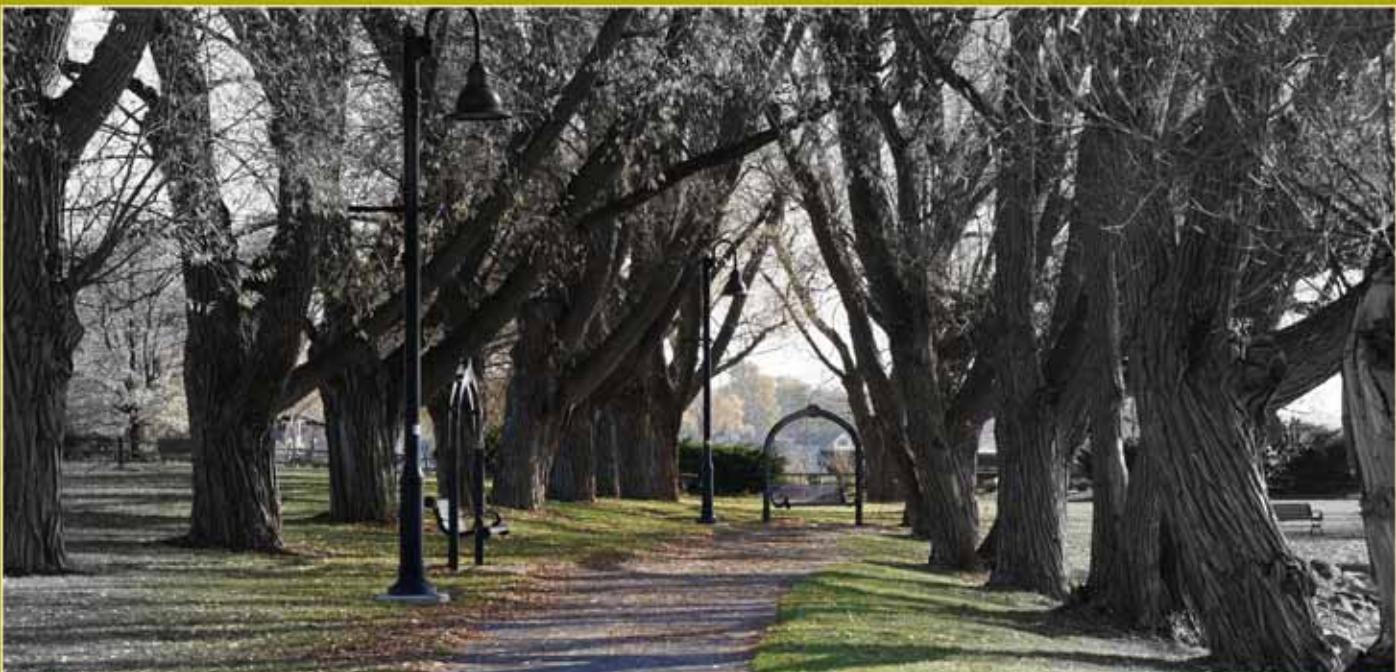


# *Lenten Resources*

## 2016



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***Finding My Strength in Community:  
Journeying Down This Road Together***

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## **About the Author**

The Rev. Antonio (TONY) Gerome Redd along with his wife, Erica, and Amaris Gabrielle (18-month old daughter), currently reside in Richmond, Virginia. He has been a member of Mt. Olive East Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Martinsville, Virginia for twelve years. It is there where he accepted his call to minister under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Davis on January 11, 2004. While at MOE he has served as the Young Adult Minister and has directly provided consultation to the Youth Ministry department. Tony currently serves as the Minister to Christian Education and the Assistant to the Senior Pastor at Second Baptist Church West End in Richmond, Virginia. It is there where Rev. Dr. James Henry Harris, Distinguished Professor of Homiletics at the School of Theology at Virginia Union University is the Senior Pastor.



He is a graduate of Virginia State University (2009), where he received a Bachelor of Science in Health. Most recently he graduated from the School of Theology at Virginia Union University (STVU) with a Master of Divinity (2014) and a Master of Arts in Christian Education (2015). Tony is the Young Adult President for the National Convocation and also serves as a member of the Young Adult Commission. "Over the past eleven years, ministry has taught me many lessons that aid me in being better mediator of words inside and outside of the pulpit. I have come to better understand the task of preaching; that which causes one to reflect closely on the parishioners' current condition, and provide them with the answers to their most relevant questions."

Along with staying committed to his call to ministry, Tony works as an Elementary Health/Physical Education teacher in the Richmond City School District at J.B. Fisher Elementary School. He maintains that the opportunity to mold today's young minds is one that is second to none. "Many children, especially in urban environments, leave home daily expecting to come in contact with someone who will take the time to invest in them. No one pours in to them at home, and in many cases, educators, the ones who spend long periods of the day with them, fail to pour in to them as well. So I believe that this is currently a part of my purpose in life, to be a beacon of light in a world that is, for them, full of darkness."

### *The following people offered prayers for the daily devotionals.*

*Erica Perkins Redd*

*Whitney Redd*

*Keyode Rogers*

*Rev. John Adams*

*Min. Matthew Brown*

*Harrold Thomas*

*Jenelle Kellam*

*Chantea Wright*

*Min. Keith Johnson*

*Rev. Samantha Richardson-Epps*

*Minister Quan Williams*

*Jocelyn Logan*

*Aaron Knight*

*Deacon Michael Palmer*

*William Jared Kellam*

*Lindsey Beekman*

*Tiffany Barksdale*

*Sloane Mosley*

*Rev. Susan Prather*

*Dominique and Jeneen Preston*

*Sierra Coppage*

*William and Triaillyn Evans*

*Ronda Harper Brown*

# *Finding My Strength in Community: Journeying Down This Road Together*

When it comes to reflecting on the things that transpired throughout my childhood, there are some things that can be recalled without hesitation, and then there are some things that I cannot seem to remember so well. Among those things that I will never forget, are the numerous times my grandmother and her sisters, who lived in close proximity, would call one another whenever they needed to borrow some sugar, milk, a stick of butter, a sewing needle, some thread, a jar of preserves, I mean the list could go on for days. And without hesitation, whenever one of them called, the other would freely give what was needed if they had it. This type of spirit did not just resonate in the hearts of my grandmother and her sisters, but there are times when I return home now, even after all of my great-aunts have passed away, that I can sense the same spirit flowing throughout the community in which I grew up in as a child. My father has keys to other people's houses just in case there is something that needs to be done when they are away, and vice versa. I could probably bet that my aunt, who lives just up the street, is calling my parent's home this morning to ask my mother if she has some dress she could wear to church this morning. Now that I think about it, we forgot to bring some dress clothes for our 18-month old daughter as we travel home this weekend. I may need to call her to see if her great-granddaughter has something Amaris can wear. This is real, I cannot make this up. If anyone is in need, and there is someone 'around the corner' or 'up the street' who can meet that need, then there is no need to worry about whether or not they will be willing. You might as well count it done.

Now, are there communities where one can witness the same characteristics possessed by the one in which I was raised in? Of course! However, as I have grown older, I have come to experience community in a way where people choose to remain a stranger, rather than striving to become familiar with one another to the point where I can feel the same spirit of love that is expressed and shared throughout the community that I call Home. There are so many factors that come in to play as I begin to think about the reasons this remains to be the case. So many to the point where I must question how I have personally played a part in the current reality that exist. I do believe that those who dwell in the place that I call home, understand that we are only able to progress forward when we ensure that everyone has access to all the resources necessary to meet their needs.

As we examine the present state of community that surrounds our own reality, we must take a close look at how we have personally played an active part in the disparities that cause community to become an afterthought and not our primary focus. The loss of the need for community has brought us to a place where we are only concerned about our own personal gain, and fail to acknowledge that without relationship we are unable to grow in the faith.

---

The journey that I desire for all of us to take during this Lenten season is one that will cause us to bring our focus back to the idea of relationship and community. This will bring us to a place where we are no longer seeking to hear from God as it pertains to what can be done for us, but it will push us to a place where we adhere to our true purpose in life. A purpose that causes us to be concerned about others. A call that causes us to reevaluate what we are birthed into this world to become. It is in this season that we strive to journey down the road together, hand in hand, looking out into a world full of brokenness, and strive to mend the broken pieces back together again.

During this Lenten season you will be led by a weekly devotion that I quicken you to refer back to daily, in order to fully understand the Gospel and the life it intends for us to live. The righteousness of God that we live to obtain cannot be obtained in isolation. This righteousness is only able to be fulfilled if we truly believe in the life lived by Jesus Christ our Savior. He is one who always kept in mind what he had been sent by God to do. We can witness through the life of Christ, what it really means to live in community. His desire to meet the needs of others caused him to undergo much scrutiny. Mainly because it went against the norm and challenged the integrity of those who held their own personal agendas at heart.

I have brought along those who I call family, to offer daily prayers in order to expound on this idea of community. You will see throughout this daily devotional a prayer offered up by different individuals from across various faith beliefs. These are prayers from people whom I have built and maintained relationship with throughout my life. They are ones who I feel understand this idea of community and the need for us all to journey down this road together. It is my hope that you hear the sincerity of their hearts through their prayers, and utilize it to strengthen you throughout this period of devotion. At the end of the day, when all of the prayers have been prayed, and all of the words of meditation have come to an end, let us not leave these moments of devotion in vain. These moments in devotion should inspire us to move towards the better, and become the community of faith that God has called all of us to.



