavens to the depths of Sheol. Let me live in this truth, the truth of your steadfast and unfailing love, amidst the confusion and pain of this world.

Friday, February 19

Written by: Anna Christians

2 Timothy 4:1-5

¹ In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I solemnly urge you: ² proclaim the message; be persistent whether the time is favorable or unfavorable; convince, rebuke, and encourage, with the utmost patience in teaching. ³ For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths. ⁵ As for you, always be sober, endure suffering, do

the work of an evangelist, carry out your ministry fully.

Reflection:

Paul and Timothy proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ in tumultuous times-times that were most likely unfavorable. In the midst of those difficulties, Paul encouraged Timothy to be persistent, to endure suffering, and to carry out his ministry fully. Whatever our circumstances are today-whether they are favorable or unfavorable-the call to carry out our ministries fully remains. Each one of us faces various difficulties over the course of just one day. However, we can find Paul's words to be encouraging for a few reasons. First, he reminds us that all of our lives are lived "in view of his appearing and his

kingdom.” Hope is always on the horizon. Second, Paul gives us encouragement for the meantime-to be sober, to endure suffering, to do the work of one bringing good news, and to carry out our ministries fully. In the midst of uncertainty and a lack of truth, we can continue to bear the good news of the gospel through our callings while holding onto the hope of Christ’s kingdom.

Question:

How can I carry out my ministry fully today? What is Christ calling me to today?

Prayer:

Lord, I pray that you would open my ears to hear what you are calling me to

today. I pray that you would open my eyes to see the ways I can carry out your mission today. Guide my thoughts and footsteps that they will follow in your light and in your truth. Amen.

Saturday, February 20

Written by: Nathaniel Ryan

Psalm 25:1-10

¹ To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

² O my God, in you I trust; do not let me be put to shame; do not let my enemies exult over me.

³ Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame;
let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths.

⁵ Lead me in your truth, and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all day long.

⁶ Be mindful of your mercy, O Lord, and of your steadfast love, for they have been from of old.

⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord!

⁸ Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in the way.

⁹ He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble his way.

¹⁰ All the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness, for those who keep his covenant and his decrees.

Reflection:

I've always imagined Psalms of lament being written in a literal pit. Being overwhelmed by darkness, the steep walls covered in mud, the oppressive

impossibility of climbing out. The good news is that we were never supposed to climb out alone. If you notice in this Psalm, the Psalmist recognizes that knowing God's ways, paths, and truths are only a result of God's steadfast love and mercy. God makes the first move! God moves down into the pit to carry us up to deliverance and freedom, the freedom to live in faithful pursuit of God's ways.

Question:

In what ways have you attempted to dig yourself out of your pit instead of submitting to both our inability to claw our way out and God's desire to lift us out?

Prayer:

Lord God, Mount of Zion, it is You who saves out of your overflowing and unquenchable love for me. I ask that you give me the strength to submit to you, to humbly live in your grace, mercy and love for me.

Monday, February 22

Written by: Caleb Williams

Ephesians 2:1-10

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ² in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. ³ All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. ⁴ But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and

seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹ not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Reflection:

We are human, we are dead in our sin, lost in our transgressions and overwhelmed by the desires of flesh, this is known. It is also known that through faith in Jesus who was sent by

God in his divine mercy, we are set free from the bindings of this world. Now being set free we are made new and with a greater purpose and a plan is set before us and built on the foundation of God's will. With this new life we are made to do good works through Christ and for Christ.

Question:

How will you honor the gifts and abilities given to you by God to glorify Christ?

Prayer:

Lord I pray that you may guide the words of my mouth to be uplifting, constructive and glorifying to you. I pray that you will guide my hands to put the building blocks of your kingdom into place here on earth. Lord guide me to

do what is right for you, and for your children. Amen.

Tuesday, February 23
Written by: Dawn Williams

Job 5:8-27

“But if I were you, I would appeal to
God;

I would lay my cause before him.

⁹ He performs wonders that cannot be
fathomed,

miracles that cannot be counted.

¹⁰ He provides rain for the earth;

he sends water on the countryside.

¹¹ The lowly he sets on high,

and those who mourn are lifted to
safety.

¹² He thwarts the plans of the crafty,

so that their hands achieve no
success.

¹³ He catches the wise in their craftiness,

and the schemes of the wily are
swept away.

14 Darkness comes upon them in the
daytime;

at noon they grope as in the night.

15 He saves the needy from the sword in
their mouth;

he saves them from the clutches of
the powerful.

16 So the poor have hope,
and injustice shuts its mouth.

17 “Blessed is the one whom God
corrects;

so do not despise the discipline of the
Almighty.

18 For he wounds, but he also binds up;
he injures, but his hands also heal.

19 From six calamities he will rescue you;
in seven no harm will touch you.

20 In famine he will deliver you from

death,

and in battle from the stroke of the sword.

21 You will be protected from the lash of the tongue,

and need not fear when destruction comes.

22 You will laugh at destruction and famine,

and need not fear the wild animals.

23 For you will have a covenant with the stones of the field,

and the wild animals will be at peace with you.

24 You will know that your tent is secure; you will take stock of your property and find nothing missing.

25 You will know that your children will be many,

and your descendants like the grass

of the earth.

²⁶ You will come to the grave in full vigor,
like sheaves gathered in season.

²⁷ “We have examined this, and it is true.
So hear it and apply it to yourself.”

Reflection:

I need to ask myself, am I the one who
appeals to God and lays my cause
before him (vs 8)?

Or am I the one who is crafty, scheming,
and wily (vs 12-14)?

I am both.

God is the one who lifts me up high,
saves the needy, and gives the poor
hope. And God corrects.

Vs 17 "For he wounds, but he also binds up; He injures, but his hands also heal."

The NIV translates verse 19 as "From 6 calamities he will rescue you; in 7 no harm will touch you". Proverbs 6:16-19 lists the 7 things the Lord hates. I am guilty of all 7. And he rescues me.

What a contradiction. He allows me not to be harmed by actually injuring me. Do I want his healing and binding up from my brokenness? Or do I want to exist in the darkness? I'm a believer who can choose to not be healed, I can be saved and also despise the discipline of the Almighty. Instead, may I want to choose his healing, his binding, his hope.

God's protection does not mean that I will not experience destruction, famine, wild animals, or stones of the field. It is not a matter of IF these will happen to me but WHEN they will be in my life. BUT God wills me to be protected, to laugh, to be at peace, to be secure, to find nothing missing, and to have descendants.

Vs 26 "You will come to the grave in full vigor, like sheaves gathered in season."

Prayer:

Dear Lord, This life is far from easy, but you keep me safe. This is not the safety where nothing hard happens to me, but my heart is safe with you. Help me to open my heart to your correction. Help me to live a life of hope in days of hurt,

to rejoice in your wonders, to finish full of vigor before I am gathered fully to you. Oh Lord, I long for that day. In your precious name, Amen.

Wednesday, February 24

Written by: Regan Postma-Montaña

Psalm 77

- ¹ I cry aloud to God,
aloud to God, that he may hear me.
- ² In the day of my trouble I seek the
Lord;
in the night my hand is stretched out
without wearying;
my soul refuses to be comforted.
- ³ I think of God, and I moan;
I meditate, and my spirit faints.
- ⁴ You keep my eyelids from closing;
I am so troubled that I cannot speak.
- ⁵ I consider the days of old,
and remember the years of long ago.
- ⁶ I commune with my heart in the night;
I meditate and search my spirit:

7 “Will the Lord spurn forever,
and never again be favorable?
8 Has his steadfast love ceased forever?
Are his promises at an end for all
time?
9 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has he in anger shut up his
compassion?”
10 And I say, “It is my grief
that the right hand of the Most High
has changed.”
11 I will call to mind the deeds of
the Lord;
I will remember your wonders of old.
12 I will meditate on all your work,
and muse on your mighty deeds.
13 Your way, O God, is holy.
What god is so great as our God?
14 You are the God who works wonders;
you have displayed your might among

the peoples.

15 With your strong arm you redeemed
your people,
the descendants of Jacob and
Joseph.

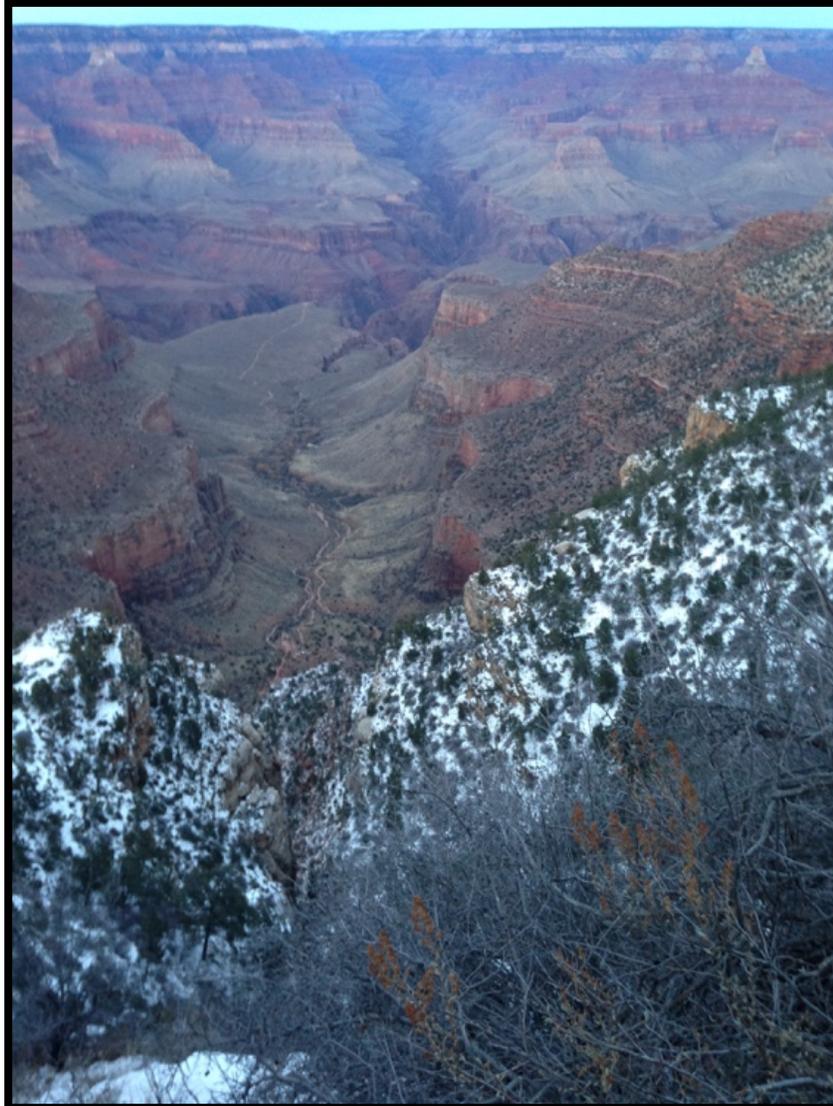
16 When the waters saw you, O God,
when the waters saw you, they were
afraid;
the very deep trembled.

