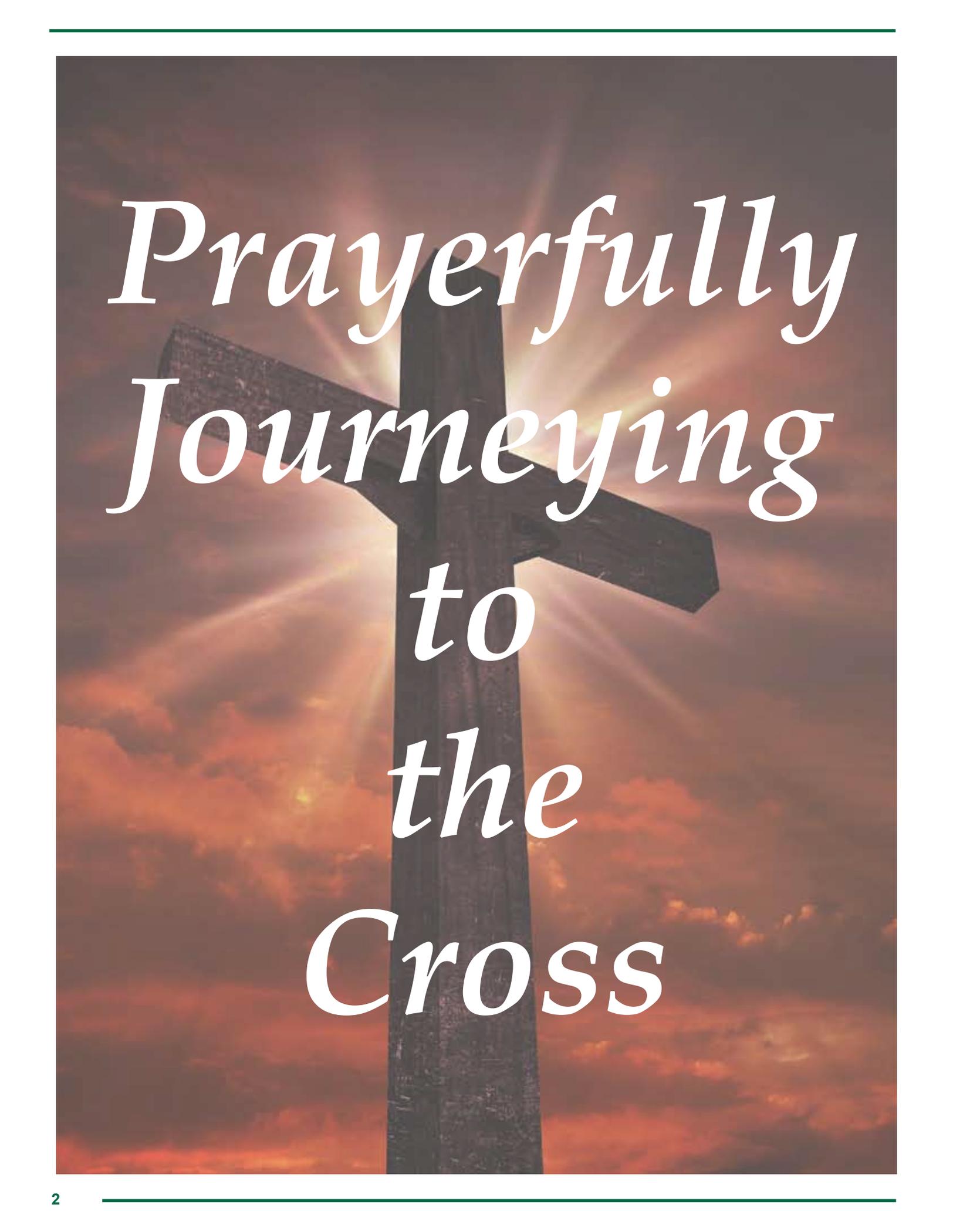




*Lenten
Resources
2014*

www.disciplehomemissions.org

A wooden cross stands centrally against a dramatic sunset sky. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow and rays of light that fan out across the scene. The sky is filled with soft, orange and red clouds. The cross is made of dark wood and is the focal point of the image.

*Prayerfully
Journeying
to
the
Cross*

Friends,

We are pleased to provide you with this online Lenten resource. It is intended to help you to engage the deeply spiritual season of Lent. During this season, we encounter the marvel of Jesus' ultimate gift, that being his very life. We will experience feelings of penitence, wonder, guilt, gratitude, shame, and love; among many others. Under most conditions, this array of feelings would be alarming, but this is Lent.

Lent begins on Ash Wednesday, which is on March 5th this year. It continues, for 40 days (excluding Sundays) to Holy Saturday, which is the day before Easter (April 20th). Like Advent, the season of Lent is one of preparation and reflection. Although we will never be fully prepared for the sacrifice that Jesus made, our reflections can enhance our appreciation. Hopefully, such appreciation will call forth prayerful responses from us.

Feel free to use this resource with your families, your friends, and your congregations. It is our contribution to your study and devotion.

From the Christian Education Office of
Disciples Home Missions (DHM)



The 2014 Lenten Resources are prepared by Rev. Betty Miller Green and Dr. Irvin W. Green, with meditations also contributed by the members and friends of First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. On some days, there are more than one devotion provided for that day. Count this as a bonus, feeling free to use either or both.



Betty is an ordained minister, with diverse educational preparation that has extended her ministry to the fields of Education and Mental Wholeness. She has served in support roles at several congregations, with a focus on Family Ministries and the empowerment derived from Women's Ministries. Rev. Green served the Michigan region as Regional Moderator. She is presently enrolled in the Doctor of Ministry program of United Theological Seminary.

Irvin is the Interim Pastor for First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. He has served congregations and institutions in five regions, over a period of more than twenty five years. Dr. Green has served in multiple capacities in the regional and general ministries of the church. Presently, he is a member of the National Convocation Board of Trustees and the Ohio Region's New Congregation Committee.

Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings – Year A

Ash Wednesday, March 5 – Easter, April 20, 2014

Wednesday Ash Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 8:1-12	Psalm 51	Psalm 51	Psalm 51
Psalm 51:1-17	Jonah 3:1-10	Jonah 4:1-11	Isaiah 58:1-12
2 Corinthians 5:20b - 6:10	Romans 1:1-7	Romans 1:8-17	Matthew 18:1-7
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21			

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7	Psalm 32	Psalm 32	Psalm 32	Psalm 121	Psalm 121	Psalm 121
Psalm 32	1 Kings 19:1-8	Genesis 4:1-16	Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28	Isaiah 51:1-3	Micah 7:18-20	Isaiah 51:4-8
Romans 5:12-19	Hebrews 2:10-18	Hebrews 4:14—5:10	Matthew 18:10-14	2 Timothy 1:3-7	Romans 3:21-31	Luke 7:1-10
Matthew 4:1-11						

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Genesis 12:1-4a	Psalm 128	Psalm 128	Psalm 128	Psalm 95	Psalm 95	Psalm 95
Psalm 121	Numbers 21:4-9	Isaiah 65:17-25	Ezekiel 36:22-32	Exodus 16:1-8	Exodus 16:9-21	Exodus 16:27-35
Romans 4:1-5, 13-17	Hebrews 3:1-6	Romans 4:6-13	John 7:53 - 8:11	Colossians 1:15-23	Ephesians 2:11-22	John 4:1-6

John 3:1-17
or Matthew
17:1-9

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Exodus 17:1-7	Psalm 81	Psalm 81	Psalm 81	Psalm 23	Psalm 23	Psalm 23
Psalm 95	Genesis 24:1-27	Genesis 29:1-14	Jeremiah 2:4-13	1 Samuel 15:10-21	1 Samuel 15:22-31	1 Samuel 15:32-34
Romans 5:1-11	2 John 1-13	1 Corinthians 10:1-4	John 7:14-31, 37-39	Ephesians 4:25-32	Ephesians 5:1-9	John 1:1-9
John 4:5-42						

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 Samuel 16:1-13	Psalms 146	Psalms 146	Psalms 146	Psalms 130	Psalms 130	Psalms 130
Psalms 23	Isaiah 59:9-19	Isaiah 42:14-21	Isaiah 60:17-22	Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:8—3:3	Ezekiel 33:10-16	Ezekiel 36:8-15
Ephesians 5:8-14	Acts 9:1-20	Colossians 1:9-14	Matthew 9:27- 34	Revelation 10:1-11	Revelation 11:15-19	Luke 24:44-53
John 9:1-41						

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Ezekiel 37:1-14	Psalms 143	Psalms 143	Ephesians 2:1-10	Psalms 31:9-16	Psalms 31:9-16	Psalms 31:9-16
Psalms 130	1 Kings 17:17-24	2 Kings 4:18-37	Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41	1 Samuel 16:11-13	Job 13:13-19	Lamentations 3:55-66
Romans 8:6-11	Acts 20:7-12	Ephesians 2:1-10	Matthew 22:23-33	Philippians 1:1-11	Philippians 1:21-30	Mark 10:32-34
John 11:1-45						