# Daily Readings for Lent

Ash Wednesday, February 10 – Easter, March 27

Wednesday Ash Wednesday	Thursday February 11	Friday February 12	Saturday February 13
<i>Isaiah 58:6-12</i>	<i>Acts 7:30-34</i>	<i>Exodus 6:1-13</i>	<i>John 12:27-36</i>
<i>Joel 2:1-2, 12-17</i>	<i>Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16</i>	<i>Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16</i>	<i>Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16</i>
<i>Psalm 51:1-17</i>	<i>Exodus 5:10-23</i>	<i>Acts 7:35-42</i>	<i>Ecclesiastes 3:1-8</i>
<i>2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10</i>			
<i>Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21</i>			

Sunday February 21	Monday February 22	Tuesday February 23	Wednesday February 24	Thursday February 25	Friday February 26	Saturday February 27
<i>Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16</i>	<i>Luke 9:28-36, 37-43a</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 10:1-13</i>	<i>Psalm 105:1-15</i>	<i>Revelation 2:8-11</i>	<i>Daniel 12:1-4</i>	<i>Luke 6:43-45</i>
<i>Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18</i>	<i>Psalm 105:1-15 42</i>	<i>Psalm 105:1-15, 42</i>	<i>2 Chronicles 20:1-22</i>	<i>Psalm 63:1-8</i>	<i>Psalm 63:1-8</i>	<i>Psalm 63:1-8</i>
<i>Psalm 27</i>	<i>Exodus 33:1-6</i>	<i>Numbers 14:10b-24</i>	<i>Luke 13:22-31</i>	<i>Daniel 3:19-30</i>	<i>Revelation 3:1-6</i>	<i>Isaiah 5:1-7</i>
<i>Philippians 3:17-4:1</i>	<i>Romans 4:1-12</i>					
<i>Luke 13:31-35</i>						
<i>Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)</i>						

Sunday February 28	Monday February 29	Tuesday March 1	Wednesday March 2	Thursday March 3	Friday March 4	Saturday March 5
<i>Luke 13:1-9</i>	<i>Romans 2:1-11</i>	<i>Romans 2:12-16</i>	<i>Luke 6:43-45</i>	<i>Numbers 13:17-27</i>	<i>2 Corinthians 5:6-15</i>	<i>Psalm 32</i>
<i>Isaiah 55:1-9</i>	<i>Psalm 39</i>	<i>Psalm 39</i>	<i>Psalm 39</i>	<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Exodus 32:7-14</i>
<i>Psalm 63:1-8</i>	<i>Jeremiah 11:1-17</i>	<i>Ezekiel 17:1-10</i>	<i>Numbers 13:17-27</i>	<i>Joshua 4:1-13</i>	<i>Joshua 4:14-24</i>	<i>Luke 15:1-10</i>
<i>1 Corinthians 10:1-13</i>			<i>Luke 13:18-21</i>	<i>2 Corinthians 4:16</i>		



Sunday March 6	Monday March 7	Tuesday March 8	Wednesday March 9	Thursday March 10	Friday March 11	Saturday March 12
<i>Luke 15:1-3, 11-32</i>	<i>Luke 23:26-41</i>	<i>Psalm 53</i>	<i>2 Kings 4:1-7</i>	<i>Isaiah 43:1-7</i>	<i>Philippians 2:19-25</i>	<i>Exodus 12:21-27</i>
<i>Joshua 5:9-12</i>	<i>Psalm 53</i>	<i>Leviticus 25:1-19</i>	<i>Psalm 53</i>	<i>Psalm 126</i>	<i>Psalm 126</i>	<i>John 11:45-57</i>
<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Revelation 19:9-10</i>	<i>Revelation 19:9-10</i>	<i>Luke 9:10-17</i>	<i>Philippians 2:19-24</i>	<i>Isaiah 43:8-15</i>	<i>Psalm 126</i>
<i>2 Corinthians 5:16-21</i>						

Sunday March 13	Monday March 14	Tuesday March 15	Wednesday March 16	Thursday March 17	Friday March 18	Saturday March 19
<i>John 3:16</i>	<i>2 Corinthians 5:11-15</i>	<i>Luke 9:10-17</i>	<i>Habakkuk 3:2-16</i>	<i>Isaiah 53:10-12</i>	<i>2 Corinthians 4:16-18</i>	<i>Psalm 31:9-16</i>
<i>Isaiah 43:16-21</i>	<i>Psalm 20</i>	<i>Psalm 20</i>	<i>Psalm 20</i>	<i>Psalm 31:9-16</i>	<i>Psalm 31:9-16</i>	<i>Leviticus 23:1-8</i>
<i>Psalm 126</i>	<i>Exodus 40:1-15</i>	<i>Judges 9:7-15</i>	<i>Luke 18:31-34</i>	<i>Hebrews 2:1-9</i>	<i>Isaiah 54:9-10;</i>	<i>Luke 22:1-13</i>
<i>Philippians 3:4b-14</i>	<i>Hebrews 10:19-25</i>	<i>1 John 2:18-28</i>			<i>Hebrews 2:10-18</i>	
<i>John 12:1-8</i>						

Sunday Passion or Palm Sunday	Monday March 21	Tuesday March 22	Wednesday March 23	Thursday Maundy Thurs.	Friday Good Friday	Saturday March 26
<i>Luke 19:28-40</i>	<i>John 12:1-11</i>	<i>Isaiah 49:1-7</i>	<i>Hebrews 12:1-3</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 11:23-26</i>	<i>Luke 23:44-49;</i>	<i>Matthew 27:57-66</i>
<i>Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29</i>	<i>Isaiah 42:1-9</i>	<i>Psalm 71:1-14</i>	<i>Isaiah 50:4-9a</i>	<i>Exodus 12:1-14</i>	<i>Isaiah 52:13-53:12</i>	<i>Job 14:1-14</i>
	<i>Psalm 36:5-11</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 1:18-31</i>	<i>Psalm 70</i>	<i>Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19</i>	<i>Psalm 22</i>	<i>Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24</i>
	<i>Hebrews 9:11-15</i>	<i>John 12:20-36</i>	<i>John 13:21-32</i>	<i>John 13:1-17, 31b-35</i>	<i>Hebrews 10:16-25</i>	<i>Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16</i>
					<i>Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9</i>	<i>Peter 4:1-8</i>
					<i>John 18:1-19:42</i>	<i>John 19:38-42</i>

Sunday Easter Day
<i>1 Corinthians 15:19-26</i>
<i>Acts 10:34-43</i>
<i>Isaiah 65:17-25</i>
<i>Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24</i>
<i>Acts 10:34-43;</i>
<i>John 20:1-18</i>
<i>Luke 24:1-12</i>

# Daily Meditations

## Introduction to Ash Wednesday:

Accompanied to the practice of blessing the ashes and placing them on the heads of those who participate in the traditional Ash Wednesday ceremony are the words, "Repent, and believe in the Gospel," or "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return." Throughout this Lenten season, such words should deeply resonate in one's soul.

## Wednesday February 10 Ash Wednesday

"Repairing The Breach"

Isaiah 58:6-12 NIV

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin? Then your light shall break forth like the dawn, and your healing shall spring up quickly; your vindicator shall go before you, the glory of the LORD shall be your rear guard.*

*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,<sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. <sup>12</sup>Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of streets to live in.*

*"Ubuntu - the essence of being human. Ubuntu speaks particularly about the fact that you can't exist as a human being in isolation. It speaks about our interconnectedness. You can't be human all by yourself, and when you have this quality -*

*Ubuntu - you are known for your generosity. We think of ourselves far too frequently as just individuals, separated from one another, whereas you are connected and what you do affects the whole world. When you do well, it spreads out; it is for the whole of humanity."*

- Archbishop Desmond Tutu

So, what brings us to the place we are at this current moment? With the understanding we obtain through the reading of Isaiah coupled with what we receive from Bishop Tutu's definition of Ubuntu, we should arrive at a place of understanding that provides us with the tools needed in order to endure this season of transition. Today is the day that we utilize these tools for the good. Knowing what has brought us into this Lenten season, it is critical that we adhere to the call, and focus on repairing the heart and soul of not the individual, but the whole of humanity.

"Repent, and believe in the Gospel." If we believe in such, then there is without a doubt a need for us to move our understanding of fast from one that only repairs the breeches within oneself, and continues to leave the streets by which surround the community indrenched in chaos. And this is why we are once again called to this season. In hopes that we can go out into the chaos and speak to the pandemic of injustice that leaves an unrepairs hole in the heart and soul of the whole.

## Prayer:

*Creator, You have called us to this season that we have left incomplete many times before. So we ask that You provide us with clarity and understanding that will lead us to the places where we have left the work unfinished. Many are crying out to find restoration, yet we have failed to allow our light to shine in those spaces that are consumed by darkness. Therefore, we come into this season with a desire to meet the need of all who are crying out. We leave our personal agendas behind us, knowing that the good You do within us is purposed to impact those who dwell amongst us. It is in the only name we pray this prayer; in Jesus name we pray,*

*Amen.*

## Additional Readings:

*Joel 2:1-2, 12-17;  
Psalm 51:1-17;  
2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10;  
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*



## Thursday February 11

Acts 7:30-34 NRSV

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

### Prayer:

Lord, Most High, it is in this season that we seek to clearly hear Your voice. We understand that there remains to be answered, the question as to whether or not we have done what You have required of us in the past. So we earnestly come to You now seeking to be provided another opportunity to answer the call. The nature of creation's existence is currently in shambles. Our communities are crying out to You seeking Your sovereignty, but feel that their requests have been denied. And though it appears to them that such may be true, we know that this is not the case. The truth that we fail to own up to is the fact that You have continued extending Your love and mercy towards us, but as believers we have fallen short in offering the same to those who stand in need of it. Daily we feel the warmth of Your spirit as You wrap us up in the comfort of Your arms. But, our hearts have turned cold, we choose to consume all of what You offer to us for our own personal gain. As a result, we look out from the confines of comfort and see Your creation in chaos.