17 The clouds poured out water;
the skies thundered;
your arrows flashed on every side.

18 The crash of your thunder was in the
whirlwind;
your lightnings lit up the world;
the earth trembled and shook.

19 Your way was through the sea,
your path, through the mighty waters;
yet your footprints were unseen.

20 You led your people like a flock
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.



Reflection:

In the midst of dark days, we may feel like the psalmist—our spirits faint, our voices full with heavy moans or silent with too much pain to bear. Here, in these moments, the psalmist teaches us not only to cry out to God but also to tell the stories of the goodness of God. The psalmist indeed “calls to mind,” “remembers,” “meditates,” and “muses” on God’s mighty deeds. From this, we too can see, there is power and hope in contemplating the stories of the goodness of God.

Question:

What “deeds of the LORD” and “wonders of old” come to mind as you reflect on God’s faithfulness in your life and community?

Prayer:

Good Shepherd, Thank you for caring for us. Bring to mind for us all of the stories of your past faithfulness even as we seek to trust in you. Amen.

Thursday, February 25

Written by: Michelle R. Loyd-Paige

Romans 3:21-31

²¹ But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, ²³ since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; ²⁴ they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; ²⁶ it was

to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus.

²⁷ Then what becomes of boasting? It is excluded. By what law? By that of works? No, but by the law of faith. ²⁸ For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. ²⁹ Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, ³⁰ since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the ground of faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. ³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.



Reflection:

I like to think of myself as a good person. I think that most people would say that I am good person. I have never been arrested, I pay my taxes, I give to several charities, my social media postings are positive, I ... well you get the picture. Fortunately, there are many good people in this world. Unfortunately, there are also many people who are counting on being “good” to equate with

righteousness at the day of judgement. The Apostle Paul in the book of Romans, reminds us that no matter how good we are or how good others think we are, we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We can't help it. We all inherited a sinful nature from Adam and Eve. We can try to overcome our sin nature by doing good, but it will never be enough. Good works do not equate to the righteousness we need at the day of judgement. The good news is that the righteousness we need for justification is given by faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

Question:

Honestly, which are you trusting more – good works or faith in Christ Jesus -- for justification?

Prayer:

Gracious God, I thank you that through faith in Christ my sins have been forgiven. During this Lenten season help me to see where I am trusting more in good works than in my faith in Christ. Amen.

Friday, February 26
Written by: Bruce Benedict

Psalm 22:23-31

23 You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring
of Israel!

24 For he did not despise or abhor
the affliction of the afflicted;
he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.

25 From you comes my praise in the
great congregation;
my vows I will pay before those who
fear him.

26 The poor shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise

the Lord.

May your hearts live forever!

27 All the ends of the earth shall
remember

and turn to the Lord;

and all the families of the nations
shall worship before him.

28 For dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.

29 To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in
the earth bow down;

before him shall bow all who go down
to the dust,

and I shall live for him.

30 Posterity will serve him;

future generations will be told about
the Lord,

31 and proclaim his deliverance to a
people yet unborn,

saying that he has done it.



Resurrection, by Sister Photina, 1965

Reflection:

The Suffering Servant Wins the Deliverance of the Nations

The second half of Psalm 22 is shocking and unexpected. Many Christians will be familiar with the verses from the first half of this psalm which rang out from Jesus' own mouth on the cross, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" But few read past those lines as they quickly turn to Psalm 23 a more familiar psalm. But Psalm 22 as a whole is a beautiful journey from Golgotha to the glory of Resurrection and the gathered joy of Pentecost.

Verses 23-31 is broken into two movements - verses 23-26 the psalmist offers his sacrifice of praise as a growing crescendo into verses 27-31

where the all the nations will be gathered up in the symphony of redemption. I love how the psalms are a study in contrasts. I'm always grateful to be reminded that there is no height or depth of human experience that can't be found in the psalms. In this pandemic season where the gathered community feels so far away the repeated theme of the nations gathered encourages me that our future is one where we will be together under the joy of the Lord.

Question:

In this Lenten season how will you pray for the nations as one whom God has delivered?

Prayer:

Dear Suffering Servant glorified,

Give me strength during this Lenten season to proclaim your deliverance to my own heart, my family, my friends, and the nations that you so dearly love. Take my prayers and expand them beyond my own insecurities and failings. Open my heart to remember your goodness and proclaim through my life your love for generations not yet born. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Saturday, February 27

Written by: Rachel VanDam

Genesis 16:7-15

⁷ The angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, the spring on the way to Shur. ⁸ And he said, “Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?” She said, “I am running away from my mistress Sarai.” ⁹ The angel of the Lord said to her, “Return to your mistress, and submit to her.” ¹⁰ The angel of the Lord also said to her, “I will so greatly multiply your offspring that they cannot be counted for multitude.” ¹¹ And the angel of the Lord said to her,

“Now you have conceived and shall bear a son;
you shall call him Ishmael,
for the Lord has given heed to your affliction.

¹² He shall be a wild ass of a man, with his hand against everyone, and everyone’s hand against him; and he shall live at odds with all his kin.”

¹³ So she named the Lord who spoke to her, “You are El-roi”; for she said, “Have I really seen God and remained alive after seeing him?” ¹⁴ Therefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; it lies between Kadesh and Bered.

¹⁵ Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram named his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. ¹⁶ Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore him Ishmael.

Reflection:

I gotta tell ya. I feel I was given a difficult passage! I read and re-read this and thought it was very thorny. That message God gave Hagar is not exactly one I would want to receive! She's running away and He tells her to go back. She's going to have a son, but he is going to be a wild donkey of a man and have a life of hostility. Thorns!

Where is a rose? The angel delivers it in guiding Hagar and telling her that her descendants will be too numerous to count. She was so moved she named God, the One who sees me. Because Hagar was willing to listen and submit to God, she was Seen. We can complain because rose bushes have thorns. Or we can rejoice that thorn bushes have roses. Even more so, we can rejoice

that God, indeed, always sees us, cares for us, guides us, and provides for us. Life has thorns. But life also has blessings. And when we submit to Him, the blessings are too numerous to count.

Question:

Can a perspective shift help you through anything in your life right now?

Prayer:

Dear Lord, Thank you for guiding me through all of life's thorny passages. You truly are the One who sees me and never forsakes me. Please help keep my eyes on You that I may see Your innumerable blessings. Amen.

Monday, March 1:
Written by: Maryann Blystra

Psalm 105:1-11, 37-45

¹ O give thanks to the Lord, call on his name,

 make known his deeds among the peoples.

² Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wonderful works.

³ Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.

⁴ Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually.

⁵ Remember the wonderful works he has done,

 his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,

6 O offspring of his servant Abraham,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones.
7 He is the Lord our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.
8 He is mindful of his covenant forever,
of the word that he commanded, for a
thousand generations,
9 the covenant that he made with
Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
10 which he confirmed to Jacob as a
statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
11 saying, “To you I will give the land of
Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance.”
37 Then he brought Israel out with silver
and gold,
and there was no one among their
tribes who stumbled.

38 Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon it.

39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.

40 They asked, and he brought quails,
and gave them food from heaven in
abundance.

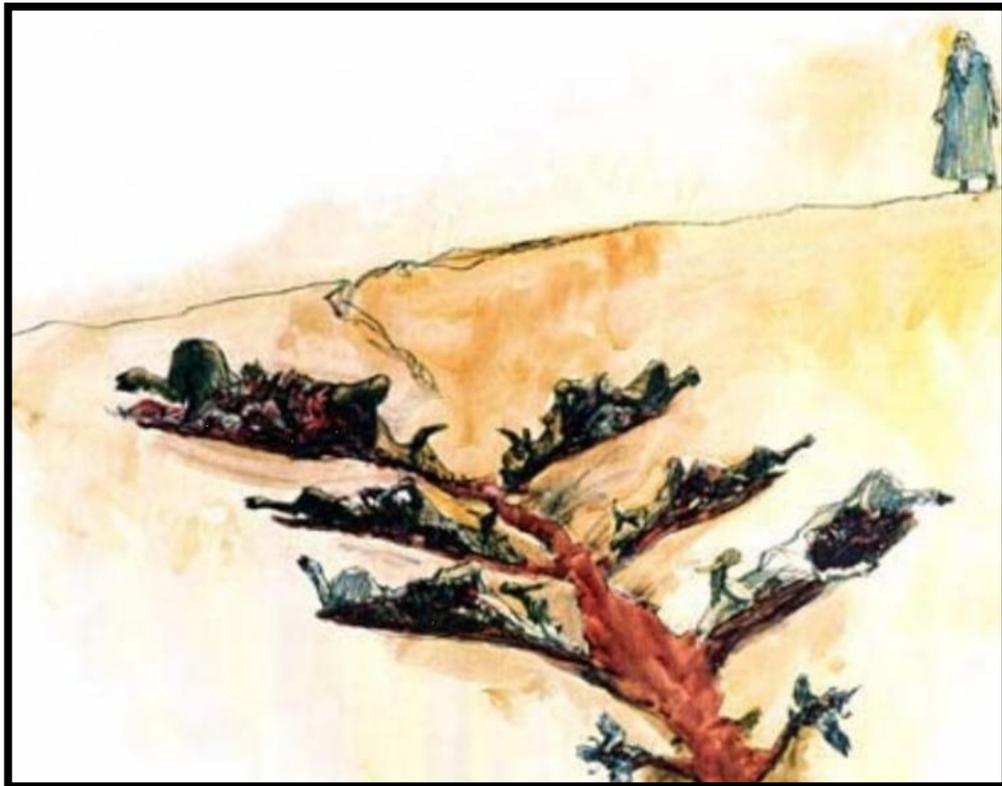
41 He opened the rock, and water
gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a
river.