Sunday Passion or Palm Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday Maundy Thurs.	Friday Good Friday	Saturday
Psalms 1 18:1-2, 19-29	Isaiah 42:1-9	Isaiah 49:1-7	Isaiah 50:4-9a	Exodus 12:1-4 [5-10] 11-14	Isaiah 52:13 - 53:12	Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24
Matthew 21:1-11	Psalms 36:5-11	Psalms 71:1-14	Psalms 70	Psalms 116: 1-2, 12-19	Psalms 22	Psalms 31: 1-4, 15-16
Passion Isaiah 50:4-9a	Hebrews 9:11-15	1 Corinthians 1:18-31	Hebrews 12:1-3	1 Corinthians 11:23-26	Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9	1 Peter 4:1-8
Psalms 31:9-16	John 12:1-11	John 12:20-36	John 13:21-32	John 13: 1-17, 31b-35	John 18:1 - 19:42	Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42

	Sunday Easter Day	Sunday Easter Evening
Philippians 2:5-11		
Matthew 26:14 - 27:66 or Matthew 27:11-54	Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6	Isaiah 25:6-9
	Psalms 118: 1-2, 14-24	Psalms 114
	Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43	1 Corinthians 5:6b-8
	John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10	Luke 24:13-49



Common Lenten Activities

INDIVIDUAL:

- Fasting
- Personal Improvement (giving up things or habits)
- Daily Devotion
- Work Projects (cleaning and renewal)

CONGREGATIONAL:

- Ash Wednesday Service (may be a mass or musical and usually includes imposition of ashes)
- Easter Play
- Maundy Thursday Service (includes observance of Last Supper and may include Seder meal and/or footwashing)
- Weekly Study Group (may include light meal)
- Good Friday Service (may involve musical rendering or preaching of “Seven Last Words of Christ”)
- Silent Worship and Prayer
- Membership Classes and Baptism



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES:

- Shopping for Easter Clothes
- Egg Dying
- Egg Hunt
- Family Gatherings (with limitless food)
- Spring Cleaning and Gardening

Lenten Terms

ASH WEDNESDAY: The first day of Lent. This observance is so called because celebrants have ashes placed on their foreheads, as a sign of humility and repentance.

ANNUNCIATION: Many Christians (particularly Catholics) celebrate March 25th, as the day that Mary was told that she would be the mother of the Messiah. This date does not always fall during Lent.

CARNIVAL: A pre-Lenten festive celebration, involving revelry and celebration. Brazil is the site of the most known Carnival (Carnivale).

FASTING: The practice of abstaining from eating all or most foods, for religious or dietary reasons. Some abstain for portions of the fasting days (i.e. until sunset). Others fast on a particular day of the week, for a period of time.

FAT TUESDAY: The day before Ash Wednesday, when fatty or rich foods are eaten, in anticipation of fasting.

GOOD FRIDAY: This is the day of the crucifixion of Jesus. Although many have come to believe that it is called Good Friday, the origin of the term comes from a translation from a term meaning “holy.” (Also called Holy Friday or Black Friday)

HOLY WEEK: The period from Palm Sunday to Holy Saturday.

HOLY SATURDAY: The day between the crucifixion (on Good Friday) and the resurrection (Easter). Tradition has asserted that Jesus descended to Hell, to release many captives. Others diminish their activities on this day, in the belief that this was a day of rest for Jesus.

IMPOSITION OF ASHES: On Ash Wednesday, ashes are ceremonially placed (imposed) on the foreheads of celebrants, as a sign of guilt, penitence, and humility.

MARDI GRAS: A French term, meaning “Fat Tuesday”, when celebration precedes the solemn period of Lent.

MAUNDY THURSDAY: The day that the Last Supper was held, as an observance of Passover, by Jesus and the disciples. This day also includes the washing of the disciples’ feet (by Jesus), Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, and the arrest of Jesus. Some include the betrayal by Judas, but this is more commonly placed on Wednesday.



PALM SUNDAY: Upon entering Jerusalem (triumphal entry), Jesus was welcomed by celebration and shouts of joy. Many in the crowd placed clothes and palm branches in the path of Jesus, who rode into Jerusalem on a donkey.

PASSION: This term is used to describe the anguish and suffering of Jesus, as the crucifixion approached and while on the cross.

PASSOVER: A Jewish observance, commemorating the time when the angel of death was directed to “pass over” the homes of Israelites who had obediently marked their doorpost with blood from lambs, during the plagues against Egypt.

PENITENCE: Sorrow and repentance from sin, often involving visual signs of humility. Also known as “penance.”

SEDER: A family or community meal, observed as a part of Passover. This is the meal that Jesus was sharing with the disciples during the “Last Supper.”

SEVEN LAST WORDS: The last phrases spoken by Jesus on the cross. The order is not actually verifiable, in that none of the Gospels contain all seven. The traditional order is:

Father, forgive them
Today, you will be with me in paradise
Behold your son (mother)
My God, why have you forsaken me?
I thirst
It is finished
Into your hands, I commend my spirit

SHROVE TUESDAY: The day prior to Ash Wednesday, when some Christians prepare for their fasting by eating pancakes.

STATIONS OF THE CROSS: Seven points along the route that Jesus took, as he carried the cross. Displays of the seven stations note occurrences such as Jesus falling or being assisted by Simon of Cyrene. (also called “The Way of the Cross” or “Via Dolorosa”).

Daily Meditations

Wednesday March 5 Ash Wednesday

And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. Matthew 6:16

The Gospel writer reports Jesus speaking pointedly against the theatrics that are part of the ways that many of us observe spiritual practices. All of our friends and relatives know how late the Board meeting ran last night. Our co-workers know that we are “generous” supporters of our congregation’s ministries. Fellow congregants have all heard of the great effort that we put into the seasonal cleaning of the church kitchen, and how ungrateful the rest of the members are. We have often been guilty of seeming overburdened in serving God. In representing ourselves as heroic, in our service, we have received a self-bestowed award.

God is seeking willing workers, who serve God and the Church out of appreciation for the continuous stream of blessings that each of us has received. When we present our participation or service as inconvenient or unreasonable, we belittle God’s blessings. We claim, by our attitudes, to be giving more than we are getting. We are unreliable character witnesses for the Lord. The world around us needs to discover, by our joyful engagement, that God is worthy of as much of our attention and commitment as is needed.

Ash
Wednesday is different, in that it displays unity, in the practice, rather than showcasing individuals. Wearing of the ashes



offers many ordinary believers the opportunity to speak of their faith, even to strangers. We can make it about ego, but it can be a powerful testimony. Together, we appreciate the saving acts of Jesus, who came to redeem us.

Saving Lord,

We can never be impressed with ourselves, if we are aware of the price that you paid for each of us. We confess our sinfulness and celebrate your great sacrifice.

In Humility,

Amen

Thursday March 6

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10

Of the many descriptors of God that we have heard, it is doubtful that many have called out to a “heavenly cardiologist.” The psalmist is seeking cleansing of a different sort. Angioplasty will not accomplish what is needed here. The cleanliness or lack thereof that the writer seeks for his heart is not physical. We are in need of meditation, not medication. In spiritual terms, the heart is the essence of our being. As such, one with a clean heart is essentially godly. The psalmist desires, as should we, an essence that resembles God.

Of all the things that people “give up” for Lent, few speak to the essence of one’s spirit. Even if we could accomplish controlling our chocolate intake or manage to quit smoking, we would remain essentially the same persons. Too many critics cynically reject the usual practices, without recognizing the potential that they represent. Perhaps if I can stay out of Crispy Crème for a week or two, I can summon the discipline to engage in spiritual practices. It is all about process and progress.

As we ponder the meaning and

importance of Lent, we have the opportunity to connect the dots. Everything that we do has spiritual meaning. Those things that we fail to think about, in spiritual terms, most likely have negative spiritual meaning. Our task is to envision sanctity in our sacrifice.

God of Bounty,

We take this season to embrace you at a basic level, so that we can understand and appreciate your generosity. Although some of our actions are symbolic, we desire genuine engagement with your holiness. We are willing to give up much of our daily dosages of “stuff”, in exchange for a sprinkling of your love.

In Christ,

Amen

Friday March 7

For I am not ashamed of the Gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. Romans 1:16

Many of us sing lustily and proclaim proudly that we, like Paul, are not ashamed of the Gospel. It is a popular thing to claim. For the most part, we believe ourselves when we say this. The shame emerges in the variety of things of God and the Gospel that we deemphasize or even hide. We assert our faith loudly in the sanctuary (some of us do), but many of our co-workers are unaware that we even frequent the sanctuary. Even in our Christian conduct, we duck and dodge issues and passages that are difficult to understand or challenge our existing world views.

Our failure to embrace even the rough edges of the Gospel could reasonably be understood as shame. Perhaps we need to seek to overcome, rather than to deny our shame. We may not have intended to be ashamed, but it appears we have been. In various ways, the Disciples

of Jesus displayed shame, both as the crucifixion approached and in the days following. Prayerfully, most of them appear to have overcome their shame. That should be our hope.