So we ask that You again provide us with the tools to correct the problems that now overwhelm our communities, and prevent them from seeing in us a God that loves them enough to bring them through the vicissitudes of life. Equip us with all that is required to go out into this chaos, and stand with our brothers and sisters, with the hope that together we will be able to move towards the better. This is the type of transformation You desire that we endure, to carry us to a place You have prepared, waiting for us to inhabit. Now we carry our own cross, as Your Son did. The burdens on the cross in which he carried are no longer ours to be weighed down by. All that we carry is the burden of sharing the love of God that is expressed through Jesus' crucifixion. It is now, with this knowledge, that we pray this prayer in Jesus name,

Amen.

### Additional Readings:

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16;  
Exodus 5:10-23

## Friday February 12

Exodus 6:1-13 NRSV

<sup>1</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you shall see what I will do to Pharaoh: Indeed, by a mighty hand he will let them go; by a mighty hand he will drive them out of his land.”

<sup>2</sup>God also spoke to Moses and said to him: “I am the LORD. <sup>3</sup>I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name ‘The LORD’ I did not make myself known to them. <sup>4</sup>I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they resided as aliens. <sup>5</sup>I have also heard the groaning of the Israelites whom the Egyptians are holding as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. <sup>6</sup>Say therefore to the Israelites, ‘I am the LORD, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. <sup>7</sup>I will take you as my people, and I will be your God.

You shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. <sup>8</sup>I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.” <sup>9</sup>Moses told this to the Israelites; but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery.

<sup>10</sup>Then the LORD spoke to Moses, <sup>11</sup>“Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his land.” <sup>12</sup>But Moses spoke to the LORD, “The Israelites have not listened to me; how then shall Pharaoh listen to me, poor speaker that I am?” <sup>13</sup>Thus the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, and gave them orders regarding the Israelites and Pharaoh king of Egypt, charging them to free the Israelites from the land of Egypt.

### Prayer:

Creator, we thank You for being our safety in this disorderly world. Even though the world is ever-changing, You still are the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this season help us not to forget who is keeping and sustaining us for dangers seen and unseen. Help us also to have unconditional love for our neighbor. We thank You in advance for hearing our prayer, in Jesus name,

Amen.

Michael A. Palmer

### Additional Readings:

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16;  
Acts 7:35-42

## Saturday February 13

*John 12:27-36 NRSV*

<sup>27</sup>"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. <sup>28</sup>Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." <sup>29</sup>The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." <sup>30</sup>Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. <sup>31</sup>Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. <sup>32</sup>And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." <sup>33</sup>He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. <sup>34</sup>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?" <sup>35</sup>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. <sup>36</sup>While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light."

### Prayer:

*Oh Lord, my strength, and my redeemer. In whom my refuge lies, thank You for Your love and protection. Thank You for grace, mercy and Your light that continues to shine over our lives. As we continue lent season we ask Your blessing of clarity as we seek to understand Your timing. We know there's a time for everything and we believe You are always on time. Thank You for this and Your many blessings. We glorify Your Holy Name. In Jesus name we do pray,*

*Amen.*

*Keyode Rogers*

### Additional Readings:

*Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16;  
Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

## Week One February 14 - 20

### Sunday February 14

*"Fearfully and Wonderfully Made"  
(An excerpt from a sermon entitled,  
"God's Worst Nightmare")*

#### Scripture Reading:

*Psalm 139:13-16 NRSV*

<sup>13</sup>For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb. <sup>14</sup>I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well. <sup>15</sup>My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. <sup>16</sup>Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.

The stories have been replayed over and over again in my head. Images are constantly popping up, when I am in the process of carrying out my life's daily responsibilities. When I see a certain class or group of people living life without fear, without reservation, without any hesitation, horrifying images of us who do not have the luxury of living life in such a manner replay themselves in my mind constantly. I am sure you have heard such stories many times already in the recent months, or even the most recent years. So much so, that it sickens you that we are still having such a conversation even now. But let's be honest with ourselves, if the truth be told, if we were brave enough to keep it real with ourselves, if we could own up to what the facts presents us with, we would be able to seamlessly confess that had we continued to have this conversation over time, had we not dropped the ball and became complacent with the progress that had been made, we would not be now so far removed from the current issues within society, faced by a culture, class, or group of individuals who like us, are now standing at an historical intersection that we have once visited many years ago.

So that is why I am now going to bed at night imparting words of protection for those who daily experience poverty, oppression, injustice, and lack access to life's necessities. But that does not allow me to escape the pain and the scars of my reality. For when I close my eyes, I am traumatized with horrifying nightmares consisting of images related to our most recent tragedies. Then I wake up, and I return to the same place I left off when I closed my eyes just the night before. Hoping and wishing I do not turn my phone on to be overwhelmed by another church burned to the ground, this time however, being one with bodies being trapped within. Or rather witness that the burden of life has forced one to take matters into their own hands, and take the lives of others before swiftly eliminating their own. Let us not again be stuck with our mouths hanging, when our sisters and daughters are left being beaten, battered and bruised by officers of the law, left to die in jail cells, or yet, arise from rest and recognize that I too have become victim to the very same thing that is causing me so much misery. Terrifying is such a matter of my existence. And if we are concerned with what is transpiring, as the scriptures requires us to be, we all should wake up daily with the same horrifying truth to our existence.

This shouldn't be the case for a people who believe in a supernatural power in which we identify to control all of the happenings. One whom we have believed to wrap us in his/her arms of protection. One whom we suggest is able to keep us from all hurt, harm, or danger. One who is supposed to guide us in valleys of shadows of death, lead us beside the still waters, and restore our severed souls. Tables are intended for us to dine in the presence of our enemies, not to be prepared so that we become the main course for our enemies' appetite.

And though such travesty intends to keep us trapped in fear, we rest in knowing that our lives are orchestrated and woven by one who foresaw our horrific circumstances well before we experienced them. In

our text the psalmist says, “<sup>13</sup>*For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.*<sup>14</sup>*I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.*” One might suggest that as a result of the creator understanding how we are wired, how we are put together, how we were constructed, developed, and formed, we are equipped to handle these happenings of life with resilience. However, I would suggest on today that it’s not a result of how he has put us together which allows us to withstand such pain and continue to push through it, but it is rather the creator’s knowledge of our happenings which caused God to put us together in such a manner that we are wired, equipped, developed, and formed to withstand these matters. It’s God’s biggest nightmare, the viewings of God witnessing the effects of this life, the same images we see that cause us so much pain, these are the same images God foresaw, even before our developments, that prompted God to build us, stitch us, create us, and mold us in a way that would provide us with a line of defense to push through it. This allows us to see a perfected end even in the midst of our traumatizing experiences. We are offered a place of refuge to be charged and recharged over and over again, in order that we might fight the fight in a way that would allow the roads and paths of others to be made much easier. Not to remain where we are, but to move higher and higher, closer and closer to what God, who even in the midst of viewing like images, designed us and purposed us to be great. That is how we can be both fearfully and wonderfully made. In the realms of understanding what was sure to exist within our own experiences, with apprehension, with hesitance, with fear, and with an extremely dreadfully anxious manner, God intended for us to yet be made wonderful. Full of greatness, excellence, aroused with astonishing amazement and wonder.....

Fearfully and wonderfully made to truly overcome and triumph.

Insomuch, we still press forward and are fearless. Aware, but

fearless. We are fearless, because God designed us and created us in fear, and because God could yet wonderfully design us with the fear in knowing what we would encounter, we can fearlessly gather on this morning with a purpose. Yes, our churches have been burned to the ground, but we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Yes, our brothers and sisters have lost their lives as a result of being welcoming and accepting of a stranger, but we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Yes, our sons and daughters have a difficult time navigating society and excelling as a result of what they look like, but we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Yes, we continue to see bodies in the streets, bodies hanging from trees, bodies slain in patrol wagons, bodies beaten, battered, and bruised by law enforcement, who swear on the oath to protect and serve all members of the environment by which they serve, but we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Yes, we so often fight the war against human trafficking that leave many fighting for their lives in objection to being sold into slavery for human pleasure. We fight to obtain justice for those who desire to cross certain boarders and experience a better life for their friends and family, but in return they are overwhelmed by a process full of red tape, one that causes them to be shipped away and back to their places of misery. But in spite of it all, God still causes us to remain fearless. Fearfully and wonderfully made by the hand of a God who is yet still in control and holding all things together.

So then, how do we reconcile resting in knowing that our experiences are handled with being wonderfully birthed out of fear? We reconcile resting in knowing that our experiences are handled with being wonderfully birthed out of fear, because our blueprint has always been on the mind of God. So let us not worry about what’s facing us as a people, because God has us on his mind. God understands your existence. It was God who called you into existence. And if God is able to call us into this life full of tragedy

and despair, then God is able to equip us with the tools to navigate through it. It is the hand of God that shapes us to be resilient. It is by God’s hand that we have everything we need to change our own reality and the reality of others. It is by God’s hand that we are able to overcome all that we face in life, together. We are fearfully and wonderfully made.