42 For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.

43 So he brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.

44 He gave them the lands of the
nations,
and they took possession of the
wealth of the peoples,
45 that they might keep his statutes

and observe his laws.
Praise the Lord!



Reflection:

When God made his covenant with Abraham (and all of his descendants) they made a blood covenant, meaning that they dug a trench, cut animals in two, and placed the halves on each side. The blood would fill the trench and

God and Abraham would walk through the blood. Once they walked through the blood that meant that if they broke the covenant the blood in the trench would become their own blood. God understood that Abraham was sinful and would break the covenant, so God took on his side of the covenant. God walked through the blood twice so that Abraham would not have to. Because Abraham sinned that means that God would have to die. So He sent Jesus to do it, He sent Jesus to finish *my* blood covenant, to protect me, and to save me.

Question:

How often do you stop and reflect on how God's covenant with us is affecting your life every day?

Prayer:

Lord, I am blessed to know you, I am thankful that you sent Jesus to take my side of the covenant. I want to know you better and get closer to you. Thank you for putting people in my life that guide me toward you even though I might not realize. Thank you Lord, In **your** name I pray, Amen.

Tuesday, March 2

Written by: Keith Blystra

Genesis 22:1-19

After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ² He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.” ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young

men, “Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.” ⁶ Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷ Isaac said to his father Abraham, “Father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham said, “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So the two of them walked on together.

⁹ When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then

Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven, and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.” ¹² He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.” ¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns.

Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place “The Lord will provide”; as it is said to this day, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided.”

¹⁵ The angel of the Lord called to Abraham a second time from heaven, ¹⁶ and said, “By myself I have

sworn, says the Lord: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷ I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, ¹⁸ and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.” ¹⁹ So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham lived at Beer-sheba.



Art by HeQi

Reflection:

“Together. Always together.” These three words are a constant from the pulpit at Maple Ave. They are words that test us as a community. They confront us, convict us, and motivate us to love the way we do. Within the provocative story

from Genesis 22 there is a moment of stillness and harmony between Abraham and Isaac. The moment is broken when Isaac comes to terms with a horrifying reality, “*where is the lamb for a burnt offering?*” “*God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering my son,*” says Abraham. This reply from Abraham is ambiguous. The original language, Hebrew, has no punctuation. If you put a comma after ‘offering’ it looks like Abraham is trusting God to come through. But if you put a colon after ‘offering’ it looks like Abraham is telling Isaac some bad news, that *he* is the offering. Regardless of how you read it the situation is heavy and it is unclear at this moment how things will turn out in the end. The text is clear on one

thing, “*the two of them walked on together.*”

The test of Abraham in this story was the willingness to sacrifice everything, not simply the act of sacrificing Isaac. God did not need Abraham to prove his love for Him. The test was meant to establish for all time how far the love of God must go. Abraham and Isaac did this together.

Question:

Is there someone you know walking through life’s challenges alone today? Have you reached out to that person in a while?

Prayer:

Lord, in this unpredictable world, test our hearts and minds today. Pry open our tight fists that cling to possessions, ideologies, painful pasts and anxious futures. Recalibrate and restore our trust in you alone. Confront us, convict us, and give us motivation for showing our families and this community how far the love of God must go. Amen.

Wednesday, March 3
Written by: Celeste Ryan

John 12: 36-43

“Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them. Even after Jesus had performed so many signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him.

This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet:

“Lord, who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord
been revealed?”

For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere:

“He has blinded their eyes
and hardened their hearts,
so they can neither see with their eyes,
nor understand with their hearts,
nor turn—and I would heal them.”

Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’
glory and spoke about him.

Yet at the same time many even among
the leaders believed in him. But
because of the Pharisees they would
not openly acknowledge their faith for
fear they would be put out of the
synagogue; for they loved human praise
more than praise from God.

Reflection:

“For they loved human praise more than
praise from God.”

Can anyone else relate with this?

Honestly, it makes me feel a little bit

better to know that this isn't just a struggle of today; since the days of Jesus (and probably long before!), humans have been struggling with the choice between praise and approval from men and praise and approval from God. It's understandable too - we live among humans and are surrounded by them constantly - of course we long for acceptance and praise and approval from them. It's natural, and in many ways, how God made us. Yet, I have to wonder - what would have been different in Jesus' day if those leaders had openly acknowledged their faith regardless of their fear? What would have been different? Of course, we know that God had an ultimate plan, and He knew what He was doing. However, I can't help but wonder how many more would have

believed in Jesus while He was alive if the leaders were more concerned about God's praise than the Pharisees. Or what God wants to do in the world today that our fear holds us back from.

Question:

What's an area of your life where you tend to love human praise more than God's? How might God use your boldness or lack of fear in that area?

Prayer:

Lord, forgive us for the times we forget whose approval we need. We pray you would give us courage in the times we feel the need for approval, and that you would use our boldness to accomplish your plans and purposes in the world.

Thursday, March 4
Written by: Laura Blystra

Exodus 19:1-9

On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day, they came into the wilderness of Sinai. ² They had journeyed from Rephidim, entered the wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness; Israel camped there in front of the mountain. ³ Then Moses went up to God; the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the Israelites: ⁴ You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall

be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, ⁶ but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the Israelites.”

⁷ So Moses came, summoned the elders of the people, and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. ⁸ The people all answered as one: “Everything that the Lord has spoken we will do.” Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. ⁹ Then the Lord said to Moses, “I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, in order that the people may hear when I speak with you and so trust you ever after.”

Reflection:



I wonder how Moses was feeling as he "went up to God"? The hike itself, up the side of the mountain is no small feat, but with every step what were his thoughts? Was he

anxious, fearful, awestruck and full of wonder? Or was he scared, unsure, full of self-doubt and second guessing himself as to why God could possibly have chosen him for this job? I imagine Moses felt all of these emotions and so many more, yet he

continued up the mountain. He did not turn back. He set his face toward God, trusting that he, a broken and imperfect man, was enough to take on what God was calling him to do, as scary and overwhelming as it may have appeared.

Question:

No matter how you approach God today, do you believe you are enough,? Do you believe you are worthy to meet with him? Do you trust that you are capable to accomplish what God has called you to?

Prayer:

Holy God, thank you for trusting us to do your kingdom work here on earth. Thank you for creating us in your likeness. May we trust that you have

created us worthy, despite our failings and imperfections. May we approach you with the confidence and praise you deserve, today and always. We praise you, Holy God. Amen and amen.

Friday, March 5

Written by: Chloe Williams

Acts 7:30-40

³⁰ “Now when forty years had passed, an angel appeared to him in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning bush. ³¹ When Moses saw it, he was amazed at the sight; and as he approached to look, there came the voice of the Lord: ³² ‘I am the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Moses began to tremble and did not dare to look. ³³ Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. ³⁴ I have surely seen the mistreatment of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their groaning,

and I have come down to rescue them. Come now, I will send you to Egypt.'

³⁵ "It was this Moses whom they rejected when they said, 'Who made you a ruler and a judge?' and whom God now sent as both ruler and liberator through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. ³⁶ He led them out, having performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea, and in the wilderness for forty years. ³⁷ This is the Moses who said to the Israelites, 'God will raise up a prophet for you from your own people as he raised me up.' ³⁸ He is the one who was in the congregation in the wilderness with the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living oracles to give to us. ³⁹ Our ancestors were unwilling to obey him; instead, they

pushed him aside, and in their hearts they turned back to Egypt, ⁴⁰ saying to Aaron, 'Make gods for us who will lead the way for us; as for this Moses who led us out from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him.

Reflection:

Moses respected God by taking off his shoes to speak to him. The words that God spoke from the bush were like God's word out of the Bible. He told Moses to tell Pharaoh to let his people go. That was what Moses did even though he was scared. People were going to be mad at him, but he still trusted God.

Question:

Would you be afraid of people if God told you to do something?

Prayer:

Dear God, Thank you for telling Moses to tell Pharaoh to let his people go. Even though he was scared, he was brave. Please help me to be brave like Moses when God tells me to do something. Amen

Saturday, March 6

Written by: Malachi VanDam

Psalm 19

¹ The heavens are telling the glory of
God;

 and the firmament proclaims his
handiwork.

² Day to day pours forth speech,
 and night to night declares
knowledge.

³ There is no speech, nor are there
words;

 their voice is not heard;

⁴ yet their voice goes out through all the
earth,

 and their words to the end of the
world.

In the heavens he has set a tent for the sun,

⁵ which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy,

and like a strong man runs its course with joy.

⁶ Its rising is from the end of the heavens,

and its circuit to the end of them;

and nothing is hid from its heat.

⁷ The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul;

the decrees of the Lord are sure,

making wise the simple;

⁸ the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart;

the commandment of the Lord is clear,

enlightening the eyes;

⁹ the fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever;

the ordinances of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether.