Forgiving God,

We have hidden from your fullness and from our callings. We have been ashamed, but we seek to grow beyond it. Grant us your patience and your peace.

In Earnest Quest,

Amen

Saturday March 8

Psalm 51, Isaiah 58:1-12, Matthew 18:18:1-7

When confronted with the deed he has done, David saw the need of repentance and forgiveness. Isaiah points to relationship we should strengthen. We need to be more aware of poverty and injustice and do more to right the wrongs that exist among us. Matthew describes incidents in the journey of Jesus to Caesarea Philippi as Jesus nears the end of his ministry. The disciples vie for the highest standing in the kingdom of heaven; and Jesus replies that the greatest is the one who humbles himself.

Each of the biblical accounts, cited above, stands as a road marker for the persons involved in these narratives. They are all on journeys. Collectively, we can see that the journeys are also on them. Like newly applied tar; the roads that each of them traveled will now travel with them, for the rest of their lives. We too have been "tarred" by our chosen paths. If looking at us is to reveal where we have been, we ought to choose our paths wisely.

As we go through Lent, we need to dwell on repentance, compassion, and humility.

Lord,

Help us be more forgiving, more loving, and more humble in our relations with others.

By Your Grace,

Amen

Saturday March 8

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry for help and he will say, here I am. If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. Isaiah 58:9-10

The things that are included in chapter 58 of Isaiah's prophecy do not sound like the motives or outcomes of dietary changes. We may be more accustomed to promises of weight loss or increased energy. Instead, God speaks through Isaiah and condemns the usual fasting that Israel has engaged in. It (the fasting) is depicted as self-serving and, with little or no regard for making a positive impact on those who are suffering. They might be described as fasting for the sake of fasting. God desires that even our rituals should make a difference.

In our relationships, it matters whether we do things to benefit those with whom we share in relationship or to benefit ourselves. Whether we offer a job, a meal, or a check, questionable motives will lead some to decline our offers, while others accept our favors with no sense of gratitude. God is more perceptive than any of us. Whether we fast or tithe or assume positions of leadership, it matters to God why we do it.

Jesus came into the world for our benefit. He taught and preached for our enlightenment. He was crucified to redeem our sins. Even though the people around him at that time questioned his reasons, time has presented him as entirely selfless. When our fasting and service mirrors the attitude of Jesus, we will be more deserving of rewards.

Gracious Lord,

We need and want much from you. Bless us to take some time to understand and respond to the needs of others.

In Faith,

Amen



Sunday March 9

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him "all these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Matthew 4:8-9

It has long been said to be advantageous to have friends in high places. Satan not only represented himself as such a friend, but offered Jesus access to the high places. The condition required to garner that which could never be delivered was that Jesus was to worship Satan. This too was impossible. Jesus was incapable of looking up to Satan, as worthy of worship. He was also incapable of pretending to do so. This was an easy call for him, but clearly is not for all of us all of the time.

Depending on the state of our self esteem, on a given day, many persons or entities seem greater than us. We may not consider ourselves to be worshipping them, but the extent of our adoration and praise is exactly that. We are too often guilty of looking up to other humans so much that we aspire to be them. Nobody presently among us is worthy of such worship, just as the devil was unworthy in our text.

Jesus is worthy of our adoration and worship. We can properly emulate him, knowing that we could never be him. He is fully capable of giving us all things, if we will fall down and worship him.

King of Kings,

You have been crowned with many crowns, but remain worthy of more. No praise is undeserved, nor is any promise from you undeliverable. We do not seek the kingdoms of the world, but instead aspire to be citizens of your kingdom.

In Your Service,

Amen

Monday March 10

You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance. Psalm 32:7

We often associate avoidance of trouble with hiding places. As children, employees, and even pets, the assumption is that we would risk trouble if it was known what we had done and where we could be found. For this reason, we spend a great deal of time and effort hiding both our activities and our whereabouts. God is represented in this text more as a source of security than as a co-conspirator. Instead of sheltering us from the consequences of our actions, God delivers and forgives us.

With God, there is nothing hidden or withheld. Amazingly, God knows all about us and still secures our lives. We live in the light of God, which both reveals all of our actions and illuminates our path. God's light reveals a better way for us. We find our most effective hiding place to be right out in the open. Only God is capable of such.

Embracing God,

We could not stand up to scrutiny, except for your forgiveness and grace. No amount of gratitude could properly thank you, but it is only right to try. Please accept our thanks and continue to be our hiding place.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

Tuesday March 11

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:15-16

Whether we are engaged in pastoral counseling, psychotherapy, a support group, we tend to have some degree of concern about the understanding of those who are charged with hearing our concerns. Do they "get it"? Are they judging me, as I allow myself to be transparent and vulnerable? Will I hear my story being reported by voices that were not even present, when I told my story?

With Jesus, we need not have these anxieties. He not only understands what we have been subjected to, he has experienced the judgment, accusations, and scorn of the world around him. With him, sharing more offers greater possibilities. Jesus is on my side and knows whose side that is. It is with that perspective in mind that the writer suggests that we approach God's throne "with boldness." We have no need to hold back. We are known and understood.

God of Intimacy,

We trust you completely because you are completely trustworthy. In you, we have a listening ear that is more than safe. You act in our interests and fully know us. For this, we give thanks.

By Your Grace,

Amen

Wednesday March 12

The Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke." Exodus 34:1

In the course of our lives, we occasionally encounter what we name as "our big chance." When such an event arrives, we tend to believe that it calls for our very best. This is a once in a lifetime situation. If you falter in the job interview or drop the ball in your tryout, there will not be another chance. We experience life as having limited opportunities.

The text from Exodus describes God as offering a "do over" to Moses. In rage, Moses had thrown down and broken the original tablet upon which the 10 Commandments were inscribed. Although it could be said that his anger was justified, upon finding the Israelites engaged in idolatry and revelry, the tablets were





the work of God. Moses had failed to deliver the very words that would name the behaviors of the Israelites as being contrary to God's will. According to the prevailing world view, there was no reason to expect a second chance.

God was not and is not more lenient than the world. Instead, God is able to determine what is most important in a given situation. The intention to provide direction for Israel was not to be thwarted by the angry behavior of Moses. God had chosen Moses as his messenger and found him still capable of this work. The individual consequences would come, but not at the expense of the whole community. We would all profit from being more aware of the priorities of the moment.

Steadfast Lord,

You give us a clear vision of what it is to see a mission through to completion. We have many starts, but few conclusions. Help us to profit both from your example and from your works.

In Christ,

Amen

Thursday March 13

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness, you that seek the Lord. Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Isaiah 51:1

Proud fathers have often referred to one of their children as "a chip off the old block." This is way of asserting that whatever accomplishment or attribute has

come to the fore is due to the origin or heritage of the child. The success of the child has to do with where he/she has come from. This may be due to genetics or to the teaching that occurs in the home of your parents.

In the text, God calls attention to several things. The first is "I am preparing to speak, so listen." The second is to make clear who this message involves, "you who pursue righteousness." Thirdly, God reminds us all of where or whom we have come from. We are described as being hewn from a rock or dug from a quarry. We are "chips off the Godly rock."

Although Isaiah understood this message as being for Israel, it applies to all who pursue righteousness and know themselves to be sons and daughters of God. It intends more than the ego boost that comes from being claimed as God's child. It demands that we live and behave with the awareness and subsequent responsibility that is derived from the identity of being God's offspring.

Father God,

In being your children we often realize how high you have set the bar. May we also come to know how capable we are, just because of our kinship with you. Bless us and empower us.

In Your Blood,

Amen

Friday March 14

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of your possession? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in showing clemency. Micah 7:18

There are times when it seems like everybody who can use power to our detriment does exactly that. Dishonest merchants milk every possible penny from us. Insurance companies cancel coverage after years without a claim. Social systems deny needed benefits because of technical reasons. On occasion, the wielders of

this power admit their motivation. When asked why they have done whatever they have done, they answer "because I can."

God is not like the megalomaniacs that we encounter. More correctly, they have failed to be like God. Power is most properly used for positive purposes, but it often seems that only God is comfortable enough with power to use it properly. It is amazing to read the words of the text that assert God's pleasure in showing clemency.

We must really be extraordinary in our waywardness, for a God who desires to grant clemency to still have to repeatedly discipline us. Like earthly parents, God allows us to discover the credible claim that "this hurts me more than you." The proper ordering of God's creation requires that we function in ways that are Godly and sustainable. God yearns for the day when we accept the clemency that will bring peace and joy to us all.

God of Mercy,

Please forgive our persistent discord, which disrupts your most loving intentions for us all. We continue to act willfully, even to our own detriment. May we arrive at the point of true submission, for our well being and for the sake of your realm.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

Saturday March 15

"I lift up my eyes to the hills--where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip--he who watches over you will not slumber...." Psalm 121:1-3

This Psalm is a reminder that life is a pilgrimage and we were never promised an easy way. Man has often looked toward high places for their help, just as the Greeks looked upon Mt. Olympus to their pagan Gods for help. But this Psalm contains so much more.