### Prayer:

*God, thank You for being our safe place. Please forgive us for allowing the cares of this world to distract us from giving You our best. Help us to make You our priority. Help us to “tithe our time” to You. We thank You for strength. We thank You for restoration. And when we are renewed, we will be a beacon light to our brothers and sisters who do not know You. In Jesus’ Name we pray,*

*Amen.*

Ronda Harper Brown

### Additional Readings:

*Deuteronomy 26:1-11;  
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16;  
Romans 10:8b-13;  
Luke 4:1-13*

### Monday February 15

#### *1 John 2:1-6*

*1My children, I am writing this so that you won’t sin. But if you do sin, Jesus Christ always does the right thing, and he will speak to the Father for us.<sup>2</sup>Christ is the sacrifice that takes away our sins and the sins of all the world’s people.*

*<sup>3</sup>When we obey God, we are sure that we know him. <sup>4</sup>But if we claim to know him and don’t obey him, we are lying and the truth isn’t in our hearts. <sup>5</sup>We truly love God only when we obey him as we should, and then we know that we belong to him. <sup>6</sup>If we say we are his, we must follow the example of Christ.*

## Prayer:

God, thank You for a timely word in our lives. We recognize that Your power is shown through our obedience and our breakthrough is released through our love for others. Help us to keep Your commands in the forefront of our thoughts and to love one another as Christ loves us. We speak favor over our relationships and interactions from this day forward. In Jesus name,

Amen

Dominique Preston

## Additional Readings:

Psalm 17; 1  
Chronicles 21:1-17

## Tuesday February 16

Zechariah 3:1-10 Good News Translation

<sup>1</sup>In another vision the LORD showed me the High Priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD. And there beside Joshua stood Satan, ready to bring an accusation against him. <sup>2</sup>The angel of the LORD said to Satan, "May the LORD condemn you, Satan! May the LORD, who loves Jerusalem, condemn you. This man is like a stick snatched from the fire."

<sup>3</sup>Joshua was standing there, wearing filthy clothes. <sup>4</sup>The angel said to his heavenly attendants, "Take away the filthy clothes this man is wearing." Then he said to Joshua, "I have taken away your sin and will give you new clothes to wear."

<sup>5</sup>He commanded the attendants to put a clean turban on Joshua's head. They did so, and then they put the new clothes on him while the angel of the LORD stood there.

<sup>6</sup>Then the angel told Joshua that <sup>7</sup>the LORD Almighty had said: "If you obey my laws and perform the duties I have assigned you, then you will continue to be in charge of my Temple and its courts, and I will hear your prayers, just as I hear the prayers of the angels who are in my presence. <sup>8</sup>Listen then, Joshua, you who are the High Priest; and listen, you fellow priests of his, you that are the sign of a good future: I will reveal my servant, who is called The Branch! <sup>9</sup>I am placing

in front of Joshua a single stone with seven facets. I will engrave an inscription on it, and in a single day I will take away the sin of this land.<sup>10</sup>When that day comes, each of you will invite your neighbor to come and enjoy peace and security, surrounded by your vineyards and fig trees."

## Prayer:

God, thank You for ordering my steps. Thank You for helping me to be strong and to not give in to the desires of the flesh. I pray for continuous strength and courageous leadership to complete my spiritual journey. With You, all things are possible.

Amen

Jeneen Preston

## Additional Readings:

Psalm 17; 2  
Peter 2:4-21

## Wednesday February 17

Luke 21:34-36 NIV

<sup>34</sup>"Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life, and that day will close on you suddenly like a trap.<sup>35</sup>For it will come on all those who live on the face of the whole earth. <sup>36</sup>Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man."

## Prayer:

Spirit of the living God, when my voice has been muted I know that You give ear to my petitions providing provisions of protection and peace. It is You who have kept me from the folly of fools who have sought to bring pain upon me. I thank You that I can find solace in the shadow of Your wings.

Amen

Min. Keith N. Johnson Jr.

## Additional Readings:

Psalm 17;  
Job 1:1-22

## Thursday February 18

Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18 NRSV

<sup>1</sup>So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. <sup>2</sup>Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold.

<sup>3</sup>From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier <sup>4</sup>and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

<sup>5</sup>Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup>But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. <sup>7</sup>And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

<sup>14</sup>The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. <sup>15</sup>All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. <sup>16</sup>I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. <sup>17</sup>Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you."

<sup>18</sup>So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he pitched his tents. There he built an altar to the LORD.

## Prayer:

God, as we embark on this journey to be great in life, please direct our paths. Allow us to remain humble and steadfast as we continue to keep our eyes towards You. Lord, deter us from things that are not of Your will, but give us perfect peace as we lean on You. This is our prayer today Lord,

Amen.

Aaron L. Knight, M.S.



## Week Two February 21 - 27

### Sunday February 21

*"You Have Nothing to Fear"*  
Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16 NRSV

*<sup>1</sup>You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, <sup>2</sup>will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust."*

*<sup>9</sup>Because you have made the LORD your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, <sup>10</sup>no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. <sup>11</sup>For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. <sup>12</sup>On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. <sup>13</sup>You will tread on the lion and the adder, the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. <sup>14</sup>Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. <sup>15</sup>When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble, I will rescue them and honor them. <sup>16</sup>With long life I will satisfy them, and show them my salvation.*

Parenthood causes you to look at life with a different point of view. The lens by which you perceived things once before is almost transformed in an instance. There is no way possible one cannot witness the faith and

comfort a little child has when they are in the presence of those who have been gifted with the privilege of caring for them, and see things from a different point of view. In an atmosphere where the child has the opportunity to thrive in the presence of their earthly parents, the child is able to freely exist without worry. You are able to witness this type of faith by seeing their faces light up when they fall hard but recognize that someone is there to pick them up and care for them. This type of faith is expressed and explained through the excitement and joy that is heard throughout the room when they have been away from you for most of the day and they see you walk through the door after a long day at work. Such expressions are moments of validation for them that suggest that they fully understand that their ability to freely function lies in the hands of those who are present when they open their eyes up in the morning and tuck them in when they close those same eyes at night to rest. Without a doubt they know where they can find refuge.

So the psalmist attempts to make plain for us that this type of faith and trust can be established when we know that God is our refuge. With this understanding, like the child has in the comfort of their earthly parents, we can rest in the most high

with a faith in knowing that we are shielded from everything that is set up to harm us. When God is your refuge, you can freely let your light shine and trust that there is one whose light shines brighter standing right there with you in the midst of your dark places. And even in the midst of someone else's dark place. When God is your refuge you can fulfill the call in its fullness and in return God will cover and protect you from those things that possess ill intentions. When God is your refuge, in the midst of chaos you can trust that you will be rescued.

#### *Prayer:*

*Because you are my refuge, the Most High, my dwelling place, God I trust that you will make the burdens of life light. I can rest in knowing that you are there at all times, even when my eyes cannot see you and my ability to hear your voice clearly has failed me. When I go to fulfill the work that I am called to, nothing shall stand in my way. I wholeheartedly believe that this is true, because the angels that you have encamped around me have never let me fall. With long life you will satisfy me and show me my salvation. I am forever grateful.*

*Amen.*



## **Additional Readings:**

*Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18;  
Psalm 27;  
Philippians 3:17-4:1;  
Luke 13:31-35;  
Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)*

## **Monday February 22**

*Luke 9:28-36, 37-43a NRSV*

<sup>28</sup>Now about eight days after these sayings Jesus took with him Peter and John and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. <sup>29</sup>And while he was praying, the appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white. <sup>30</sup>Suddenly they saw two men, Moses and Elijah, talking to him. <sup>31</sup>They appeared in glory and were speaking of his departure, which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem. <sup>32</sup>Now Peter and his companions were weighed down with sleep; but since they had stayed awake, they saw his glory and the two men who stood with him. <sup>33</sup>Just as they were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah"—not knowing what he said. <sup>34</sup>While he was saying this, a cloud came and overshadowed them; and they were terrified as they entered the cloud. <sup>35</sup>Then from the cloud came a voice that said, "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" <sup>36</sup>When the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen.

<sup>37</sup>On the next day, when they had come down from the mountain, a great crowd met him. <sup>38</sup>Just then a man from the crowd shouted, "Teacher, I beg you to look at my son; he is my only child. <sup>39</sup>Suddenly a spirit seizes him, and all at once he shrieks. It convulses him until he foams at the mouth; it mauls him and will scarcely leave him. <sup>40</sup>I begged your disciples to cast it out, but they could not." <sup>41</sup>Jesus answered, "You faithless and perverse generation, how much longer must I be with you and bear with you? Bring your son here." <sup>42</sup>While he was coming, the demon dashed him to the ground in convulsions. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit, healed the boy, and gave him back to his father. <sup>43</sup>And all were astounded at the greatness of God.

## **Prayer:**

*Gracious God, we thank You for this day and the many communities in which we actively participate. Knowing that we come together in shared purpose and values we ask that You allow us to see the uniqueness of all its participants and hear everyone's voices. Let us not turn blind to members of our communities as they face daily challenges. And in our very own struggles give us the courage to seek out help from others. We continue in this season seeking to grow closer to You God and the various persons who are a reflection of Your beauty. For it is in unity that we see your glory manifest so we thank You for showing us Your love through the communities in which You have planted us. In Jesus name we pray,*

*Amen.*

*Sierra Coppage*

## **Additional Readings:**

*Psalm 105:1-15 42;  
Exodus 33:1-6;  
Romans 4:1-12*

## **TuesdayFebruary 23**

*1 Corinthians 10:1-13 NRSV*

<sup>1</sup>I do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, that our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, <sup>2</sup>and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, <sup>3</sup>and all ate the same spiritual food, <sup>4</sup>and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ. <sup>5</sup>Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness.

<sup>6</sup>Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they did. <sup>7</sup>Do not become idolaters as some of them did; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play." <sup>8</sup>We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. <sup>9</sup>We must not put

Christ to the test, as some of them did, and were destroyed by serpents. <sup>10</sup>And do not complain as some of them did, and were destroyed by the destroyer. <sup>11</sup>These things happened to them to serve as an example, and they were written down to instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come. <sup>12</sup>So if you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. <sup>13</sup>No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it.