10 More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey,
and drippings of the honeycomb.

11 Moreover by them is your servant
warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

12 But who can detect their errors?
Clear me from hidden faults.

13 Keep back your servant also from the
insolent;
do not let them have dominion over
me.

Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.

14 Let the words of my mouth and the
meditation of my heart

be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer



Art by Malachi

Reflection:

This Psalm of David shows how mighty and strong God is. I was moved by His

glory and power. He is amazing! I was inspired by the words woven together about nature to show the beauty of God. I love nature, and it amazes me that God can do everything! His power is endless! I feel the power of His words in this Psalm; they are Holy and special. God guides me every day. Even when I don't know it.

Question:

How did God guide you today?

Prayer:

Dear God in Heaven, I ask You to guide me in the sun and rain. Please let Your knowledge of the heavens guide me and be the Light in the darkness. I love You. Amen.

Monday, March 8

Written by: Leela Thomas Parish

Psalm 84

¹ How lovely is your dwelling place,
LORD Almighty!

² My soul yearns, even faints,
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh cry out
for the living God.

³ Even the sparrow has found a home,
and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may have her young—
a place near your altar,
LORD Almighty, my King and my God.

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your
house;
they are ever praising you.

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in
you,

whose hearts are set on pilgrimage.
6 As they pass through the Valley of
Baka,
they make it a place of springs;

the autumn rains also cover it with
pools.

7 They go from strength to strength,
till each appears before God in Zion.

8 Hear my prayer, LORD God Almighty;
listen to me, God of Jacob.

9 Look on our shield, O God;
look with favor on your anointed one.

10 Better is one day in your courts
than a thousand elsewhere;

I would rather be a doorkeeper in the
house of my God

than dwell in the tents of the wicked.
11 For the LORD God is a sun and shield;
the LORD bestows favor and honor;
no good thing does he withhold
from those whose walk is blameless.
12 LORD Almighty,
blessed is the one who trusts in you.



Reflection:

Home. A place of rest and recovery, peace and growth, love and trials. The dream home on earth has comfy beds, couches, chairs and nooks. Full pantries, refrigerators, the newest tech and swag filled closets. Soft scented candles, clean floors, and the perfect aesthetic. The house of God though, is where praise and spiritual fulfillment resides. Our souls cry out, yearning to be in the perfect house of God. A place where no one is ever turned away or goes without. A place that turns its dwellers into people erupting with the living water of God. A place that strengthens us to go out into life's daily pilgrimage. A place that even the sparrow can call home. It is better to belong to God's home as a doorkeeper,

welcoming others to enter, than to not belong at all. How often the places we call home let us down in one way or another.

Question:

Are we returning to God's house for rest, praise, and community? Are we turning to Christ and Christ's message for our refuge and salvation? Or are we ignoring our souls cries and turning to other things to fulfill our needs. Are we hoarding this perfect dwelling place for ourselves? Or are we standing at the door, inviting others in with smile and abundant living water?

Prayer:

Lord, call us home. Remind us where our souls belong – in the corridors of

your great house. As we return to our first home, teach us again how to praise your name, how to sing out in gratitude for your provision and protection.

Strengthen our spirits, minds, and bodies Lord that we may go throughout our days in this broken world and share springs of living water to our parched and thirsty world. Invite the worn out and broken hearted into your house of glory and redemption. Lord call us home daily to your good and perfect dwelling place.

Tuesday, March 9

Written by: Maria Kamara

2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 16-19

¹ Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old; he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah daughter of Zechariah. ² He did what was right in the sight of the Lord, just as his ancestor David had done.

³ In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired them. ⁴ He brought in the priests and the Levites and assembled them in the square on the east. ⁵ He said to them, "Listen to me, Levites! Sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of the Lord, the God of your ancestors, and

carry out the filth from the holy place. ⁶ For our ancestors have been unfaithful and have done what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God; they have forsaken him, and have turned away their faces from the dwelling of the Lord, and turned their backs. ⁷ They also shut the doors of the vestibule and put out the lamps, and have not offered incense or made burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel. ⁸ Therefore the wrath of the Lord came upon Judah and Jerusalem, and he has made them an object of horror, of astonishment, and of hissing, as you see with your own eyes. ⁹ Our fathers have fallen by the sword and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this. ¹⁰ Now it is in my heart to make a

covenant with the Lord, the God of Israel, so that his fierce anger may turn away from us. ¹¹ My sons, do not now be negligent, for the Lord has chosen you to stand in his presence to minister to him, and to be his ministers and make offerings to him.”

¹⁶ The priests went into the inner part of the house of the Lord to cleanse it, and they brought out all the unclean things that they found in the temple of the Lord into the court of the house of the Lord; and the Levites took them and carried them out to the Wadi Kidron. ¹⁷ They began to sanctify on the first day of the first month, and on the eighth day of the month they came to the vestibule of the Lord; then for eight days they sanctified the house of the Lord, and on the sixteenth day of the

first month they finished. ¹⁸ Then they went inside to King Hezekiah and said, “We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the table for the rows of bread and all its utensils. ¹⁹ All the utensils that King Ahaz repudiated during his reign when he was faithless, we have made ready and sanctified; see, they are in front of the altar of the Lord.”

Reflection:

Have you ever looked around your home and felt the need to get a fresh start and begin anew by cleaning out the old? The Israelites did what many of us are doing this time of year, Spring cleaning.

In 2nd Chronicles 29:1-19 we read how King Hezekiah cleansed the house of the Lord and decluttered the sins of his parents. Having witnessed the fall of his father's kingdom to the Assyrians and his people taken away in chains, young King Hezekiah blamed this destruction on the prior generation's failure to honor and fully worship God. He believed that in order to restore his nation's safety, wealth and health, the Israelites needed to follow God again with all their hearts.

King Hezekiah set out to show God he was serious about new beginnings by purifying the temple. The significance of the eight days it took to reach the portico of the Lord, and another eight days to consecrate the temple, represents the regeneration of Israel he

was attempting. The goal was forgiveness, and indeed God's fierceness was turned away from his people. King Hezekiah's plan succeeded, followed by a long and successful reign.

Today's America may have something in common with the Israelites of yesterday. Many believe America has turned away from the God of Abraham, and have ideas as to what should be done to restore us to a better time. Others believe our current societal situation of divisive politics and racial disparities is a result of our prior generation's sins. If this is so, our country has much in common with King Hezekiah in that we must right the wrongs of our parents. Forcing people to practice a

specific religion, as King Hezekiah decreed, doesn't change hearts. We as individuals need to freely receive Jesus the Redeemer and Savior. Once we call Him ours, it is our responsibility to both follow and act out the words of Christ. Although King Hezekiah was unaware, his very existence as part of the line of David gave him a role in God's plan to bring salvation to a fallen world with the birth of Jesus.

A great amount of planning went into consecrating the Lord's temple, and the Israelites worked hard investing time and energy to find absolution. For us it is different. Thanks to the gift of the cross which allows us to be right with God, and our sins wiped away, no Spring cleaning is required. We need

only to repent and ask for God's forgiveness.

Jesus' death on the cross paid the price for our sin, and entitled all of us the opportunity for life in heaven. Heaven, a place governed not by humankind, but by God's love and peace.

Question:

Where in my heart can I invite Jesus in to cleanse and make white as snow?

Prayer:

Lord, we thank and praise you for the gift of Jesus' death and resurrection. Too often we fail to recognize the life-changing event it was. Thank you for the ways your love and grace cleanses us

each and every day. Your mercies are new every morning. Amen.

Wednesday, March 10

Written by: Jay Van Groningen

Mark 11:15-19

¹⁵ Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; ¹⁶ and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. ¹⁷ He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations’?

But you have made it a den of robbers.”

¹⁸ And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a

way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching. ¹⁹ And when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.

Reflection:

Remember, and if you are able to, share a story about a time when you sought and got something and upon receiving it you felt really “ripped off”? The product or the event you had imagined and anticipated was not at all what was advertised? Can you imagine what Jesus felt when entering the temple he found a market place instead of “House of prayer for all people”?

A building is a building. I doubt whether Jesus' anger was about the building. Jesus wants our actions to be aligned

with our purpose. The faith leaders of the day were more interested in their power and privilege, in their own interests than in being devoted followers of God standing with and for His people.

Question:

What is God calling you to let go of, to change, so that you are fully aligned with His purposes in His world today?

Prayer:

It is the hunger of hearts Oh Lord to love you, our neighbors and your world. Forgive us for getting side tracked, for elevating ourselves above you and your purposes in this world. Help us to align our hearts, our minds, our will and our actions to your purposes. May we be pleasing to you dear Lord. Amen

Thursday, March 11
Written by: Dani Suhy

Ephesians 1:3-6

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ just as he chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless before him in love. ⁵ He destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ, according to the good pleasure of his will, ⁶ to the praise of his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

Reflection:

Blessed-made holy, consecrated

Chose-selected as being best or most appropriate

Destined-developing as though according to a plan

Bestowed-present, an honor, right or gift

These all are actions describing what God has done for us. We are not random acts of the universe, or lives left up to fate. We are wanted. We are chosen. We are sought. When we choose to live as Christ and give ourselves to the process God chose and purposed for us long before we were “here,” we receive all God has promised. When I think of the largeness of God and who He is, I am overwhelmed that God wants me.

Wants me, to participate with Him, in my purpose.

Wants me, who God selected as being best.

Wants me, who God makes holy and consecrates.

Wants me, who is developing according to His plan.

Wants me, to present honor, rights and gifts.

God knew me before I knew me! I can bring glory to God. God, will give me “every spiritual blessing.” God sent His son, to make me holy. Wow. On the days when I feel so inadequate, God sees so much more.

Question:

Can you look back on your life and see the evidence of God and His purpose for you?

Can you look at your life now; even if it seems hard and painful, and see evidence of God's blessings to you?