It is a reminder of the constant struggle that Christians face as the old self struggles to re-establish itself as the master of the heart. Notice that even in this Psalm of comfort and consolation, the first intent contained in the first verse seems almost mockingly to question where our help will come from. But then in the second verse comes the statement that God is still in charge and will eventually “lead us by the still waters” of our life as the Holy Spirit reassures us that He will not let our foot slip as we climb out of the valley of our despair toward our resting place in Him.

The high places also remind us of a passage from Isaiah 54:10 that reads: “The mountains may disappear and the hills come to an end, but my love will never disappear; my promise of peace will not come to an end...” What a source of comfort no matter what we encounter or how much pain we endure! Unending love and unending peace isn’t that what we all long to attain? It’s going to come since Our God promised it would.

The remainder of this little Psalm is a reminder of all the ways that God will protect us...never slumbering... protecting us from all dangers...and guarding our lives, but hidden within it is also a reminder that we must come to him and seek, ask and he will be found. He will respond and come to us.

As we continue down the Lenten road that leads to our glorious celebration of Easter, let us truly lift up our eyes to the Lord from which all our help truly comes.

Holy God,

Prepare us for the coming days, both in this season and throughout our lives. Provide us with all the resources that we need, especially your presence.

In Anticipation,

Amen

Sunday March 16

Then Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” Matthew 17:4

In Matthew 17, Jesus takes three of his disciples to a literal “mountaintop experience.” The event and the mountain have come to be known as the transfiguration and the Mount of Transfiguration. This was a place where they had never been and what they witnessed had never been seen before. Right before their eyes, the clothes and countenance of Jesus began to shine like the sun. Having never seen such things as these, Peter had a plan by verse 4. He was sure that the best course of action was to move in, constructing permanent housing for Jesus, as well as Moses and Elijah, who had joined in the vision.

Many of us have been invited to live out the visions of those who we have come to lead. As pastors, football coaches, stock brokers, and parents, we have often found that the task of leading God’s people involved dispelling some implausible ideas that are offered by those in our care. In many such cases, there has been every opportunity to explore these ideas. More importantly, most of us have been in the role of offering these ideas. Whether we are a football team, a client, a family, or a congregation, there is nothing wrong with us offering ideas. It is essential that our ideas and plans do not prevent the hearing and engaging the voice of God, in the person of each of those who have come to guide us.

God of Light,

Shine your brilliant light on each of us, that we might discover all that we have hidden away in the darkness. Let your light also guide us on unfamiliar paths and to unknown destinations. We subject ourselves to your guidance, and to the guidance of you designated drivers.

In Your Service,

Amen

Monday March 17

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” Numbers 21:4-5

Few examples can be cited of such impatience and lack of gratitude as that of the Israelites in the wilderness. After all of the suffering in Egypt and all of the efforts of Moses and miracles of God, needed to secure their freedom, the Israelites soon found the cost of liberation too much to render. Even though God has provided water, even from a rock, they claim “there is no water.” In the same verse in which they complain there is NO food, they say “we detest THIS food.” Who has time to verify the validity of their complaints while maintaining a steady stream of them?

It may be easy to critique the ingratitude of Israel. It may even be comedic to point out their inconsistencies. Our problem is that among the examples, that match or exceed the case of the Israelites, we are high on the list. Each day, by actions or words, we refute the value of Jesus’ sacrifice. When we claim that the state of the economy has dried up our hope, we say “there is no water.” As we claim that the preaching and teaching of the church has us starving for the Word, we cry “there is no food.” In Christ, we have all that we need to engage the shortcomings of society and the world.



God of Plenty,

Please grant each of us a five minute recess from our complaining. In that time, let us examine our shortcomings and begin to rediscover the path to faithfulness.

With Appreciation,

Amen

Tuesday March 18

Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways. Psalm 128:1

This psalm promises the happiness of those who fear God and offers blessings from Zion. It names several blessings to those concerned. They will eat the fruit of their labor. Their wives will be like fruitful vines and their children will be like olive shoots. It will “go well” with them. This is quite a list of blessings. Certainly, with some good biblical exegesis, these things can be presented as appealing, but it is doubtful that any of them would make the “top ten” of most folks. We rejoice that God is blessing us, but wish that God would take a brief peek at our wish lists.

What the psalmist realizes, and offers to us, is that our happiness comes from learning to accept and value whatever we receive from God. God knows what we need and what will enhance our lives. We are creations of God. Everything that God provides is an enhancement of the creation. Much of what we seek would diminish or destroy parts of us and our surroundings. We can never claim to be walking in God’s way,

while believing that we have better ideas of how God should bless us. We are called to accept that the author of life and every living thing is best equipped to select the accessories.

Lord of Our Joy,

We are proud of the ideas and plans that are products of our intellect, a blessing from you. Help us to know that the one who breathed life into each of us knows well how to provide for our effectiveness and pleasure.

In Submission,

Amen

Wednesday March 19

Jesus straightened up and said to her “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, sir.” And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.” John 8:10-11

There are many of us who are unable to avoid judging or condemning people. We all know the story of Jesus encountering the woman who was caught in adultery. There is a clear message that condemnation is not God’s way for us. Instead of embracing the clear message, we often look for alternative messages. We point out that the woman was not caught alone. Although this is true, our motive may be to avoid the lesson that calls us to accountability. We need to stop



condemning.

We sometimes engage in a “scripture-thon”, when this text is mentioned. When called upon to accept the message of not condemning, we respond with, but the Bible also says... We present these additional texts, as if they stand to refute or contradict what Jesus is saying in the passage at hand. Jesus will not ever be shown to be partially or somewhat right. His teaching is fully authoritative.

We may mean well. We rightfully see that those who sin need to stop doing so. Jesus is trying to teach us that this objective is better realized through grace and forgiveness, than through judgment and scorn. Until we embrace this teaching, Jesus continues to speak to each of us, “Go your way, and from now on do not sin again.”

God of Grace,

When we assign ourselves to join you in ordering the world, remind us that you alone are divine and fit for such work. Let us submit ourselves to your teaching and your will.

In Humility,

Amen

Thursday March 20

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:19-20

It is not unusual to hear a negotiated agreement as one in which nobody is fully satisfied. The two sides agree that each party had to give up some of their demands, for the good of getting an agreement. As much effort is exerted in citing the sacrifices as in naming the gains. This is what it takes for mortal persons to come to terms with each other.

Jesus did not compromise or barter. He fully gave up himself for us. His contribution is named in the text as one in which God was fully

pleased to dwell in. He is entirely pleasing to God, as the source of reconciliation of all things. His blood is the universal solvent for all that needs cleansing. If God is fully pleased, then Jesus is fully adequate.

The ways that we negotiate with fellow mortals is appropriate, in the necessary give and take. It is regrettable that some of us never subscribe even to this standard. In the case of Jesus, we can never match his sufficiency, but we can appreciate it and profit from it.

Lord of Lords,

You have served us as only you can. May we at least endeavor to serve you and each other as well as we can. We have not only fallen short of your capacity, but our own. Forgive us and challenge us.

In Hope,

Amen

Friday March 21

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access through one Spirit to the Father. Ephesians 2:17

Jesus was rare in many ways. One of those ways is the ability to meet the needs of all people. Jesus is embraced by Republicans and Democrats. Evangelicals and mainline Protestants agree, when it comes to loving Jesus. We may not agree on the meaning of Jesus' words, but we agree that they are important. He won us over without an agent a marketing campaign or a webpage.

The peace that Jesus proclaimed was not tailored to the audience of the day. He was consistent in calling upon all of us to love one another and to act in ways that reflect concern for the well being of all. We do not always embrace the peace that Jesus calls us to. In that, we are among those who the writer refers to as "far off." We know what Jesus calls forth from us, but sometimes love Jesus more than we love his teaching. To us, he provides access.

Access is also provided for those who are described as near. Unlike some of our social programs or classrooms, Jesus does not neglect those who seem closer to the mark. He knows that we continue to need the access that he provides until we have safely crossed the finish line. We have proven that even when we almost get it, we seem to return to being far off. Jesus will see us through to the end.

Lord of All,

We are different in many ways, but united in our brokenness. None of us are always near or always far. Meet our needs at both times in our lives. Grant us your peace.

In Christ,

Amen

Saturday March 22

Moses said, "This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, in order that they see the food with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.' " Exodus 16:32

In many places of business, there is a dollar or even a penny framed and displayed on a wall. Most often, the owner of the business will proudly state that the display is of the first money earned by the business.

After this, stories of struggle and survival are often told. Together, the display and the stories combine to proclaim both the determination to make it and the joy that comes from outlasting challenges.

God instructed Moses to hold on to a sample of the manna that the Israelites ate in the wilderness. This would certainly provide a visual reminder of struggle, especially after a few years. It seems that remembering our struggles is more useful, in facing our challenges, than recounting our glory days. Some of our families or congregations could profit from realizing this. We spend a lot of time retelling stories of "the good old days."