## **Prayer:**

*God, we come to you today with a spirit of thanksgiving and praise. Lord, we thank you for your goodness, mercy, grace and power in all areas of our lives. The challenges that present themselves in our daily walk often leaves us broken, tempted and pressed on every side; we stand on your word each day knowing that the sufferings of our present times are not worthy to be compared to the glory which shall be revealed. Help us Father to encourage and lift each other up. Use us to be light in dark places, intercessors to those that can't pray for themselves and transparent enough to minister to our brothers and sisters in Christ that are struggling in areas of bondage. Let your presence be known unto the world so that all can see that you are the one, true living God. You are Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. You will never leave us or forsake us. We can depend on you in all situations in that we know that those circumstances will work out for our good because we love you and are called according to your purpose. We pray these things now in Jesus' name.*

*Amen.*

*Tiffany T. Barksdale, M.Ed.*

## **Additional Readings:**

*Psalm 105:1-15 42;  
Numbers 14:10b-24*

## Wednesday February 24

Psalm 105:1-15 NIV

<sup>1</sup>Give praise to the LORD, proclaim his name;  
make known among the nations what he has done.

<sup>2</sup>Sing to him, sing praise to him;  
tell of all his wonderful acts.

<sup>3</sup>Glory in his holy name;  
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

<sup>4</sup>Look to the LORD and his strength;  
seek his face always.

<sup>5</sup>Remember the wonders he has done,  
his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,

<sup>6</sup>you his servants, the descendants of Abraham,  
his chosen ones, the children of Jacob.

<sup>7</sup>He is the LORD our God;  
his judgments are in all the earth.

<sup>8</sup>He remembers his covenant forever,  
the promise he made, for a thousand generations,

<sup>9</sup>the covenant he made with Abraham,  
the oath he swore to Isaac.

<sup>10</sup>He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,  
to Israel as an everlasting covenant:

<sup>11</sup>"To you I will give the land of Canaan  
as the portion you will inherit."

<sup>12</sup>When they were but few in number,  
few indeed, and strangers in it,

<sup>13</sup>they wandered from nation to nation,  
from one kingdom to another.

<sup>14</sup>He allowed no one to oppress them;  
for their sake he rebuked kings:

<sup>15</sup>"Do not touch my anointed ones;  
do my prophets no harm."

### Prayer:

Dear God, for as long as I live I will forever posture my heart to flow with praises to You. You are not a man or woman who forgets a covenant or decree. You are faithful to your word and to Your people. Holy Spirit help us to praise the Lord; sing to the Lord; glorify the Lord; look to the Lord; and remember the Lord.

Amen

Min. Keith N. Johnson Jr.

### Additional Readings:

2 Chronicles 20:1-22;  
Luke 13:22-31

## Thursday February 25

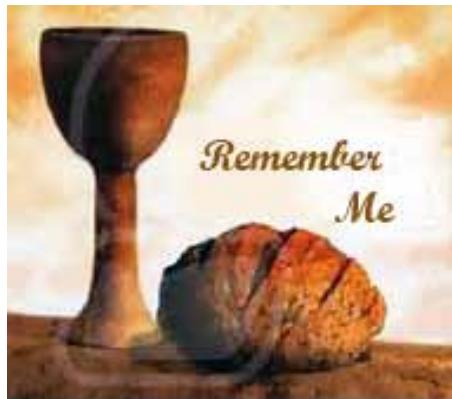
Revelation 2:8-11 Good News  
Translation

<sup>8</sup>"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

"This is the message from the one who is the first and the last, who died and lived again. <sup>9</sup>I know your troubles; I know that you are poor—but really you are rich! I know the evil things said against you by those who claim to be Jews but are not; they are a group that belongs to Satan! <sup>10</sup>Don't be afraid of anything you are about to suffer. Listen! The Devil will put you to the test by having some of you thrown into prison, and your troubles will last ten days. Be faithful to me, even if it means death, and I will give you life as your prize of victory.

<sup>11</sup>"If you have ears, then, listen to what the Spirit says to the churches!

"Those who win the victory will not be hurt by the second death.



### Prayer:

Lord, grant me the strength to accomplish the things that man cannot envision. Lord, I ask for the strength and the discipline to keep me from things that are not of Your will. Lord, You know what's best for me and I trust in You. Lord, please take away the desire to follow my sinful nature. This is my prayer today,

Amen.

Aaron L. Knight, M.S

### Additional Readings:

Psalm 63:1-8;  
Daniel 3:19-30

## Friday February 26

Daniel 12:1-4 Common English Bible  
(CEB)

<sup>1</sup>"At that time, Michael the great leader who guards your people will take his stand. It will be a difficult time—nothing like it has ever happened since nations first appeared. But at that time every one of your people who is found written in the scroll will be rescued. <sup>2</sup>Many of those who sleep in the dusty land will wake up—some to eternal life, others to shame and eternal disgrace. <sup>3</sup>Those skilled in wisdom will shine like the sky. Those who lead many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and always. <sup>4</sup>But you, Daniel, must keep these words secret! Seal the scroll until the end time! Many will stray far, but knowledge will increase."

### Prayer:

Dear Lord,

We look to you as our source of nourishment to satisfy our needs. We repent and seek your guidance in all things. Your word strengthens us, sustains us, and gives us life. We believe in your power and believe in you to meet our every need.

Amen.

Jenelle Kellam

## **Additional Readings:**

**Psalm 63:1-8;**  
**Revelation 3:1-6**

## **Saturday February 27**

*Luke 6:43-45*

*43-45 "You don't get wormy apples off a healthy tree, nor good apples off a diseased tree. The health of the apple tells the health of the tree. You must begin with your own life-giving lives. It's who you are, not what you say and do, that counts. Your true being brims over into true words and deeds.*

## **Prayer:**

*Dear Lord, We come to You at this time, thanking You for all You have done and Your endless blessings. We ask You to clean our minds and our hearts of worldly things God; for all we want to do is bare good fruit. We know that in these times we are facing many tests; tests that question our beliefs, our mind, and hearts. It is intimidating when we think of the time we live in and the ways of this world. The evil and wrong doings seem so easy while the great and just things seem impossible. But we come to you asking for you to remind us that thru you we can do all things; to remind us of our King's roots and that if we live thru you we will bare good fruit! In your name we pray.*

*Amen*

*William Jared Kellam*

## **Additional Readings:**

**Psalm 63:1-8;**  
**Isaiah 5:1-7**

## **Week Three** **February 28 - March 5**

## **Sunday February 28**

*"Why Are You Stalling?"*

*Luke 13:1-9 NRSV*

*<sup>1</sup>At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup>He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup>Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.*

*<sup>6</sup>Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. <sup>7</sup>So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' <sup>8</sup>He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it. <sup>9</sup>If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.'"*

At this moment along our Lenten journey many of us should be questioning some of our daily practices if not all of them. If we take the opportunity to record our works between the last time we engaged in such moments of meditation and devotion such as the one we are practicing at this current moment, would we be able to say that we adhered to the call that has been placed on our lives? Would we be able to say without conviction, that we did exactly what has been required of us? Did we meet the need of others when the opportunity presented itself? Did we exhaust all possible resources and attempt to provide closure to each and every single circumstance that required the best from us? If you answered yea to each and every one of these questions, you should be commended, because you are

the example that all of us should look to when it comes to fulfilling the requirements of "The Gospel." However, if your answer was nay to any of those questions set before you, well you have suggested that this is why your daily walk should be put into question. Let us not be misunderstood as to who should be doing the questioning either. This responsibility is given to us. This is the weight that should be carried by each one of us individually. If we believe that God is the primary entity that holds us in judgement, then we should ensure that we convene our own personal Grand Jury in order to provide a solid case when the indictment of our works has been issued.

So then, as we strive to move towards the better we must acknowledge the mistakes that have been made in the past, and make a declaration that causes us to take the necessary steps in correcting what has been wronged. This helps us to understand what it means to "right the ship." It should be obvious that this opportunity still exists right? Of course! The fact that we have the privilege of recognizing that we have somehow steered off course, should offer clarity that today is the day to make it right.

The writer to the Gospel of Luke sets the scene by informing us that there is a crowd gathered around Jesus to inform him about a tragedy that has just transpired. *<sup>1</sup>At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.* We can be sure that they were probably expecting Jesus to react to this incident in a way that would bring clarity to them as to whether or not he was who he proclaimed to be. Pilate must have committed some sort of crime by mixing the blood of the Galileans with their sacrifices. These were their offerings to God. They were being obedient to the law and here Pilate in return has polluted what they were offering up as sacrifices with the blood of the Galileans. So by telling Jesus of such happenings would help to validate their belief as to who he was not, had he failed to respond appropriately.

However, in his response, Jesus intends to refocus their intentions, as well as our own, to the place where it should have been all along.

*<sup>2</sup>He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? <sup>3</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. <sup>4</sup>Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup>No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did.*

As we begin to reevaluate our daily practice, let us begin with how we could have prevented our shortcomings of yesterday. Before we end up back at this same place, let us take a moment to refocus ourselves to ensure that we have the right intentions. Is it that we are placing too much of our energy in the wrong place? Our purpose in life calls us to a place that should speak against this type of tragedy and prevent such things from taking place. It should not cause us to question the integrity connected to someone else's motives or agendas. This stalls progression.

Having the tools necessary to advance the entire community of faith, and yet becoming too concerned with the person and not the purpose, causes us to be like the man who had the fig tree planted. He comes back time after

time, seeing that his fig tree is not producing any fruit, and instead of giving the gardener the chance to do the things necessary to change the tree's behavior, this man chooses to remain content with his current condition and requests that the tree be cut down. This man should be concerned with why this tree is not producing any fruit and coming up with solutions to change this fig tree's behavior. It is troubling that this man is okay with the tree being cut down and removed. Cutting the tree down only removes the problem. It does not solve the problem. He is stalling progression.

On the other hand, the gardener understands that cutting the tree down will not solve the problem, because the problem may not be the tree having the inability to bear fruit. The problem could be related to the soil in which the tree is rooted and grounded in. The gardener understands that the purpose of the tree is to bear fruit. However, this purpose is totally reliant upon the quality of the soil in which it is planted in. His knowledge of gardening causes him to focus more on the purpose and not the tree itself. This moves him to make his plea on behalf of the tree's purpose of bearing fruit, and not base his plea solely on the current condition of the tree itself. He chooses to move progression forward.