Prayer:

Oh Lord, I thank you for all that you see in me. I thank you for choosing me. For consecrating me. I thank you for the gift of your Son. Thank you for the gifts you give to help me, who you call your child, to bring glory to your name. Thank you.

Amen

Friday, March 12

Written by: AJ Westendorp

Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22, 33-35, 43

¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

for his steadfast love endures forever.

² Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, those he redeemed from trouble

³ and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

¹⁷ Some were sick through their sinful ways,

and because of their iniquities endured affliction;

¹⁸ they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of

death.

19 Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble,

and he saved them from their distress;

20 he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction.

21 Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love,

for his wonderful works to humankind.

22 And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices,

and tell of his deeds with songs of joy.

33 He turns rivers into a desert,

springs of water into thirsty ground,

34 a fruitful land into a salty waste,

because of the wickedness of its inhabitants.

35 He turns a desert into pools of water,
a parched land into springs of water.

43 Let those who are wise give heed to
these things,
and consider the steadfast love of
the Lord.

Reflection:

No one likes being stuck with the person
who's "always right."

On the surface, one could see God in
this light in Psalm 107: "God rescued
everyone from something, so ya'll better
thank him and be a witness! Look at
how he helped those in the wilderness,
in the darkness, in foolishness, on
choppy seas!"

It might read like just an assertion of God's "always right-ness," which can sometimes leave the suffering person disillusioned, bringing to mind the exceptions where God *hasn't* always come to the rescue.

Let's zoom out and see the whole story.

The Psalmist acknowledges the pendulating polarity of life of peoples' experiences with God. How can God be God in the suffering and God in the restoration; the God of deserts and the God of springs of water?

Verse 34 goes on: "He turns the fruitful land into salty wastelands (why?) because of the wickedness of those who live there. But he also turns deserts into

pools of water, the dry land into springs of water.

It begs the classic question of, “So is God up there just sending suffering on wicked people? Is that always the reason people suffer?” That’s a valid and common feeling.

Verse 43 gives us a resolution that can help us today: “Those who are wise will take **all** this to heart; they will see in our history the faithful love of the Lord.”

It’s so confusing to live in a world with an unfair distribution of suffering: “Why another sickness? Why another one lost? Why another victim? He/She/I don’t deserve it! Why does Herod get to make his own springs in the desert while

kind, humble travelers die in the same desert?”

Let's zoom out, and see the whole story. Listen, it's life, not every suffering is a punishment, not every bubbling spring is a prize from God, but can we “see in our history the faithful love of the Lord” across the whole story? The answers never end up clean, but there is wisdom and godliness in the search for God in the mess.

Question:

When is a time where you've felt God *hasn't* “come to the rescue”? Can you name a place in your history where you have seen God's faithful love?

Prayer:

God, thank you for being the God of all things. It's hard for us to see you in all things, especially the hard things and the unfair things. Help us to find wisdom, help us to find your faithfulness and love in the big story and in the small things.

Saturday, March 13

Written by: Jeff and Melissa Roessing

John 3:1-13

¹Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ² He came to Jesus by night and said to him, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God.” ³ Jesus answered him, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” ⁴ Nicodemus said to him, “How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” ⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and

Spirit. ⁶ What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷ Do not be astonished that I said to you, ‘You must be born from above.’ ⁸ The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” ⁹ Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” ¹⁰ Jesus answered him, “Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹ “Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹² If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³ No one has

ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.

Reflection:

Lord, apart from the blessing of your Spirit, we will at best see you as a teacher. But to stop at calling you Rabbi is to entirely miss the significance of God's Son. For "no one has ever gone into heaven, except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man." Like Nicodemus, our ideas about God need to be shed for the reality of God revealed. Here, in this chapter, Jesus claims to be the Son of God who lays down his life for the salvation of all who believe in him. Do we believe in this Jesus?

Question:

What is your reaction to the phrase “born again?” How has our perception of (and reaction to) this phrase been shaped more by culture and culture wars than by Scripture?

Prayer:

Lead us beyond the wisdom of this world into the foolishness of the message preached, the gospel of the crucified and risen Christ. Christ, who didn't show the way to salvation but made the way. Amen.

Monday, March 15

Written by: Joan Donaldson

Hebrews 3:1-6 (NIV)

“Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, whom we acknowledge as our apostle and high priest. **2** He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. **3** Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. **4** For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. **5** “Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house,” bearing witness to what would be spoken by God in the future. **6** But Christ is faithful as the Son over

God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”

Reflection:

In elementary school I studied prepositions such as *in* and *out* (what my cat does) and *over* and *under*. Two prepositions used in the Hebrews passage caught my attention. Moses was a faithful servant *in* God's house while Jesus was faithful as a son *over* God's house. Paul wrote his letter to the “holy brethren,” to followers of Jesus who understood the important work of Moses. Yet Paul reminds the believers to *consider Jesus*, to ponder his deity and how as the Son of God, Jesus built and rules over the house in which Moses served. As called people, we

also dwell *in* Christ's house where He provides for our needs. We should continue to gaze at Jesus as our High Priest who sacrificed His life so we could embrace courage and hope while we walk through a wounded world.

Question:

What do we learn when we keep Jesus as our focal point, as the Lord over our lives? How can we display His hope during a pandemic?

Prayer:

Father, as the hymn writer states may we, "turn our eyes upon Jesus and look full into His wonderful face". May Jesus remain our North Star who points us towards a deeper and more loving relationship with You.

Tuesday, March 16

Written by: Anna Christians

Numbers 20:1-13

The Israelites, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. Miriam died there, and was buried there.

² Now there was no water for the congregation; so they gathered together against Moses and against Aaron. ³ The people quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had died when our kindred died before the Lord! ⁴ Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness for us and our livestock to die here? ⁵ Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to bring us to this wretched place? It is no place

for grain, or figs, or vines, or pomegranates; and there is no water to drink.” ⁶ Then Moses and Aaron went away from the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting; they fell on their faces, and the glory of the Lord appeared to them. ⁷ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ⁸ Take the staff, and assemble the congregation, you and your brother Aaron, and command the rock before their eyes to yield its water. Thus you shall bring water out of the rock for them; thus you shall provide drink for the congregation and their livestock.

⁹ So Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he had commanded him. ¹⁰ Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and

he said to them, “Listen, you rebels, shall we bring water for you out of this rock?” ¹¹ Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his staff; water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their livestock drank. ¹² But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.” ¹³ These are the waters of Meribah where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and by which he showed his holiness.



Reflection:

This is a common passage, but after reflecting on it this particular time, I was struck by the range of emotions expressed by the Israelite people and also the emotions I felt experienced while reading it. The story starts with the Israelites being desperate for water. They are expressing emotions of anger,

disappointment, frustration, doubt, and questioning. They wonder if Moses really knows what he is doing and even further than that, they are doubting God's plan in bringing them out of Egypt. Next comes an emotion of hope. Moses meets with God and God makes a way for them in the wilderness-water from a rock!! The congregation and the livestock drank. I imagine them feeling satisfied, hopeful, joyful, and content. However, this hopeful feeling doesn't last long for in verse 12 there is a key word, "but." Moses did not trust God's command and therefore will not be able to enter the promise land with the assembly. Oofta!

Within one story and one scene, there is anger, happiness, frustration,

satisfaction, hope, despair, doubt, and joy. The emotions of the human experience are broad and far reaching. But even in the midst of these scene of quarreling, the Lord showed his holiness. In the face of our emotions that we are experiencing today in this moment, the Lord is showing his holiness to us. Our emotions are far reaching and always changing, but God's holiness is constant and consistent.

Question:

In what ways can I rely on God's constant character of holiness above my own emotions today?

Prayer:

Lord, expand my ability to trust in you and your character today. Reveal to me the ways that I am trying to do it on my own. Thank you for your holiness that provides water in the wasteland. Amen.

Wednesday, March 17

Written by: Gus & Kathy Gustafson

John 8:12-20

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life.” ¹³ Then the Pharisees said to him, “You are testifying on your own behalf; your testimony is not valid.” ¹⁴ Jesus answered, “Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid because I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge by human standards; I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is valid; for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who

sent me. ¹⁷ In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid. ¹⁸ I testify on my own behalf, and the Father who sent me testifies on my behalf.” ¹⁹ Then they said to him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered, “You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also.” ²⁰ He spoke these words while he was teaching in the treasury of the temple, but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.

Reflection:

Let's set the stage.

- When: Around half way through Jesus' three year ministry
- Where: The Temple in Jerusalem
- Why: To attend the Feast of the Tabernacles. This feast, held in

October, marked the completion of the harvest of fruit, oil and wine.

It was the 8th and final day of the feast. It was time to light the four great golden candelabras. These candelabras symbolized the pillar of fire that God used to guide his people during the night in the wilderness. It assured the people of God's presence, protection and guidance. Now, imagine yourself in the temple as the candelabras are lit. Watch the people's faces as Jesus stands and says, "I am the light of the world – follow me." What?!! How can you even say that we should follow you just as our ancestors followed the light of God? What blasphemy! Jesus goes on to validate his claim by saying he has two witnesses to this fact, "my Father

and me”. In that time two witnesses were needed to prove something factual. Think of it: unlike the rest of us, Jesus knows where he comes from and where he is going. He knows the future. Because he is God, he is again offering his presence, protection and guidance to us. We only need to follow him.

Question:

What does it mean to follow that light?

Prayer:

Dear Jesus, our Light, we want to follow You. We desire Your presence, Your protection, and Your guidance. We acknowledge that following You will look different for every person. Light our way so that we may be like you. Holy Spirit flow into us so that we might see what

we can do and what we can be. In Your name we pray. Amen

Below is a song that God gave to me in this season. The verses reflect how it might look to follow Jesus' light. I remember singing it in the 70's and 80's. Maybe some of you will remember it, too! (:

(Song should not be raced through—sing some verses and chorus slow and blues like)

1 "You are the mystery light"

by Jim Strathdee

I AM THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Chorus

F G C Am F G C Am C Am

"I am the light of the world! You people come and follow me!" If you

F G C Am F G C

follow and love, you'll learn the mystery of what you were meant to do and be.