Maybe those of us who lack manna should think about emulating the Israelites. Each congregation should retain a mason jar of chicken casserole, to remind future generations of the great sacrifices involved in making it through the years.

Jehovah Jireh (Lord our Provider),

You have met our needs throughout all generations. We sometimes become too comfortable and forget both our struggle and your provision. When we do, show us the casserole.

In Humility,

Amen





Sunday March 23

Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." John 4:13-14

Every day, most people experience what we describe as hunger and thirst. For the most part, this means that we are at the beginning of the urge to eat or drink. We are not at the point of survival that define hunger or thirst for too many people around the world. For them hunger means that the body is approaching the point of shutting down, for lack of food. Thirst is, for them, descriptive of dehydration that threatens survival.

The woman at the well experienced thirst as we do. It was an inconvenience to have to go get water, but it was there. Many of us live in homes with running water in the pipes and bottled water in the refrigerator, but do not drink it. We find it boring. Jesus was not engaging thirst, as we describe it.

The water that Jesus offered was both spiritual and essential. Those who receive the spring of spiritual nurture, that is his water, will drink and be made strong. Even if, in complacency, we neglect to drink of the water of Jesus, we

still have it. We may experience the thirst of boredom again, but we will never again be without access to the spiritual survival that Jesus has provided.

Living Water,

Hydrate our spirits, so that we may think clearly. Show us the value of drinking deeply from your fountain of love. Send us to provide both spiritual and physical water to all who have need.

Through Your Spirit,

Amen

Monday March 24

There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god. I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide and I will fill it. Psalm 81:9-10

Many psalms appeal to God, but this one presents an appeal from God. The psalmist acts as a combination of prophet and emcee, as verses one through five introduce eleven verses which quote the voice of God. Israel is represented as being both stubborn and unfaithful, in spite of God's history of meeting their needs. Only love can account for God choosing to continue to appeal to Israel.

Parents of young adults often

conclude that the primary difference between the rebellion which characterized the adolescence of many of us and the onset of adulthood is that our children are now free to make their own choices. No longer, is it the parent's choice to grant independence. It is legally theirs. At this point, parents must switch from declaring what will be to appealing for what they believe should be. A lot of questionable choices are made, on the way to choosing to consider the wisdom of parents or acquiring wisdom of their own.

God is aware that there is great peril in the free choice that we have been blessed with. In love, God chooses to appeal to us. This choice is another blessing, which we should be careful not to squander.

God of Freedom,

Although you allow us to make choices, you show us your love, by warning us of the risks involved. In your divinity, you allow us to both succeed and to fail. We appreciate our freedom, but even more, we appreciate your vigilance.

In Liberty,

Amen

Tuesday March 25

"I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket... But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me." Psalm 81:6,11

In the aftermath of regrettable outcomes, there is usually someone available to point out that our consequences were avoidable. Such phrases as "I told you so", or "what were you thinking of?" point to the clear evidence that we are responsible for the negative way that things have turned out. It matters little that these tardy prophets have often told us nothing, nor have they done anything to prevent our problem.

God's "I told you so" is authentic. In the case of this psalm, God has gone beyond telling us how to

carry the burden. God points out "I took the burden from you. I took the wheel." Even when relieved of responsibility or the burden of performance, we are inclined to do it our way. We would rather make our own mess than witness success that we had no hand in.

God understands our ego drive. On a regular basis, God offers us the combined blessing of doing it ourselves and doing it well. This is accomplished by hearing and heeding God's guidance. Somehow, we still manage to either mess things up or to leave them undone.

Enduring Lord,

Forgive us, for our repeated willfulness. You have both shown and told us how to experience the best outcomes. We continue to prefer our flawed creation to your perfect one. Love us, while we find our way to faithfully yielding to your will.

In Christ,

Amen

Wednesday March 26

About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. The Jews were astonished at it, saying, "How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?" Then Jesus answered, "My teaching is not mine but his who sent



me." John 7:14-16

Teachers, in school settings, are normally required to present several forms of credentials, before being offered a job. They present degrees and transcripts from the schools that they have attended. They seek certification from state and local governments. Resumes and references describe the impact of their prior work. Still, we have occasion to question their competence.

Jesus showed up at the temple with no "papers", but that was not the problem. The problem was that he taught well. He defied the expectations of the people; that only those who are products of the culture's processes could perform well. He responded, by offering the best possible credential. He credited God with preparing him to teach.

Although there are times when we overdo our insistence on credentials, the practice is valid. We who offer God's ways are not excusing ourselves from the process. We are valuing God's wisdom and insisting that others do, as well.

God of Wisdom,

Teach us your truth, and guide us to honoring it above all else. You are not a reasonable facsimile of the world's knowledge. Yours is the real thing. For this we give thanks.

In Wisdom,

Amen

Thursday March 27

Be angry, but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger. Ephesians 4:26

People are fond of believing that we live by a different set of expectations when we are angry. The assumption is that the decisions and actions that come, while we are angry, are covered by our diminished state of self control. Some people seem to have embraced this claim and therefore hurry to the point of anger. The awareness that we are less in control is accurate; however the threshold of responsibility remains unchanged.

The writer calls upon us to dispense with our anger by sundown. This come just as it was looking as if the writer understood anger. If anger robs us of self control, how can we put it on a timetable? What about all the times when we become angry during the evening?

We need to realize that the writer is not addressing our abilities. He speaks of what we can and must do, by the power of the Holy Spirit. As children of God, we must dispel everything that obstructs our capacity to be fully faithful. We do not have the luxury of relinquishing our self control or anything else that we need to live the Gospel message.

Faithful God,

Bless us, to surrender our control to you alone. Regulate us, to be all that you intend for us to be. We receive your best, therefore you require our best.

In Holiness,

Amen

Friday March 28

Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me. Psalm 23:4

If asked to recall our darkest valleys, many of us would grow uncomfortable to even think about them. For some of us, memories

of military service would emerge. Others would recall being victimized by street crimes or home invasions. Relational struggles would jar the memory of many. In any of these cases, the claim of fearing no evil is audacious. Most of us would agree that these valleys had earned the privilege of rendering us fearful.

The psalmist was not a stranger to legitimate fear. He experienced battle with wild animals, ducked spears thrown by Saul, interacted with five wives, and engaged Goliath in a heated debate. Certainly, he knew the sources of fear, before and after writing this psalm. Importantly, he also knew the solution for fear.

David knew God to be one who would usher us beyond our fears. God would guide us with a staff or protect us with a rod. Because of God's sufficiency, fear could be relinquished. We can walk without fear, as long as we know one who is greater than the persons and situations that we would otherwise fear. With God, there is light in every valley.

Lord of Light,

Illuminate all of the dark and frightening corners in our lives. Chase away every adversary. Most of all; shine your light on us, so that we can see your image in our faces.

Without Fear,

Amen

Saturday March 29

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. John 1:6-8

There are occasions when we become overwhelmed, by the enormity of a challenge that we are facing. We wonder how we can write so many pages or stack so many boxes. It seems that there is not enough time, money, energy, or creativity, to meet the demand that is before us. Relief can come upon



discovering that the entire job is not our responsibility. We are told, "All that you are needed to do is..."

John did not have a small job to perform. Preparing the world for Jesus is not a simple matter. John was able to diligently engage his work, knowing that it was far more possible to prepare for Jesus than to "be" Jesus. Long before the present phrase was coined, John knew how to "stay in his lane."

We often make things harder for ourselves, when we presume to oversee the work of everyone around us. In many of these cases, we have little capacity to guide others in their work. In most cases, our own work suffers, while we concern ourselves with that which is in someone else's in-box.

God of Order,

The load that you give to each of us is challenging. You know what every person can bear. Bless us, to do our work, leaving others to do theirs. Only then, can we manage our loads.

Through Jesus,

Amen

Sunday March 30

Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." 1 Samuel 16:10-11a

Every year, congregations all over the country, and perhaps the world, scamper to complete the filling of their slate of leaders. Whether leaders are elected or appointed, these congregations can never find enough suitable candidates. The text suggests that we may be overlooking some people. We may be reliving the "Humpty Dumpty" narrative. Humpty perished, while even horses were given a chance to save him, rather than involving the women of the community.

David was the son who was overlooked, even by his father. Apparently he did not look like king material. Certainly, Jesse loved all his sons, but only saw certain potential in each one. God saw the full potential of David, and spoke through Samuel. David was anointed to become the king.

Keeping the sheep was Jesse's assignment for David. Others of us have been assigned, according to the imagination of those around us. Unless the vision and voice of God is brought into the equation, there is no chance of us realizing our full potential. This is a detriment to our families, congregations, and communities.

Lord of Vision,

Expose us, for the successful and effective leaders that you know we can be. Open the eye and ears of those who see only portions of our capacity. Let them see what you see, and do what you desire.

In Faithfulness

Amen

Monday March 31

But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem;" Acts 9:13

Along with nearly everyone who reads this meditation, I have been thought to be unfit for some service or position, because of what had been heard about me. Some of what was said was true. Some was spoken vindictively or jealously. In every case, the reports described my past, rather than my future. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, none of us are limited by our past.