As we continue to journey along the way, let us not be like those who gathered to focus on the personhood of Jesus. Instead, let us strive to place all of our energy in being like the gardener in the parable, understanding our purpose in life as it is related to the whole community of faith. Knowing this causes us to acknowledge that we are rooted and grounded in fertile soil, through Jesus Christ, and it is with him that we all are able to move forward.

### Prayer:

*God, as we continue to journey along the way, let us not be like those who gathered to focus on the personhood of Jesus. Instead, let us strive to place all of our energy in being like the gardener in the parable, understanding our purpose in life as it is related to the whole community of faith. Knowing this causes us to acknowledge that we are rooted and grounded in fertile soil, through Jesus Christ, and it is with him that we all are able to move forward.*

*Amen*

### Additional Readings:

*Isaiah 55:1-9;  
Psalm 63:1-8; 1  
Corinthians 10:1-13*

## Monday February 29

*Romans 2:1-11 Message Bible*

*<sup>1-2</sup>Those people are on a dark spiral downward. But if you think that leaves you on the high ground where you can point your finger at others, think again. Every time you criticize someone, you condemn yourself. It takes one to know one. Judgmental criticism of others is a well-known way of escaping detection in your own crimes and misdemeanors. But God isn't so easily diverted. He sees right through all such smoke screens and holds you to what you've done.*

*<sup>3-4</sup>You didn't think, did you, that just by pointing your finger at others you would distract God from seeing all your misdoings and from coming down on you hard? Or did you think that because he's such a nice God, he'd let you off the hook? Better think this one through from the beginning. God is kind, but he's not soft. In kindness he takes us firmly by the hand and leads us into a radical life-change.*

*<sup>5-8</sup>You're not getting by with anything. Every refusal and avoidance of God adds fuel to the fire. The day is coming when it's going to blaze hot and high, God's fiery and righteous judgment. Make no mistake: In the end you get what's coming to you—Real Life for those who work on God's side, but to those who insist on getting their own way and take*

the path of least resistance, Fire!

<sup>9-11</sup>If you go against the grain, you get splinters, regardless of which neighborhood you're from, what your parents taught you, what schools you attended. But if you embrace the way God does things, there are wonderful payoffs, again without regard to where you are from or how you were brought up. Being a Jew won't give you an automatic stamp of approval. God pays no attention to what others say (or what you think) about you. He makes up his own mind.

#### Prayer:

God, we approach this season seeking peace and love. We ask You to help us be mindful of the words we speak to others. Help us to speak peaceful words into the lives of those we come in contact with. Allow those listening to hear from You through the words that are spoken. In difficult interactions, we ask that You lead us to feel love instead of hate. In your precious name we pray,

Amen.

Sloane Mosley

#### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 39;**  
**Jeremiah 11:1-17**

## Tuesday March 1

#### Scripture Reading:

Romans 2:12-16 NRSV

<sup>12</sup>All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. <sup>13</sup>For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God's sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified. <sup>14</sup>When Gentiles, who do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. <sup>15</sup>They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them <sup>16</sup>on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all.

#### Prayer:

Dear merciful and all wise God, I come to You with a heart full of gratitude. Thank You for Your unwavering love that was evident on Calvary. Thank You God for constantly covering me with grace and mercy. Lord, God, touch our hearts so that we find no comfort in sin but only a desire to please You. In Jesus name,

Amen.

Whitney Redd

#### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 39;**  
**Ezekiel 17:1-10**

## Wednesday March 2

Luke 6:43-45 NIV

<sup>43</sup>"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>44</sup>Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thorn bushes, or grapes from briers. <sup>45</sup>A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

#### Prayer:

You are the creator of all good things oh God, and we thank You. You have blessed us with much and for that we are grateful. Our testimony is that everything we have is because of You. It is never our desire to take the credit for the things that You have done. Please position us so that we are able to tell many others of Your goodness and of Your love. For it is only because of Your love for us that we are able to acknowledge these things. In this time of need, help us draw others to You. In the name of Jesus we pray,

Amen.

Jocelyn Logan

#### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 39;**  
**Numbers 13:17-27;**  
**Luke 13:18-21**

## Thursday March 3

Numbers 13:17-27 NRSV

<sup>17</sup>Moses sent them to spy out the land of Canaan, and said to them, "Go up there into the Negeb, and go up into the hill country, <sup>18</sup>and see what the land is like, and whether the people who live in it are strong or weak, whether they are few or many, <sup>19</sup>and whether the land they live in is good or bad, and whether the towns that they live in are unwalled or fortified, <sup>20</sup>and whether the land is rich or poor, and whether there are trees in it or not. Be bold, and bring some of the fruit of the land." Now it was the season of the first ripe grapes.

<sup>21</sup>So they went up and spied out the land from the wilderness of Zin to Rehob, near Lebo-hamath. <sup>22</sup>They went up into the Negeb, and came to Hebron; and Ahiman, Sheshai, and Talmai, the Anakites, were there. (Hebron was built seven years before Zoan in Egypt.) <sup>23</sup>And they came to the Wadi Eshcol, and cut down from there a branch with a single cluster of grapes, and they carried it on a pole between two of them. They also brought some pomegranates and figs. <sup>24</sup>That place was called the Wadi Eshcol, because of the cluster that the Israelites cut down from there.

<sup>25</sup>At the end of forty days they returned from spying out the land. <sup>26</sup>And they came to Moses and Aaron and to all the congregation of the Israelites in the wilderness of Paran, at Kadesh; they brought back word to them and to all the congregation, and showed them the fruit of the land. <sup>27</sup>And they told him, "We came to the land to which you sent us; it flows with milk and honey, and this is its fruit.

### Prayer:

God, thank You for Your faithfulness, your promises, and your unfaltering word. Thank You for the leaders that You have placed in our lives who follow Your direction and who seek to secure all of their citizens and not a chosen few. Please help us grow into Your image by inspiring us to provide one for another, regardless of tribe, ethnicity, or place of origin. Though we are of many different backgrounds, help us to behave as one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Please provide opportunities for Your willing servants to go out into the world to earn the sustenance that sustains our bodies, minds, and spirits. Finally, we thank You for the countless blessings You have done and that You continue to do; for it is only by Your will that we receive a new chance with each rising sun to live a life of brotherhood, compassion, and service. In Your Son Jesus' name I pray,

Amen.

William A. Evans Jr.

### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 32; Joshua 4:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:16**

### Friday March 4

2 Corinthians 5:6-15 NIV

<sup>6</sup>Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. <sup>7</sup>For we live by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup>We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. <sup>9</sup>So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. <sup>10</sup>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

<sup>11</sup>Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade others. What we are is plain to God, and I hope it is also plain to your conscience. <sup>12</sup>We are

not trying to commend ourselves to you again, but are giving you an opportunity to take pride in us, so that you can answer those who take pride in what is seen rather than in what is in the heart.

<sup>13</sup>If we are "out of our mind," as some say, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. <sup>14</sup>For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.

<sup>15</sup>And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.

### Prayer:

Lord, we are grateful that we are anointed to execute your will. Today, we accept the calling you have on our lives, we submit to the Holy Spirit for our guidance, and we pray for the strength to keep pressing on, in spite of the things we encounter on our journey. For we know our Redeemer lives and will deliver us when we earnestly seek Him. Thank you for the promises that are the crowning achievements for our faith walk with you. In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

Dominique Preston

### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 32; Joshua 4:14-24**

### Saturday March 5

Psalm 32 NRSV

<sup>1</sup>Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

<sup>2</sup>Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit.

<sup>3</sup>When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long.

<sup>4</sup>For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer.

<sup>5</sup>Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity.

I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

<sup>6</sup>Therefore let all the faithful pray to you while you may be found; surely the rising of the mighty waters will not reach them.

<sup>7</sup>You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

<sup>8</sup>I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my loving eye on you.

<sup>9</sup>Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding but must be controlled by bit and bridle or they will not come to you.

<sup>10</sup>Many are the woes of the wicked, but the LORD's unfailing love surrounds the one who trusts in him.

<sup>11</sup>Rejoice in the LORD and be glad, you righteous; sing, all you who are upright in heart!

### Prayer:

God, in the midst of difficult times and trouble minds we asked that You continue to remind us where the true sense of community is. We believe that Your power will guide us with purpose and fulfilment. We believe that through Your guidance we continue to strike through adversity, navigate through less important things, and focus on the true gift of life. We believe that through Your spirit we will lift up all of your children, our brothers, and our sisters, to remain on the path of community and love. Through Your passion for forgiveness we believe that we can overcome injustice, inequality, and hate through our relationship and community with You first. Give us strength to seek Your community first in order to rebuild the community You have blessed us to have. In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

Harold Thomas

## **Additional Readings:**

**Psalm 32;**  
**Exodus 32:7-14;**  
**Luke 15:1-10**

## **Week Four**

### **March 6 - 12**

#### **Sunday March 6**

*"Which One Are You?"*

*Luke 15:1-3, 11-32 NRSV*

<sup>1</sup>Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him.

<sup>2</sup>And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

<sup>3</sup>So he told them this parable:

<sup>11</sup>Then Jesus[b] said, "There was a man who had two sons. <sup>12</sup>The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. <sup>13</sup>A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. <sup>14</sup>When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. <sup>15</sup>So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. <sup>16</sup>He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. <sup>17</sup>But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! <sup>18</sup>I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; <sup>19</sup>I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."'

<sup>20</sup>So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. <sup>21</sup>Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' [d] <sup>22</sup>But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. <sup>23</sup>And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; <sup>24</sup>for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is

*found!*' And they began to celebrate.