Verse

C F G C Dm Am G

When the song of the angels is stilled, When the star in the sky is gone, When the

C F G C Am F G

kings and the shepherds have found their way home The work of Christmas is begun!

2. To find the lost and lonely one, To heal that broken soul with love To feed the hungry children With warmth and good food, To feel the earth below the sky above!	3. To free the prisoner from all chains To make the powerful care, To rebuild the nations With strength of goodwill, To see God's children everywhere!	4. To bring hope to every task you do. To dance at a baby's new birth, To make music in An old person's heart, And sing to the colors of the earth!
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Words & Music by Kurt Kaiser

PASS IT ON

C Em F G

It on - ly takes a spark to get a fire go - ing, And

Thursday, March 18

Written by: Arika Theule-VanDam

Psalm 51:1-12

- ¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
- ² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.
- ³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
- ⁴ Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass
judgment.
- ⁵ Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived
me.

6 You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my
secret heart.

7 Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be
clean;

wash me, and I shall be whiter than
snow.

8 Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed
rejoice.

9 Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

10 Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within
me.

11 Do not cast me away from your
presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from
me.

12 Restore to me the joy of your

salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.



Image from <https://radicaldiscipleship.net/2018/03/15/wild-lectionary-purge-me-with-hyssop/>

Reflection:

It's tempting to want to skip past the first few verses of this psalm and jump straight to the joy and gladness, to the

crushed bones that rejoice, the iniquities blotted out, the clean heart and the right spirit, the joy of salvation. We twenty-first-century humans are so good at skipping ahead, especially when the thing we're skipping past is a mirror that reveals truths about ourselves that we'd rather not see. When the mirror shows us sin, transgression, evil, and guilt--not just the psalmist's but our own--it can start to feel like the walls are closing in all around us. And who wants to stay put for very long in a place like that? Who wants to admit, with the psalm writer, "My sin is ever before me"? But if we don't stay put and listen, we'll miss the crucial piece that takes us from Point A to Point B, from the weight of sin to the lightness of rejoicing. Verse 7 is where it happens, if we'll slow down and let

ourselves hear it: “Purge me with hyssop,” the psalmist declares. Hyssop: a common and unimpressive plant in biblical days, useful for sprinkling liquids, sometimes in purification rituals. But it didn’t possess any innate powers or magical cleansing abilities. It was a tool, used by God and God’s surrogates, to deliver what was needed. Here, what’s needed is radical restoration, complete and continual purging of sin’s effects. The Hebrew that translates into English as “purge me” is really more like “*un-sin me!*” More than just a quick scrub, it’s a total removal of everything that mars our true beauty and worth as beloved children of God: *Un-sin me! Make me whole again. Restore my broken parts. Open my eyes and ears to true joy.* We have to go through the

purging to get to the renewal. There's just no way around it.

Question:

Where in your life do you sense the Spirit's purging work during this Lenten season? What might God be trying to reveal to you or root out of you, and how can you more fully open yourself to this "un-sinning" work that God is doing?

Prayer:

Lord, our crushed bones are crying out, longing to know true joy and gladness again, aching to be drawn back into oneness with you and with those around us. To get there, we need more than just a surface scrub. Together with the psalmist we cry, "Purge me with hyssop!" Give us the deep un-sinning

we so desperately need, Gracious God, so that we might be renewed. And may our renewal lead us out into the world with fresh energy to be the hands and feet of Christ. In your abundant mercy, come quickly and fiercely, Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Friday, March 19

Written by: Paul and Jean Nelson

Exodus 30:1-10

You shall make an altar on which to offer incense; you shall make it of acacia wood. ² It shall be one cubit long, and one cubit wide; it shall be square, and shall be two cubits high; its horns shall be of one piece with it. ³ You shall overlay it with pure gold, its top, and its sides all around and its horns; and you shall make for it a molding of gold all around. ⁴ And you shall make two golden rings for it; under its molding on two opposite sides of it you shall make them, and they shall hold the poles with which to carry it. ⁵ You shall make the poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with gold. ⁶ You shall place it in front of

the curtain that is above the ark of the covenant, in front of the mercy seat that is over the covenant, where I will meet with you. ⁷ Aaron shall offer fragrant incense on it; every morning when he dresses the lamps he shall offer it, ⁸ and when Aaron sets up the lamps in the evening, he shall offer it, a regular incense offering before the Lord throughout your generations. ⁹ You shall not offer unholy incense on it, or a burnt offering, or a grain offering; and you shall not pour a drink offering on it. ¹⁰ Once a year Aaron shall perform the rite of atonement on its horns. Throughout your generations he shall perform the atonement for it once a year with the blood of the atoning sin offering. It is most holy to the Lord.

Reflection:

In this passage God gave some specific instructions about the construction and use of the Altar of Incense. It must have been pretty important with all that gold and where the altar needed to be placed. Aaron's twice daily burning of incense would create a fragrance to remind the people that God meets them and He is with them. The command of the daily ritual points to the need for constant devotion to God. That can be a difficult thing. Thankfully Christ became the perfect fragrant offering to redeem us (Eph. 5:2).

Question:

What is the "incense" that you offer daily?

Prayer:

O Lord, thank you for the daily devotion of Aaron and the saints who have gone before us. Please give us what we need to be faithful to you today.

Saturday, March 20

Written by: Dennis and Jayne Taylor

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" ⁶ (He said this not

because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Reflection:

“Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor.”

Question:

Was this an act of extraordinary worship by Mary? Or did the generosity of Mary appear wasteful and misplaced as Judas expressed?

Join the dinner party. Are you struck by the surpassing generosity of Mary’s

gesture? Or by the begrudgery with which Judas interpreted the gift?

Judas interpreted the gift as an act of waste.

Jesus interpreted the gift as an act of Love.

What are your thoughts as you are a guest at the dinner?

For further reflection, listen to:

Cece Winans: Alabaster box

Prayer:

Lord we come to you and humbly ask that we never under value the gift of Salvation and the continuous blessings we receive. That we will come to you and worship you with extraordinary Love. That we can pray as Mary did with our body and heart. Lord help us to see

as Jesus sees, hear as Jesus hears and
Love as Jesus Loves.
Amen.

Monday, March 22
Written by: Emily Baker

Psalm 119:9-16

9 How can young people keep their way pure?

By guarding it according to your word.

10 With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments.

11 I treasure your word in my heart,
so that I may not sin against you.

12 Blessed are you, O Lord;
teach me your statutes.

13 With my lips I declare
all the ordinances of your mouth.

14 I delight in the way of your decrees
as much as in all riches.

15 I will meditate on your precepts,
and fix my eyes on your ways.

16 I will delight in your statutes;
I will not forget your word.



Reflection

"How can a young man keep his way pure?" (verse 9a). This seems like such a large question to consider or desire in our current culture. We are pulled in so many different directions and asked to pay attention to things of this world instead of living a pure life-family, media,

politics, our employers, comfort and ease, precious time with friends and neighbors, status, etc. Not all of these are even "bad" but still pull us from living a pure way. It is laid out here clearly in scripture to seek God with our whole heart and not wander from his commandments. We are directed to know his word, remember his word, and follow his word in order to not sin. Sounds simple and yet we know that each day it requires a choice on our part to seek God and know his word. We cannot do this alone as the psalmist asks for God to "teach me your statutes" (v 12). Each day we lay down our own desires, and the noise of the world around us and seek God and his word.

Question:

What takes you away from being in the word each day? What is a simple change you can make each day to lay down the desires of the world and pursue truth in his word? Who can you ask for help in pursuing his word each day in order to seek God with your whole heart?

Prayer:

Blessed are you, O Lord. You choose to love me each day despite my sin, brokenness and desire to walk away from you. Forgive me for choosing things of this world over you. Help me to tune out the loud noise around me pulling me away from you and what is true, holy, blameless, innocent, and pure. I cannot do anything apart from

you and pray that the desires of my heart will be matched to your desires for me-to love you with all I have and seek you first in everything.

Tuesday, March 23
Written by: Brad Holehan

Isaiah 44:1-8

But now hear, O Jacob my servant,
Israel whom I have chosen!

² Thus says the Lord who made you,
who formed you in the womb and will
help you:

Do not fear, O Jacob my servant,
Jeshurun whom I have chosen.

³ For I will pour water on the thirsty land,
and streams on the dry ground;

I will pour my spirit upon your
descendants,

and my blessing on your offspring.

⁴ They shall spring up like a green
tamarisk,
like willows by flowing streams.

⁵ This one will say, "I am the Lord's,"
another will be called by the name of
Jacob,
yet another will write on the hand,
"The Lord's,"
and adopt the name of Israel.

⁶ Thus says the Lord, the King of Israel,
and his Redeemer, the Lord of hosts:
I am the first and I am the last;
besides me there is no god.

⁷ Who is like me? Let them proclaim it,
let them declare and set it forth before
me.

Who has announced from of old the
things to come?

Let them tell us what is yet to be.

⁸ Do not fear, or be afraid;
have I not told you from of old and
declared it?

You are my witnesses!

Is there any god besides me?

There is no other rock; I know not one.

Reflection:

Today's verses are important reminders of who God is and who God names us to be.

God is called the Creator, the Former, the Maker. God is the origin of and "pourer-utter" of spirit and blessings. God is the Lord, the King of Israel, the Redeemer. God is the First, the Last, and the Only. God is the Rock. The Peace-Giver who proclaims, "Do not be afraid."

In light of who God is, we find laid out who we are, and who we are called to be: We are chosen, made, and formed. We are the Lord's. We are the intentional handiwork of our God.