The scripture above is a part of the story of Saul's (Paul's) conversion. God had determined to call him into the ministry of Christ. He was not originally appropriate for this calling. He was converted. Conversion is not intended for those who are already fully capable. It would be unnecessary.

When we limit our understanding of each other to what has been said of us, we prevent ourselves seeing their future capacity, or even what they are presently capable of. Much of Jesus' difficulty in Jerusalem resulted from the inclination of many,



to look backward to his identity as a carpenter's son. He was a carpenter's son, but so much more.

God of Our Future,

Escort us into the lives and witnesses that you have planned for us. Let us not live in denial of our pasts, but in spite of our pasts. Let the past inform, but not determine our future.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen

Tuesday April 1

Listen, you who are deaf; and you that are blind, look up and see! Who is blind but my servant, or deaf like my messenger whom I send? Who is blind like my dedicated one, or blind like the servant of the Lord? He sees many things, but does not observe them; his ears are open, but he does not hear. Isaiah 42:19-20

Today has been nicknamed "April Fools' Day". On this day, it is customary to cause friends and loved ones to look foolish, when they fall

victim to various pranks and tricks. A lot of time and money is invested in the challenge of making each other appear foolish.

God never intended for us to look or be foolish, but we did anyway. The above text may sound foolish, unless we understand the sad truth of what God is saying. God refers to persons who have been designated as leaders and messengers. In spite of God's preparing of each of them, they fail to comprehend the messages of our Lord. The Creator of the world is not inarticulate, so the blindness and deafness are resultant of choosing not to hear or see. That is foolish.

If we continue choose to ignore or dismiss the clear messages of God, we will need more than one day per year to celebrate our foolishness. It is questionable if we would be wise enough to make the appropriate designations. We, after all, are the ones who fail to heed the words of God.

All Wise God,

We pray that our foolishness is either an act, or is curable. We need your wisdom and to attain wisdom of our own. Inform us and direct us.

Through Christ,

Amen

Wednesday April 2

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest." Matthew 9: 36-38

The phrase "lost in the crowd" describes a circumstance in which there is seldom hope of receiving compassion. In the crowd, we lose recognizable identity. It is at the point that someone becomes merely a face in the crowd; that the discomfort from mistreating or neglecting them is at the lowest intensity. It is far more difficult to do harm to those that we know or recognize.

Jesus had compassion for the crowd. When he looked at the crowd, nobody was faceless. He saw in each face, the image and likeness of God. He recognized the as helpless and harassed. Strangely, Jesus describes these unfortunate and unknown people as a harvest. These, who were largely devalued, were associated with one of the most valuable things in an agricultural community.

Jesus proclaimed that this harvest was more plentiful than the available work force could handle. He advised the disciples to pray for more workers. God's marginalized people were named as a blessing. When we come to seeing service to those in need as a blessing, there will be more than enough of us to meet the challenge.

Lord of the Harvest,

Teach us to see our service as a high calling. Help us to treasure every person who is in need. Each of us is the in need of someone's service. Let us treat those to whom you send us as we wish to be treated.

In Compassion,

Amen

Thursday April 3

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. Psalm 130

Every now and then, I find myself debating a scriptural writer. These debates do not involve me challenging quotations from God or even the accounts of God's actions. They usually have to do with the explanations offered for the things that God has done or why God has done these things. The words above put me in the mood for debating the psalmist.

I am entirely accepting of God being seen as a God of forgiveness. I am entirely dependent upon God being such a God. I can also agree that God desires to be revered and is worthy of such. I do not see God as forgiving, in order to be revered. I believe God is more self-aware than that.

My friendly amendment, which I offer to my friend the psalmist, is that God forgives for two reasons. The first is the same reason as most things that God does for humanity. God loves us. And shows love consistently. The other reason is a variation of the first. Forgiveness is a part of God's being. It is actually the same, when you believe that God is love.

Loving God,

You bless us and forgive us, even when we fail to revere you. That offers us a motive to be more consistent in our reverence.

The fact that you would bless us without a selfish motive makes us want to praise and serve you even more.

In Praise,

Amen

Friday April 4

The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever. Revelation 11:15

Like William Shakespeare, Handel is sometimes regarded as if he wrote the words that he took from scripture. Nearly every word of his great work, "The Messiah", is a quotation of scripture. He would doubtlessly cringe upon hearing his work called "Handel's Messiah." He wrote, in celebration of one who came to be "Everybody's Messiah."

The text above speaks of the throne room of God. When the seventh trumpet has been blown, angels triumphantly proclaim that God has conquered the world. The kingdoms of the world have been incorporated into the kingdom of



God. There is nothing else to name a chorus based on this particular scene, but Hallelujah!

Revelation speaks of a future day. It is a prophetic writing. The activity, on the part of God and God's messengers, which will bring us to that day, is ongoing. We have no need to wait. We can shout hallelujah right now.

Triumphant Lord,

We trumpet and rejoice at your victory. We know that, for you, conquering the world is merely repossession. For us, it is a graduation to your kingdom. We are not the victors, but we are by your victory.

In Celebration,

Amen

Saturday April 5

Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Luke 24:44

Most people have had the occasion to make plans for a day. Many have, around the end of a year, made resolutions for the coming year. In either case, it is rare that all of our plans or resolutions are accomplished. This is even true of those who make a single resolution for the year. We do not accomplish our plans for a day or a year, but Jesus was able to fulfill a lifetime of plans.

Jesus came to walk among us, with a clear understanding of his mission. He was to bring hope to a dying world. We were to come to know and understand the love of God. The notion that we could only call on the Lord through a priest, or some other agent, was to be dispelled. Humanity was to come to know of and experience forgiveness for our sins. Check, check, check, check!!!!

Jesus went beyond completing his own "bucket list." He lived out the words of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms. This accomplishment is not listed, among the miracles of Jesus. Any of us, who have struggled to empty the in-basket on our desk,

would certainly see it as a miracle. We call it faithfulness.

Meticulous Master,

In a life that was shorter than most, you accomplished more than anyone had ever or would ever accomplish. Our joy is not because you completed a list of tasks, but because you made each of us complete. We thank you.

By Your Love,

Amen

Sunday April 6

I shall put my Spirit within you and you shall live, I shall place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord have spoken and you will act, says the Lord. Ezekiel 37:14

This particular passage begins with a very grim picture. Ezekiel is walking through a valley of dry bones. There are questions that may have been going through his head. Where am I? Why did God bring me here? What happened here? How can I get out of here? Will I ever get out of here? Is this my fate? Will God leave me here forever? I imagine that, as he walked he began to lose hope, as he saw that death was all around him. The place probably looked dingy, dark and smelly too.

Sometimes we may feel like we are walking through a valley of dry bones. We would probably ask the same questions. Perhaps your valley of dry bones is the loss of a job or the loss of a relationship. Just when Ezekiel probably thought he could not take any more God stepped in. God stepped in and began to take action and control of the situation. God began by asking him a very important question. Can these bones live?

God can see beyond what we can see. To Ezekiel, this was just a valley of dry bones. Nothing good could come out of it. God saw life in those dry bones. He ordered Ezekiel to prophesy to those bones. When Ezekiel was obedient, things began to change. We too must be obedient. We must not lose hope. It is not over. it is not finish until God says it is so.

Just as God saw life in those dry bones, God sees life in us. The season of Lent is yet another opportunity for us to get connected to the source of life. Let us be obedient and allow the light of God into our spirits.

Merciful and loving God,

You know what we need and when we need it. You are the God of life. We trust you Lord.

In Gratitude,

Amen



Monday April 7

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; Answer me in your righteousness. Psalm 143:1

Sometimes I think about how painful it must have been for Jesus when others persecuted him. He came to bring life and hope to a dying world. Instead of receiving appreciation for the gifts that he brought, he was mistreated. Others tried to destroy him at every turn. Even then, he returned nothing but love.

This paints a very grim picture. As human beings, we could not stand up long to such treatment. Jesus was fully human and fully divine and could. This is why Psalm 143 helps us to put things in perspective. We can count on God to hear our cries for help in days of trouble. If we keep our hands stretched to God we will receive the living water that we need to refresh our weary souls. God will keep us through it all.

Loving God,

You hear our feeble cries, above all the blather and chaos our enemies bring to our lives. You will direct our paths and give us renewed strength for the journey.

In Christ,

Amen

Tuesday April 8

“Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.” Psalm 143:8

As I was reading these verses in Psalms, I was drawn to the first phrase, “Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning.” Is the author, David, looking to God for this encouragement?

Or is he looking to the godly men and women around him to share how God showed them his love? I guess I always thought of David as in some kind of vacuum; so strong in his faith, but no believers around

him. Yet there must have been! How encouraged he would be to hear of others and their encounters with their loving God. David’s whole being is trusting God and God’s plans for his life, but we know that God also works through people.