<sup>25</sup>"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. <sup>26</sup>He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. <sup>27</sup>He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' <sup>28</sup>Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. <sup>29</sup>But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. <sup>30</sup>But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' <sup>31</sup>Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. <sup>32</sup>But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'

Along this journey to better understand the call to community the parable of the Prodigal Son offers us perspectives from the three main characters in the text that cannot be taken for granted. What we are able to witness through them in this short story that Jesus intends to clearly explain his call to ministry on earth, are points of view from three different individuals that would easily suggest that at some point along our journey in life, we could fit perfectly in their shoes. The telling of this parable is timed perfectly as the text informs us that there are three different groups of individuals in the midst. The tax collectors are present, those identified as "sinners" are there, and surely the Pharisees and scribes – portrayers of those who are without sin, have gathered to once again test the Son of God. And here is Jesus, in the midst of his own teaching series, "The Lost Ones," capturing this moment to educate those who are naïve to the truth.

Like the prodigal son, many have desired to find a way out. Whatever place in life you were in, you experienced some things that caused you to be blinded by the reality of how good you current situation really was. You had no

direct contact with the outside world, you were daily confined to a place of privilege that was structurally scripted to the point where process and procedure overwhelmed you. Stuck on the inside of what you considered to be imprisonment, you were only able to look out from where you currently resided and see an abundance of opportunity. However, in order for you to experience those things that appeared to you as being inhabited ecstasy, you had to choose to venture away from your current oceanfront view out into the gulf of the unknown. So you took the chance; against the will of your loved ones, in opposition to everything spoke into your life that provided personal experience of what it feels like to be out there on your own.

As you journey further away from the foundation by which you were birthed into, you encountered the very same thing you feared would happen. The same experiences shared with you by the ones who loved you the most, have now found reason to make the straight path you envision crooked. The wealth you carried along with you is no longer present, and you are without access to the resources that is able to replenish them. So what experience as a feeling of hunger, it is not. What you thing is being left without adequate resources to keep you clothed, it is not. What you believed to be a feeling of drowning out of the view of those equipped to rescue you, it is not. Why? Because there still remains in the back of your mind the opportunity of returning to a place you knew to be a solid foundation. The places and the people who strived to ensure that you never experienced lack are still very present, you are only currently displaced. The only thing that is required of you is to find the dignity to get up from where you are, and make your way back to the place you once left. In hopes that when you get in eyes view of those you deserted, they will put everything down to come to your rescue. This knowledge provides you with the assurance that your deliverance is always in reach.

Now the father sees the son coming back to his senses. Ever since the son departed, he remained at

home tending to his daily activities. He never really feared for his life. He never truly thought his son was in harm's way. He didn't really expect him to stay away long, because he understood the never ending resources home provided for the son while he remained here in good faith. He knew this because privilege caused him to rest in knowing that what he possessed on the home front was far above anything the son would ever be able to access in his absence.

Therefore, the joy that is expressed by the father is not so much a feeling of relief of the burden carried for fearing that he would not return alive. This joy is an expression of seeing that the son has finally acknowledged what was only able to be obtained by remaining in the presence of a structure that is built to never fail. Insomuch that there is a need to clothe him with the best, provide him with the best accessories that money can buy, cover his feet from the elements of discomfort that nature had created in the earth, and then fill him up to a point where he believes that his brief moment of starvation had now been resolved.

With all of this transpiring, out in the field, the brother who was never foolish enough to give up comfort for discomfort, has now been overwhelmed with jealousy. Can you imagine what is playing out in his mind? He now has to share what he believed he earned for staying true to his father. He never questioned his position, he remained mute up to this point. But now he has to sacrifice all of this on behalf of his brother returning to this solid foundation that he never questioned and forever remained faithful to. So the father has to proudly remind the jealous son that there is abundance of wealth in his possession. His resources are never ending, and as a result, what privilege is able to offer him is something he would never have to relinquish.

And here we are, now understanding why Jesus has to clarify the cause of his ministry on earth. By way of the Prodigal Son story, those who have gathered around him can now identify where there remains a need to be met. The prodigal son never lost the belief that

he had a way out. The father did not waiver in belief that this son would come to his senses. The jealous son was able to be reassured that his brother's return was never a loss, but only a gain. Yet what still remains is the reality that there are those within the streets who will never be able to experience the feeling either of these characters experienced. Many sons and daughters are forced to leave home because of conflict and war, and never gain the hopes of returning. Many mothers and fathers are burdened with the fear that they will one day be met at the door by someone informing them that their child would not be returning. There are those who will always have to struggle tooth and nail in order to survive, provide a nutritious meal for their family, keep a stable roof over their heads, or even a quality wage to work for and be proud about.

Should we now see in its totality the purpose connected to Jesus' earthly ministry? With all that we lack, we still have enough to offer outreach to those who are yet amongst us but remain lost. What we have read through someone else's experience, recollection, or knowledge gained by way of story handed down through the generations, is the example we should follow daily when encountering such travesty. This is not only the example that we should live by, but it is the example that others should see living within us that causes them to believe and trust God. A belief not solely based off of what they have

read concerning the son, but primarily by experiencing the son who lives within us. Which one are you?

### Prayer:

*"God, we thank You for being with us as we have had to lean and depend on You during this time in our lives. When our flesh desires to get the best of us, we are now able to withstand whatever comes our way because You have reconciled us. Help us to remember Lord that we can handle whatever we endure because we are not the same as we used to be since we are new creatures. The old us was washed away when You died for our sins. We now promise, Lord, in our new life to live for You, to let our light so shine, and to share with others what You have done for us. We thank You and ask Your continued blessings upon us on this journey, in Jesus name,*

*Amen."*

Matthew Brown

### Additional Readings:

***Joshua 5:9-12;***  
***Psalm 32; 2***  
***Corinthians 5:16-21***



## Monday March 7

Leviticus 23:26-41 CEB

<sup>26</sup>The LORD said to Moses: <sup>27</sup>Note that the tenth day of this seventh month is the Day of Reconciliation. It will be a holy occasion for you. You must deny yourselves and offer a food gift to the LORD. <sup>28</sup>You must not do any work that day because it is a Day of Reconciliation to make reconciliation for you before the LORD your God. <sup>29</sup>Anyone who does not deny themselves on that day will be cut off from their people. <sup>30</sup>Moreover, I will destroy from their people anyone who does any work on that day. <sup>31</sup>You must not do any work! This is a permanent rule throughout your future generations wherever you live. <sup>32</sup>This is a Sabbath of special rest for you, and you must deny yourselves. You will observe your Sabbath on the ninth day of the month from evening to the following evening.

<sup>33</sup>The LORD said to Moses: <sup>34</sup>Say to the Israelites: The Festival of Booths to the LORD will start on the fifteenth day of the seventh month and will last for seven days. <sup>35</sup>The first day is a holy occasion. You must not do any job-related work. <sup>36</sup>For seven days you will offer food gifts to the LORD. On the eighth day you will have a holy occasion and must offer a food gift to the LORD. It is a holiday: you must not do any job-related work.

<sup>37</sup>These are the LORD's appointed times that you will proclaim as holy occasions, offering food gifts to the LORD: entirely burned offerings, grain offerings, communal sacrifices, and drink offerings—each on its proper day. <sup>38</sup>This is in addition to the LORD's Sabbaths and in addition to your presents, all the payments for solemn promises, and all the spontaneous gifts that you give to the LORD.

<sup>39</sup>Note that on the fifteenth day of the seventh month, when you have gathered the land's crops, you will celebrate the LORD's festival for seven days. The first day and the eighth day are days of special rest. <sup>40</sup>On the first day you must take fruit from majestic trees, palm branches, branches of leafy trees, and willows of the streams, and rejoice before the LORD your God for seven days. <sup>41</sup>You will celebrate this festival to the LORD for seven days each year; this is a permanent rule throughout your future generations. You will celebrate it in the seventh month.

### Prayer:

Lord, Creator of all things. We give gratitude for the many blessings in our lives. We ask that You give us understanding through difficult times and allow us to praise You despite what is going on around us. We ask that You help us reach those that doubt Your good works. In Jesus name we pray,

Amen.

Sloane Mosley

### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 53;**  
**Revelation 19:9-10**

## Tuesday March 8

Psalm 53 CEV

<sup>1</sup>Only a fool would say,  
“There is no God!”  
People like that are worthless!  
They are heartless and cruel  
and never do right.  
<sup>2</sup>From heaven God  
looks down to see  
if anyone is wise enough  
to search for him.  
<sup>3</sup>But all of them  
are crooked and corrupt.  
Not one of them does right.  
<sup>4</sup>Won’t you lawbreakers learn?  
You refuse to pray,  
and you gobble down  
the people of God.  
<sup>5</sup>But you will be terrified  
worse than ever before.  
God will scatter the bones  
of his enemies,  
and you will be ashamed  
when God rejects you.  
<sup>6</sup>I long for someone from Zion  
to come and save Israel!  
Our God, when you bless  
your people again,  
Jacob’s family will be glad,  
and Israel will celebrate.

### Prayer:

Sweet and all-knowing God, We bless You for Your marvelous works and worship You just because of who You are. We recognize that You're the Alpha and Omega, beginning and the end, and the creator of all living and breathing things. As we seek Your face in this season, let our faith be made stronger and our foundations made firmer. Let our hearts be far from worry but closer to thee, so that You will be lifted up above all nations. In the only name that matters and moves mountains. In Jesus name,

Amen.

Whitney Redd

### Additional Readings:

**Leviticus 25:1-19;**  
**Revelation 19:9-10**

## Wednesday March 9

2 Kings 4:1-7 NIV

<sup>1</sup>The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, “Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves.”

<sup>2</sup>Elisha replied to her, “How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?”