God has revealed to us who God is and who we are. It seems the next step is that God invites us in to participate. God invites us to respond by proclaiming whose we are. Whether that be by proclaiming it aloud (I am the Lord's!) or by writing it on our hands (a holy tattoo?!), or by being a witness.

God is ready to receive and delight in our proclamations that this Lord is, in fact, our God.

Question:

Do you believe about yourself the attributes God ascribes to God's people?

Prayer:

Oh, God of endless names and boundless glory, pour out your spirit upon us we pray; that we may live in the light of how you see us. That we may extend this honor and glory you see in us to ourselves and to others, even our enemies. Let this lead us to proclaim the truth of who you are. For your glory, oh Lord. Amen.

Wednesday, March 24
Written by: Pastor Emily

John 12:44-50

44 Then Jesus cried aloud: “Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. 45 And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. 46 I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. 47 I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. 48 The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, 49 for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment

about what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰ And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me.”



by John Stuart,
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Reflection:

The heading in my Bible for these verses is “Summary of Jesus’ Teaching.” Wow. All of the gospel teachings into just a few verses? Can it be done?

And then, as I read these words in the book of John, I recognize that they do seem to be bullet points of Jesus’ teaching: belief; sent by God; light in the world; saving the world; judgment; eternal life. As he draws closer to his last days on earth, Jesus directly states his purposes. Or, as verse 44 says, he “cries it aloud.” Jesus shouts for anyone who will hear it: Believe in me! I’ve been sent by God as light to the world! I have come to save the world for the sake of eternal life!

And Jesus continues to cry out these same words to us.

Question:

If you had to summarize Jesus' teaching in a few sentences, what would you say?

Prayer:

God, let us hear and believe these words: that you have come as light to the world, not to judge the world, but to save it. To save us. Thank you, Lord, for the eternal life that you hold for us.
Amen.

Thursday, March 25

Written by: Debra Lappenga

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29

¹ O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good;

his steadfast love endures forever!

² Let Israel say,

“His steadfast love endures forever.”

¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness,

that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the Lord.

²⁰ This is the gate of the Lord;

the righteous shall enter through it.

²¹ I thank you that you have answered me

and have become my salvation.

22 The stone that the builders rejected
has become the chief cornerstone.

23 This is the Lord's doing;
it is marvelous in our eyes.

24 This is the day that the Lord has
made;

let us rejoice and be glad in it.

25 Save us, we beseech you, O Lord!
O Lord, we beseech you, give us
success!

26 Blessed is the one who comes in the
name of the Lord.

We bless you from the house of
the Lord.

27 The Lord is God,
and he has given us light.
Bind the festal procession with
branches,
up to the horns of the altar.

28 You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;

you are my God, I will extol you.

29 O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good,

for his steadfast love endures forever.

Reflection:

In this passage the Psalmist repeats the phrases, “His love endures forever,” and “give thanks,” 5 times each. Repetitions in Biblical poetry let us know when something is important.

The Message says, “His love never quits,” this made me think God continually chooses love for us.

Webster’s dictionary defines *endure* as “to remain firm under suffering.” God

chooses to love us for all eternity even when it causes Him suffering, even when we stop choosing Him. The writer commands thanksgiving as our response.

Today meditate on where you may have quit in your love for our Lord. Also, give thanks for His never-ending, always and forever kind of love for you.

Prayer:

Thank you God for never quitting me, thank you for your enduring love of me even when my love for you has failed, lapsed, and ceased. Let me feel your abiding love, draw me close. Forgive me when I turn away in difficult times and circumstances. Thank you for being good, for your righteousness, for being

my salvation; I will rejoice in this day
that you have made. Amen.

Friday, March 26

Written by: Kristin Travers

Jeremiah 33:1-9

¹ The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah a second time, while he was still confined in the court of the guard: ² Thus says the Lord who made the earth, the Lord who formed it to establish it—the Lord is his name: ³ Call to me and I will answer you, and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known. ⁴ For thus says the Lord, the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city and the houses of the kings of Judah that were torn down to make a defense against the siege ramps and before the sword: ⁵ The Chaldeans are coming in to fight and to fill them with the dead bodies of those

whom I shall strike down in my anger and my wrath, for I have hidden my face from this city because of all their wickedness. ⁶ I am going to bring it recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them abundance of prosperity and security. ⁷ I will restore the fortunes of Judah and the fortunes of Israel, and rebuild them as they were at first. ⁸ I will cleanse them from all the guilt of their sin against me, and I will forgive all the guilt of their sin and rebellion against me. ⁹ And this city shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and a glory before all the nations of the earth who shall hear of all the good that I do for them; they shall fear and tremble because of all the good and all the prosperity I provide for it.



Reflection:

Restoration: wrath, anger, death, healing, health, peace, and security. While I read through this passage, I kept thinking about the mess in our toy room. The barbies, strewn books, and spilled out board games. My kids know wrath and anger when I step on a Lego with

my bare feet. But on Saturday afternoons, we clean. We pick up, organize, breathe. We see the mess clearly and chip away at restoring the room. We walk through the room feeling more at peace once we have fully addressed the mess.

God too, must deal with pain and sin before we can see His great and mighty handiwork. We cannot heal when we are wounding our souls with sin. When we are tempted to question God about the great and mighty things, we need to remember that He does the work of purging first before He brings about the work of redemption. Then He promises that He will bring health, healing, abundant peace, and security to the world.

Question:

In what part of your life are you calling upon God for healing and peace?

Prayer:

Lord- Thank You, that when I call on you, you will listen to me. When I seek You, you will find me. I'm so thankful that you hear and bring about restoration in my life. Amen.

Saturday, March 27

Written by: Pastor Emily

Mark 10:32-45

³² They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, ³³ saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; ³⁴ they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again.”

³⁵ James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, “Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.” ³⁶ And he said to them, “What is it you want me to do for you?” ³⁷ And they said to him, “Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory.” ³⁸ But Jesus said to them, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” ³⁹ They replied, “We are able.” Then Jesus said to them, “The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; ⁴⁰ but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared.”

41 When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. 42 So Jesus called them and said to them, “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. 43 But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. 45 For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”



"Christ Enthroned" by Kelly Latimore
via kellylatimoreicons.com

Reflection:

In today's passage, Jesus takes the Twelve aside and tells them plainly about what is about to happen in just a few short days. And immediately, after Jesus speaks about his impending suffering and death, two disciples step forward. James and John, the knuckle-

headed brothers, ask Jesus if they could sit beside Jesus in his “glory.”

Glory? I imagine Jesus shaking his head or perhaps putting his face in his palm. Time and time again in the gospels, we witness the disciples asking foolish questions that show that they still do not understand who Jesus is. At this point, after years of following him, one would think that Jesus’ closest friends and followers would get it. But they don’t. And that’s ok. Jesus reminds James and John, perhaps for the 457th time, who he is and what it means to follow him. And Christ continues to call us to remember, to ask questions, and to come to an understanding of who Jesus is and, then of course, to follow him.

Question:

What 'foolish' questions would you want to ask Jesus? What does it mean to follow Jesus?

Prayer:

God, may we listen closely to your words, and even when we don't understand or get it right, may we continue to follow you. Amen.

Monday, March 29
Holy Monday, Holy Week
Written by: Anna Christians

John 12:1-11

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this perfume not sold

for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

Reflection:

“Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’ feet, and wiped them with her hair.”

What a generous act. Mary shows us what it looks like to love God because he first loved us. Mary shows us what it looks like to live a generous life because God has been and continues to be generous towards us. Here are a few ways in which Mary’s act was so generous.

1. Mary is generous with her gift. We read that the perfume was *costly*.
2. Mary is generous with her time. Mary is not rushed or in a hurry. But rather, in the midst of this meal, she takes the time to show her generous love towards Jesus.

3. Mary is generous with her reputation. Judas Iscariot had some thoughts on the situation and thought that it was foolish. However, Mary is willing to perform this act of anointing Jesus' feet regardless of what others think.
4. Mary is generous with her love. Mary makes a visible and concrete act of self-giving, sacrificial, generous love toward Jesus. She does not hold it back.

Question:

How can I be generous today? How can I be generous with my gifts, time, reputation, and love today?

Prayer:

Lord, I thank and praise you for your generous love that never stops giving

and over-flowing. I praise you for your love that you show to me every day. Spirit, show me where my hands are grasped tightly on my time, gifts, reputation and love and loosen that grip so that my hands may be open to serve both you and my neighbor.

Tuesday, March 30

Holy Tuesday, Holy Week

Written by: Anna Christians

John 12:20-36

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal

life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. ²⁷ “Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say —‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to

die. ³⁴ The crowd answered him, “We have heard from the law that the Messiah remains forever. How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up? Who is this Son of Man?” ³⁵ Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. ³⁶ While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light.” After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

Reflection:

Jesus gives us the perfect response to suffering in this world: “Father, glorify your

name.” While this is not a call to pursuit of martyrdom, we are called as Christians to die to the world and to live Kingdom minded. Our desire to obtain more, do more, achieve more, live better, become better, etc., while all good motivations, often get in the way of humble submission to the winnowing and refining that we are called to go through in Christ. Yet we have this encouragement, that our humble submission and faithfulness to God will produce fruit beyond our recognition.

Question:

What distractions do I use to avoid humble submission to God? How can I let these go?