Have you ever had an experience where God showed his love to you? We all can probably name a few. I know I can. And what is the first thing I wanted to do (after thanking God)? Tell my family, friends, or anyone who will listen. God is good!

I am also encouraged to hear about other’s experiences with our loving Lord. I am blessed by each of their encounters with God. Time after time, I hear about God’s steadfast love, how He made some direction or struggle clear to them, or how God lifted their deflated souls to new heights.

That is one way we can build up the body of Christ. Sharing how God loves us and shows us in a very clear way a glimpse of His heart. As Ephesians tells us, “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.” How can we keep silent if this is to be our way of life? “How can we keep from singing His praise?”

As Easter approaches, let us all remember the special “God moments” in our lives and in the lives of those around us. God is not dead; He is alive! And he touches our lives to this very day.

Dear God,

Help me to see the “God moments” in my life and those around me. Help me to hear of your steadfast love. Help me to understand all you did for us on Easter.

In Your precious name,

Amen

Tuesday April 8

Do not bring your servant into judgment, for no one living is righteous before you. The enemy pursues me, he crushes me to the ground; he makes me dwell in the darkness like those long dead. Psalm 143:2-3 NIV



We all make mistakes. One of the biggest mistakes is to judge others. Yet, many people do. Perhaps, most people do (leaning toward all people do). Judging is part of the job of some people. That is not the judgment that poses a problem. When we appoint ourselves as voluntary judges, we operate without authorization or accountability. It may be acceptable, when we are watching a sports event or game show. There is no consequence resulting from our judging. When something real is at stake, judging should be done by one who can bear the inherent accountability.

In verse 2, we hear a plea from the servant of God, not to be judged. Even in faithful service, we often fear receiving our grades. We cannot be perfect, no matter how we try. That is okay, for God knows you and loves you anyway. God does not want you to be perfect. God wants to form you and mold you according to the plan that God has designed for you. Do not try to be perfect. Do try to be open to God’s leading. If you can just be faithful, God will take care of the rest.

Gracious God,

Our hearts and spirits are open and waiting for you to direct our paths. As you exercise Godly judgment, guide us toward our best outcomes.

In Submission,

Amen



Wednesday April 9

I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land.
Psalm 143:6

Have ever tried so hard to reach for something that you strain yourself to the limit? If you have, you can probably get a good picture in your mind of what the psalmist is describing in this verse. If you consider what it feels like to be reaching for water, when you are parched and dry, you get another picture. I am certain that the second picture is a clearer one with more depth and breadth. You experience it not only with your eyes, but you engage it with your whole being.

The psalmist speaks from the context of having been both thirsty and stretched. As a shepherd, he was often challenged to find a source of clean water. As a king, he was stretched by such challenges as

having his own son wage a war of rebellion against him. His physical thirst and emotional stretching were sources of pain.

Thirsting for God, in spiritual terms is a source of delight. Your soul really thirsts. That is exactly how Jesus wants us to be when it comes to seeking the Word. It is that thirstiness that keeps you coming back for more.

Most Loving and Awesome God,

My soul thirsts for your precious words of life. Our spirits yearn for your spoken and lived Word. Grow us, as we stretch toward you.

In Awe,

Amen

Thursday April 10

My life is consumed by anguish, and my years by groaning, my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak. *Psalm 31:10 NIV*

My parents always warned me to not let myself become too angry over anything. It was not worth it. They told me that if you get too angry, you will do things that you will regret. Anger was not a good Christian way of being. I really did not understand it then. I am thankful for their wisdom in that matter. As I have seen television episodes in which the victims become outraged and in a moment of uncountable anguish killed or harmed another person very badly. Thankfully, that was a television show. Unfortunately, there are real life situations that are similar. We read about these situations in the newspaper and on the internet. We hear of them on television news

shows.

Uncontrolled emotions can be very dangerous. God does not want us to be consumed by anger and makes it very clear in this passage of scripture. Our anger, jealousy, and bitterness do not change any situation. They only consume us. The Christian thing to do is to turn it over to God.

Loving God,

In your infinite wisdom, you have provided us with your word. Through your living word, you correct us and guide me in the ways we should go. We turn our concerns over to you Lord, and trust you to work them out.

In Your Care,

Amen

Friday April 11

And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless... Philippians 1:9-10

Some of the people who contribute to our preparation for the future do so by teaching or training us. Others provide resources or capital, to equip us to attempt the things that we endeavor to do. The writer of this text is among a keenly important population; those who pray for us. Teachers, trainers, and investors make what they have available to us. Those who pray for us seek even more for us. They seek God's limitless resources for us.

The writer specifically prays that the Philippians be blessed with knowledge and insight, regarding the discovery of what is best for them. Being so enriched, wise decisions can be made, about future courses of action. The assumption of the writer

is that knowing and doing what is best will prepare them well, for the coming day of Christ.

All who assist in our preparation for the future are worthy of our gratitude. Those who aid in nurturing our spiritual readiness are especially important to us. They are blessings to us and vessels of God.

Equipping God,

We thank you for those who intercede, in our behalf. We are blessed when they pray to you, in our interest, and when they speak to us of your goodness. Bless them and continue to send such people into our lives.

In Community,

Amen

Saturday April 12

I am forgotten by them as though I were dead. I have become like broken pottery. Psalm 31:12

There is a beautiful poem about a broken water jar that I came across on the internet. The water jar felt useless

as it compared itself to another water jar that was taken home to provide water for a family. The broken water jar was also being put to good use. It was being used to water the flowers on the trail going home. Yes it did arrive empty, but it has done it's job already.

Sometimes we may feel useless like that broken water jar. We know that it was impossible for the water jar to talk or have feelings. As human beings we can talk and have emotions. When we feel useless, it can be very disheartening for us to deal with. Even when we feel broken, worn out, or used up, we can be useful to God. We have learned to be creative with what we have. God always sees the good in us, even when people do not. Nothing of God needs to be thrown away. We still matter and are valuable to God.

Knowing Lord,

Thank you for having plans and purposes for each of our lives. May we trust you to find value in us, even we do not. Undergird us; that we may come to see in ourselves what you see.

By Your Power,

Amen





Sunday April 13 Passion or Palm Sunday

Oh give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever. "His steadfast love endures forever." Psalm 118:1

All my life, I have searched and tried, to understand what love is. As children we wonder, but somehow know it must be something of importance. By the time we become young adults, we get think we know. By the time we become senior adults, wisdom begins to kick in and we realize we have just begun to really understand what love is. Sure we can define it, but true understanding goes beyond what we find in dictionaries. Love is alive. It has breadth and depth that has no limits.

On this day, we celebrate the triumphal entry of Jesus, into Jerusalem. There, he was praised and received by excited crowds. They may have believed their praise to be real, but many of the same celebrants would call for his death on Friday. The love of mortals is fleeting, while God's love remains steadfast.

As I read the words that the psalmist wrote, I was in awe. How can anyone love someone that much? If anyone loves me like that, out of my mouth should come nothing but praise and thanksgiving. How blessed are we that we have a God that loves us so much. Jesus gave us his life as an ultimate sacrifice of love.

Prayer: We may not know and understand why Jesus loves us. We are grateful and shall ever give him praise.

Monday April 14

How priceless is your unfailing love, O God! All people may take refuge in your shadow of your wings. Psalm 36:7

One year I did some contractual work in Wisconsin. Having grown up in Chicago in an area full of tall buildings and concrete, I was glad to find myself surrounded by nature. I delighted myself in the nature, enjoying the trees and other greenery. When the sun goes down and the darkness engulfs such settings as this, only the memory remains. The next day the sun came up once again. When, by chance, I looked up, eagles were soaring through the sky. The wing span of each claimed a huge space around it. All that I saw was the handiwork of God.

On a day when I am troubled, I can imagine myself being comforted in the shadow of God wings. If I do not have a relationship with God, I

can not expect to be able to take cover in the shadow of God's wings. Taking the time to build a relationship with God is worth the effort.

Most Awesome God,

You gave us life. You gave us eyes to take in your wondrous works. We give thanks in the name of Jesus for the refuge we find in you.

Amen

Tuesday April 15

In you Lord I take refuge; never let me never be put to shame. In your righteousness deliver me and rescue me; incline your ear to me and save me. Psalm 71:1-2

When things in our lives go wrong, many times we try to resolve the issues ourselves. When we are not able resolve them we give up hope. We forget that we are not alone. God is standing by, even if we do not notice.

When things are going right in our lives, we tend to think it is our own doing. Our egos get in the way. We forget that God is in our lives, making things happen. Our previous feelings of helplessness are supplanted by notions of invincibility.

We have a God who loves us and will never forsake us. The refuge that God provides is in place, even when we are unaware. We are like



newly hatched birds, growing in our nest. When we gain our strength and equilibrium, we will be free to fly.

God our Shelter,

We come repeatedly requiring your steadfast refuge. Again and again, you rescue us from foes and our own missteps. We acknowledge our dependence and give you thanks.