Prayer:

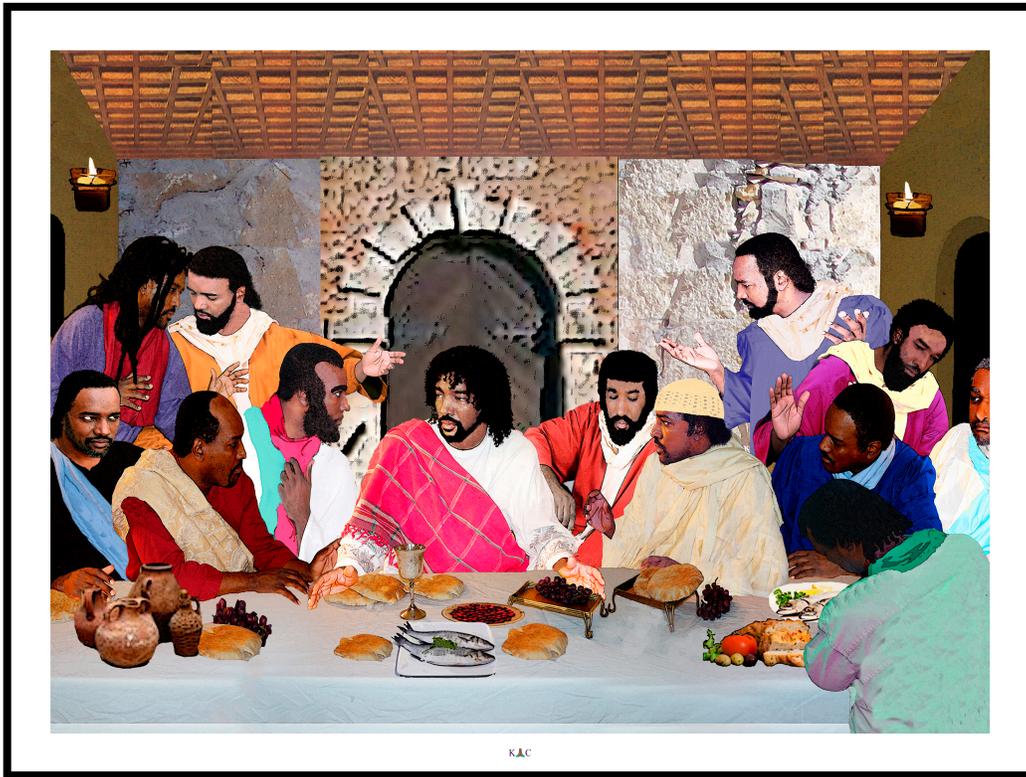
Lord God, you want me, all of me, to live in your community of love and flourishing. Help me let go of the many distractions of this world in pursuit of a loving relationship with you and my neighbors.

Wednesday, March 31
Holy Wednesday, Holy Week
Written by: Pastor Emily

John 13:21-32

²¹ After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, “Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²² The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. ²³ One of his disciples—the one whom Jesus loved—was reclining next to him; ²⁴ Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. ²⁵ So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, “Lord, who is it?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “It is the one to whom I give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish.” So when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave

it to Judas son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ After he received the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “Do quickly what you are going to do.” ²⁸ Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. ²⁹ Some thought that, because Judas had the common purse, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the festival”; or, that he should give something to the poor. ³⁰ So, after receiving the piece of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night. ³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once.



The Last Supper by BlackJesusArt,
purchased on Etsy

Reflection:

Judas. What are we supposed to do with him? When I read this part of the story I'm bewildered as to what Judas is doing and why. Hasn't he been a disciple of Jesus for the past three years? Hasn't he seen what Jesus can do, who Jesus is? Why, on earth, would he betray him for 30 pieces of silver

(Matt. 26:15)? Is the death of his friend, teacher and mentor worth any amount of money?

This difficult passage confronts us with the reality of evil. Whether we see evil as characterized in the figure of Satan who “entered into Judas” (vs. 27) or as an invisible force at work in the world like the dark night Judas went out into (vs. 30), we cannot deny the presence of evil around us or even within us. Not one of us can claim to be without selfish desires or corrupt thoughts or even immoral actions. Judas reminds us of the hard truth that we are all capable of betraying God. *And yet*, today’s passage ends with the reminder that God has been and will be glorified in Christ. It is with this hope of God’s glory that we are

able to confront the evil in the world and within ourselves.

Question:

Where do you see evil at work in the world? Where do you experience God's glory?

Prayer:

God, forgive me for the times I betray You. Give me the strength and courage needed to confront evil in the world and within myself. To God be the glory, Amen.

Thursday, April 1

Maundy Thursday, Holy Week

Written by: Anna Christians

John 13:1-17, 31-35

Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ² The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash

the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷ Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸ Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹ Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹ For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹² After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the

table, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴ So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. ¹⁵ For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶ Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷ If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with

you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Reflection:

Jesus is the ultimate example of a humble servant. He embodies humility as he washes the disciples feet and embodies sacrificial love in his death that is right around the corner. Another aspect of humility jumped out to me while reading this familiar story today. Could we also say that the disciples

must be humble in order to receive the Lord's act? At first, Simon Peter seemed to have a hard time embodying a humble posture. He doubted and questioned that Jesus was really going to wash his feet and even says, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus replies, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me."

Are we sometimes like Simon Peter? Do we question the Lord's acts? Are we often wanting to be self-sufficient and prideful in thinking that we know the answers, we know what's best, and we know the future? Accepting the Lord's great gift of self-sacrificial, humble love requires that we get out of the way. It requires a posture of surrender for Christ is Lord. It requires as posture of

humility for we are called to wash one another's feet following Christ's example.

Question:

In what ways can I embody humility today? What self-sufficient posture is the Lord calling me to lay down today?

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me for the ways I have strived to be self-sufficient. Open my eyes and heart to see your humility and sacrificial love. You are worthy of all honor, glory, power, and love. Amen.

Friday, April 2
Good Friday, Holy Week
Written by: Nathaniel Ryan

John 18:1-19:37

¹After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” ⁵ They answered,

“Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus replied, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they stepped back and fell to the ground. ⁷ Again he asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” ⁸ Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.” ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.” ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. ¹¹ Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?”

¹² So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. ¹⁴ Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people.

¹⁵ Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The woman said to Peter,

“You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.”

¹⁸ Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself.

¹⁹ Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples and about his teaching. ²⁰ Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. ²¹ Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.” ²² When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck

Jesus on the face, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” ²³ Jesus answered, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” ²⁴ Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.

²⁵ Now Simon Peter was standing and warming himself. They asked him, “You are not also one of his disciples, are you?” He denied it and said, “I am not.” ²⁶ One of the slaves of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, “Did I not see you in the garden with him?” ²⁷ Again Peter denied it, and at that moment the cock crowed.

²⁸ Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate’s headquarters. It was early in

the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” ³⁰ They answered, “If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.” ³¹ Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.” The Jews replied, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.” ³² (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.) ³³ Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” ³⁴ Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about

me?” ³⁵ Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” ³⁶ Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” ³⁷ Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” ³⁸ Pilate asked him, “What is truth?”

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, “I find no case against him. ³⁹ But you have a

custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?"⁴⁰ They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit.

¹Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. ²And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. ³They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face. ⁴Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." ⁵So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" ⁶When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted,

“Crucify him! Crucify him!” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him.”⁷ The Jews answered him, “We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God.”

⁸ Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever. ⁹ He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, “Where are you from?” But Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ Pilate therefore said to him, “Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?”

¹¹ Jesus answered him, “You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.” ¹² From then on Pilate tried

to release him, but the Jews cried out, “If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor.”

¹³ When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge’s bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew, Gabbatha. ¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, “Here is your King!” ¹⁵ They cried out, “Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!” Pilate asked them, “Shall I crucify your King?” The chief priests answered, “We have no king but the emperor.” ¹⁶ Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.

So they took Jesus; ¹⁷ and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. ¹⁸ There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. ¹⁹ Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” ²⁰ Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. ²¹ Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, “Do not write, ‘The King of the Jews,’ but, ‘This man said, I am King of the Jews.’” ²² Pilate answered, “What I have written I have written.” ²³ When the soldiers had

crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. ²⁴ So they said to one another, “Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it.” This was to fulfill what the scripture says, “They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.” ²⁵ And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. ²⁶ When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.” ²⁷ Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” And from that

hour the disciple took her into his own home.

²⁸ After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), “I am thirsty.” ²⁹ A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. ³⁰ When Jesus had received the wine, he said, “It is finished.” Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

³¹ Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed. ³² Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of

the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. ³³ But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. ³⁴ Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. ³⁵ (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) ³⁶ These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, “None of his bones shall be broken.” ³⁷ And again another passage of scripture says, “They will look on the one whom they have pierced.”

Reflection:

Jesus is God coming to us in our fallenness, our brokenness, our searching, our wandering. He comes to us, humble, demonstrating both submission to the will of God and to those He loves: you and me. He suffers hate, pain, abandonment and torture to reunite us with the triune God. God comes to us, in a demonstration of perfect love, willingly submitting to death for a people whose natural inclination is denial. God comes to us.

Question:

What does it look like for you to “join Jesus in His death?” How might this impact how we

live humbly before God and better comprehend the resurrection?

Prayer:

Jesus, thank you. You are great, and yet in my brokenness and humanity I cannot comprehend the depths of your love for me, and so often I choose denial over faithfulness. Forgive my unfaithfulness, and let me live in the love of the triune God.

Saturday, April 3

Holy Saturday, Holy Week

Written by: Pastor Emily

John 19:38-42

³⁸ After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. ³⁹ Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰ They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. ⁴¹ Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in

the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.



"Born Again" (Jesus and Nicodemus)
by Lauren Wright Pittman
used with permission from Vanderbilt University's Divinity Library:
"Art in the Christian Tradition"

Reflection:

In this passage of scripture, we encounter two men: The first is a man named Joseph of Arimathea who is identified as a *secret* disciple of Jesus because of his fear of the authorities. But, when the time came, we see Joseph of Arimathea shedding the fear that held him back and boldly approaching the highest authority with a request to care for Jesus' body, immediately revealing his own allegiance and discipleship. The second man is one we've met before: Nicodemus. The gospel author even reminds us that Nicodemus was the one who first came to Jesus by night, in secret so as to not be discovered by the authorities (John 3).

Again, in today's passage, we witness Nicodemus shedding the fear that held him, and boldly participating in the burial of Christ.

Question:

What fears hold you back from participating with your whole self as a disciple of Jesus?

Prayer:

Christ, give me the boldness to live every day as your disciple. Help me to follow you without fear, without reservation, with my whole being. Amen.