In the Name of Jesus,

Amen

Wednesday April 16

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that hinders and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set us. Hebrews 12:1

We must not allow ourselves to be caught up in what the world has to offer us; a bigger house, a more expensive car, a higher paying job (with a more prestigious title). These things are the trappings in which we can become entangled. These things strangle us and keep us seeking for things that are not of God. We must learn to let go of worldly symbols of status.

The God who loves us has a better plan for our lives. It is better than the big house, the expensive car, or the high paying job. All those things are enjoyable for the time we have them. As certainly as they have come to us, they can slip away and be gone.

God's plan cannot be defined by our human definition of success. It takes everything that is important into account. If this were not so Jesus would not have been sent to redeem our sins and offered his life as a living sacrifice. It is by faith we look forward to this week every year. It is by faith we walk with Jesus, reliving his suffering in our activities of Holy Week.



Gracious and Loving God,

You are the alpha and the omega of our lives. You have ordained us to follow the plan you have laid out for us. Let us walk by faith and not by our sight as we follow your prescribed path of life.

In Christ,

Amen

Thursday April 17 Maundy Thursday

I love the Lord; he heard my voice; for he heard my cry for mercy. Because he turned his ear to me, I will call upon him as long as I live. Psalm 116:1-2 (NIV)

In my father's home congregation, the deacons open service with prayer and song. It is a tradition that includes interactive "call and response", and is common among African American and southern congregations. It is a tradition that I respect and think fondly of. It is seen for me a time of witness and a call for the Lord to be present in the service.

The deacons line up across the front of the congregation. Without music or cues, one of the deacons begins a song; that is more like a throaty cry. "I love the Lord he heard my cry." The other deacons join in a low moaning cry with the word

"I" singing in unison. Everyone in church, within the sound of their voices comes to attention. This is a way of bringing everyone's attention to begin the worship service. Many congregations open with prayer and songs of praise. However, many congregants do not respond with the same sense of urgency or anticipation. They stroll into service after taking care of their business or finishing their conversations. In fact, many congregants are not even in the building.

It really doesn't matter where or how the tradition began. What does matter is that the respect and attentiveness to worship, that used to be a given, is gone. Can you imagine what the world would be like if Maundy Thursday never happened? What if God put the activities on hold? What if God did not answer you when you called out in your day of trouble? The time to serve God is NOW. The time to praise God is NOW.

Most Awesome and Magnificent God,

You hear me in my time of need. You hear my faintest cry. I thank you God for the blessings not only of hearing my needs, but also responding to them.

In Amazement,

Amen



Friday April 18 Good Friday

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night; but find no rest. Psalm 22: 1-2

Suffering and pain are two things that remind us that we are human. Most of us find handling either of them to be difficult. We want relief, as soon as possible. We do whatever we can to avoid pain or suffering. We run the other way as fast as we can.

In contrast, it is amazing what we will do for love. In response to love, we put aside what we want and need for ourselves, in order to provide what is needed for our beloved children. Jesus modeled that kind of

love. The suffering Messiah, dying on the cross for us, is branded in the mind of every Christian. Even though it happened such a long time ago, it continues to get our attention. As we revisit the cross, we give thanks for all of that loving sacrifice.

Sovereign God,

Out of your love, the sacrifice that Jesus gave continues to be the greatest act of love. We know that our sin required it, yet our sinning is often repeated. Forgive us, and receive our thanks.

In Humility,

Amen

Saturday April 19 Holy Saturday

Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first. Matthew 27:64

Even after the crucifixion of Jesus, he was misunderstood and feared, by those who participated in his death. Instead of celebrating the conquest of this man, who they had claimed posed a threat to the community, they somehow sensed that they were not truly through with him. They articulated their fear, by claiming a likelihood of the disciples coming to steal the body. This is ironic, given scriptural reports of the disciples hiding in fear.

We now know that no tomb could keep Jesus, and that no stone could block his way. He had already proclaimed that nobody could take his life. He would lay it down, and when ready would take it up again. Jesus did exactly as he had indicated, far from the claims of deception. Jesus has the power to free himself from any grave and to free us all from our sin.

Liberating Lord,

We are not able to escape the grip of death, but you are able to set us free. We know that we are not simply released, without consequences for our trespasses. You have paid for our release, with your blood.

No Words are Sufficient,

Amen

Sunday, April 20 Easter/Resurrection Sunday

The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day that the Lord has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. Psalm 118:22-24

Gone are the days when builders labored and did everything by hand. Each stone was likely chosen by hand, also. Carefully choosing each stone was likely a long and drawn out process. I can imagine that the shape, size, density, and hardness were among the things considered. Once a stone was chosen it was probably tested in some way. Those that were rejected were discarded.

The world tried to discard Jesus. They did not throw him away because of size, or hardness, or shape. He did not fail to fit a wall or a foundation. He did not fit their idea

of what the future should look like. For the world that they had planned, Jesus was a misfit.

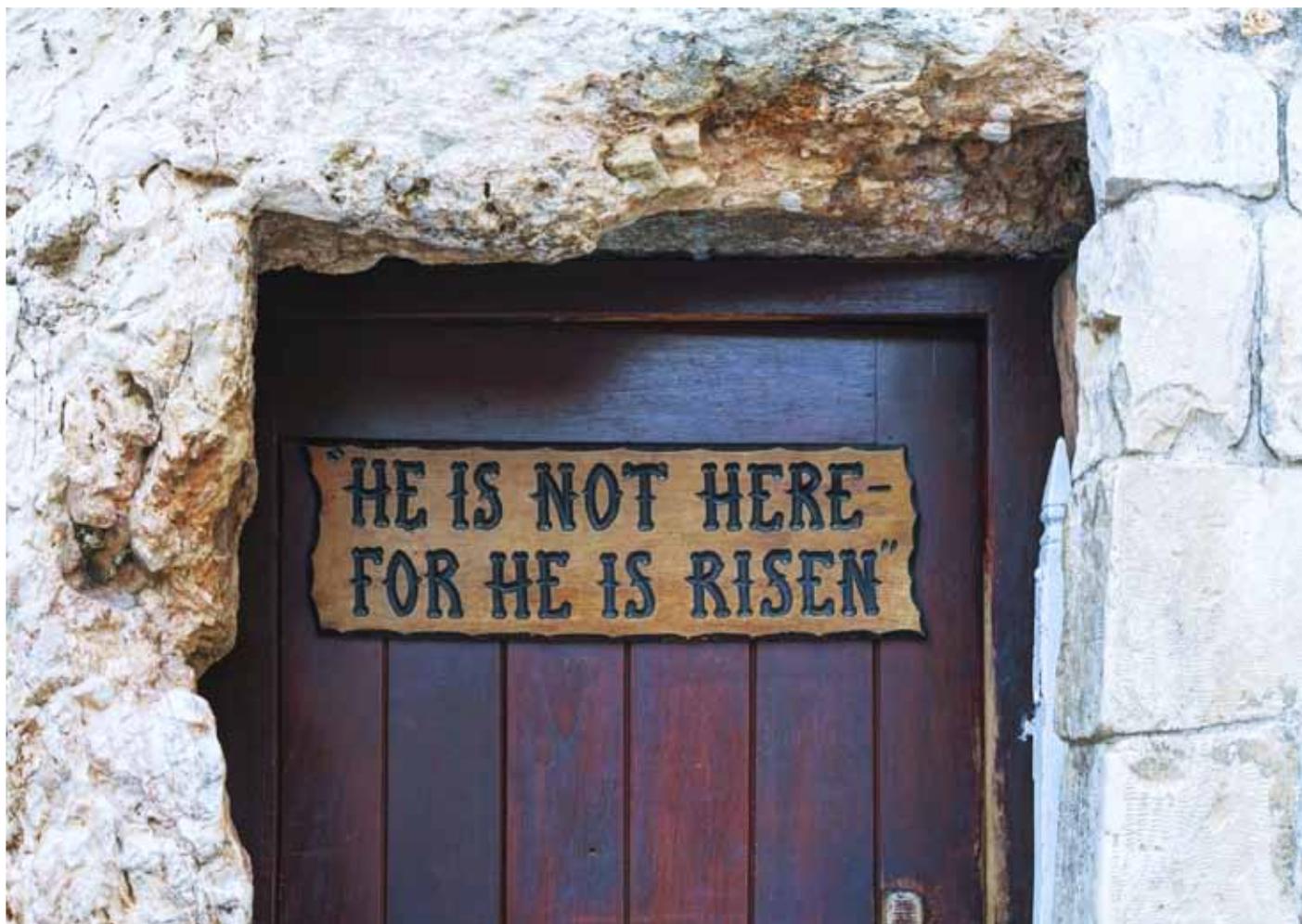
Jesus became the chief cornerstone because God's future plans prevailed. The future that God calls forth has Jesus as our anchor. Our Lord, who they tried to discard, has reclaimed those of us who were being discarded. Today, we are all triumphant.

Gracious God,

We praise you this morning and give you the glory. We are grateful that you gave your life for us. Without you, we were condemned to death. Through you, we have inherited life everlasting.

In Triumph,

Amen





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