“Your servant has nothing there at all,” she said, “except a small jar of olive oil.”

<sup>3</sup>Elisha said, “Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don’t ask for just a few. <sup>4</sup>Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.”

<sup>5</sup>She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. <sup>6</sup>When all the jars were full, she said to her son, “Bring me another one.”

But he replied, “There is not a jar left.” Then the oil stopped flowing.

<sup>7</sup>She went and told the man of God, and he said, “Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.”

## Prayer:

From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God. Thank You for the outpour of protection not only for me but for every being in creation around me. Thank You for eyes to recognize the wrong in the earth and for vision to see Your goodness and wisdom at work through us your children. God, allow your people to perform good deeds. Allow us to have a forgiving heart for those who are corrupt with evil around us, while allowing us to remain faithful to love our neighbors by being the light in the presence of darkness. When we are in trouble, You hear our call. When disaster strikes and we are in despair You are listening to our requests.

You are now and forever will be our refuge. Keep our hearts pure and our ears open to hear Your instruction to establish a real relationship with You. As believers we join together faithfully with your Word in our hearts, You, receive the glory. Bless us to not to rely off of our own understanding and let no doubt overtake us and prevent us from the blessings You have prepared for us. Instead bless us, Your people, to stand in truth and unity as You will provide (Jehovah Jireh), You will heal (Jehovah Rapha), You are our strength (El Shaddai). These are the blessings we ask for all Your children, in your mighty name,

Amen.

Triaillyn Evans

## Additional Readings:

**Psalm 53;**  
**Luke 9:10-17**

## Thursday March 10

*Isaiah 43:1-7 NRSV*

<sup>1</sup>But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

<sup>2</sup>When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not

overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.

<sup>3</sup>For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I give Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in exchange for you.

<sup>4</sup>Because you are precious in my sight, and honored, and I love you, I give people in return for you, nations in exchange for your life.

<sup>5</sup>Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you;

<sup>6</sup>I will say to the north, "Give them up," and to the south, "Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth—

<sup>7</sup>everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

## Prayer:

Loving God, You're my Lord, the One who created me. You have told me not to fear as You are always with me. I have experienced great difficulty, and trials seem to shadow my every move. Through tests and temptations, I have not always responded within Your will. But in spite of my sin and disobedience, You have always been with me. I thank You for calming the waters as I pass through the rivers of oppression. I praise You for not allowing me to be consumed by the fires of injustice. I exalt your name, Father, for you have not deserted me or forsaken me. Just as You delivered Israel, I trust you to ransom me from the bondage of this world, my flesh, and the adversary. Rescue me, oh God, from complacency; from resentment; from selfishness; from unclean thoughts; from fear. During the times that I struggle to feel Your presence, remind me of Your promise. Because You are my redeemer, nothing that I face is greater than the faith that I have in You, oh God. Instill in me the courage that is needed to boldly speak Your word as I disciple others.

Continue to cover me as I tell the story of how You brought me out of darkness into the marvelous light. And even when the road is of one less traveled, help me to find strength to endure. I promise to give you all the glory, honor & praise.

Amen.

Erica PerkinsRedd

## Additional Readings:

**Psalm 126;**  
**Philippians 2:19-24**

## Friday March 11

*Philippians 2:19-25 New Living Translation (NLT)*

<sup>19</sup>If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along. <sup>20</sup>I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. <sup>21</sup>All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup>But you know how Timothy has proved himself. Like a son with his father, he has served with me in preaching the Good News. <sup>23</sup>I hope to send him to you just as soon as I find out what is going to happen to me here. <sup>24</sup>And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon.

<sup>25</sup>Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. He is a true brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier. And he was your messenger to help me in my need.

## Prayer:

Dear Father, my creator and savior. I praise Your name and give You thanks for all You have done for me. I pray for the restoration of Your people, those who are sent out this season to spread Your word to those who may not know You. Help us be a witness for You so that others may see You in us and the joy of having You in our lives. Let your message sing through us that You are Lord of all. Thank You for the opportunity to sing Your praise. In the mighty name of Jesus we pray,

Amen.

Keyode Rogers

## **Additional Readings:**

**Psalm 126;**  
**Isaiah 43:8-15**

### **Saturday March 12**

**Psalm 126 American Standard Version (ASV)**

<sup>1</sup>When Jehovah brought back those that returned to Zion, We were like unto them that dream.

<sup>2</sup>Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing: Then said they among the nations, Jehovah hath done great things for them.

<sup>3</sup>Jehovah hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.

<sup>4</sup>Turn again our captivity, O Jehovah, as the streams in the South.

<sup>5</sup>They that sow in tears shall reap in joy.

<sup>6</sup>He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing seed for sowing, Shall doubtless come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him.

### **Prayer:**

*Most Holy and all wise and knowing God, we come to You with grateful hearts because of the grace You have shown us. Thank You for Your anointing and the everlasting blood that covers us. In a world full of tragedy and sadness, we thank You for Your healing in sorrow and the comfort of the Holy Spirit in fear. Strengthen our faith and let our walk in Christ, be a light for others to know you better.*

*Amen*

*Whitney Redd*

## **Additional Readings:**

**Exodus 12:21-27;**  
**John 11:45-57**

## **Week Five** **March 13 - 19**

### **Sunday March 13**

*"Unconditional Love"*  
(Excerpt from a sermon entitled, "For The Love of God")

*John 3:16 NRSV*

<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

The reception of gifts is sometimes unappreciated. Such a statement of proclamation can be made based off of the reaction of the one who receives something that should be greatly cherished. Frown faces, sarcastic comments in response to the gift being given, mute responses, side conversations in absence of the one who thought enough of you to give you such an item that symbolizes the extent of the relationship they have with you, and even the idea of re-gifting the item and distributing it to someone who you do not think so highly of, but you feel obligated to give them something, so you grant them the privilege of receiving something from you that you longed to find a victim for. Or better yet, the thought of receiving something that you were grateful of. And in return using what has been given to you to taunt others with, because it is perceived that you possess something that they are not fully privileged to.

This is an observation that should raise eyebrows, and cause us as believers to respond in a way that displays to the entire community of faith how to not just receive the gift with gratefulness, but how we are to properly utilize the gift that we have received. This type of response is something that displays appreciation in its greatest fashion.

And although much of this is true, it is in these times when many of us exist even without total understanding of how we can be productive and proactive beneficiaries of the greatest gift that has ever been given. The greatest gift. That gift known to us as love. That gift that demonstrated and was put on display over two thousand years ago. The belief was

that its sacrifice would allow us the opportunity to witness how we are to exemplify what we have been privileged enough to possess. This type of response that is expected by us, is something that displays appreciation in its greatest fashion.

In attempt to help Nicodemus understand how one is to experience the kingdom, Jesus deals with the gift of love in order to help him realize the expectation if one only believes. The gift of love, Jesus Christ our Savior, the Son of God, the greatest gift ever given in the history of this world's existence. And to reap the benefits of this gift, the text implicates that all we are required to do is to believe, to have faith in, to greatly appreciate what has been given by the one who coordinates all of existence and causes us to operate without constraint. If we only believe in him! For this love, the love of God, the gift that really keeps on giving, one must only believe. And there is a guarantee within the text offered to us if we receive the gift with great appreciation, and fully believe in him. That guarantee is that life will cease to exist as a result of us not refusing to believe.

So, what does it really mean to believe? The real meaning of believing is to just believe! When believing is actualized, when it's processed, when it's executed, and when it's demonstrated as it should, then it's not only thought, but it's actually performed. In other words, to fully believe in Christ doesn't only call for accepting him as your savior, and to suppose that he performed a good work, carried the weight of the world on his shoulders and died to rise, so that we might live. Believing in Christ requires us to demonstrate to others what the works of Christ looks like. It's important that we understand that God's gift to the world is not something that can be taken for granted. Had the gift of love been something that could be individualized then it would be nothing for us to be unappreciative. But because the gift of love is not just for us, it's for the world's entire existence, then it's important for us to actualize what it means for a believer to actually believe in the son of God.

The reality of what persists before

us, is that the entirety of God's creation was out of whack. The cosmos was out of whack, everything in its rotation was out of sorts. The sun was shining inappropriately, and the moon glowed ineffectively, and in order to rectify what God had envisioned to be God, everything that God's hands had created, everything that God's breath had been breathed in - for everything God breathes in is existing in the image of God. Therefore, when God looks at it God sees God. And when God sees God and what he/she sees doesn't look as though it possesses the very being of God, God then chooses to send the gift of love, the son of God, to rectify what has been discovered out of balance in its entirety. For God so loved, "The World."

As believers we are required, in order to witness the likes of eternality, we must ensure that God's love spreads to every crooked corner, to every mountain, to every valley, to every rolling hill, to every river and to every stream, to every hollow, to every bush. That's the reality of believing. The belief in Christ Jesus, the gift of loved, who performed, demonstrated, crucified, but then resurrected, requires believing at its

greats. Believing that cause the world to look on us and literally witness Jesus in the now. Not Jesus on the Cross. But the Jesus of the now, the resurrected savior that lives within us. That one in which should cause those who do not believe to look on us and be transformed into a believer.

*<sup>16</sup>For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.*

Are you a believer? This could be the most challenging question that we have had to deal with along the journey in meditation. Can we really stand up in front of the mirror every day and speak confident the truth that we have been purposed to carry? If we are unable to speak this boldly each and every day we are blessed to open our eyes, then we have to reassess our motives and intentions. If such reality exist among us, then we may be perpetrating as believers. Believers do not dream about what they believe in in itself. Believers strive to become the very thing they believe in.

## Prayer:

*Our Father, in this season of prayer we are reminded that in you we live and move and have our being. We understand the importance of depending on your divine wisdom, yet sometimes we fall short in doing so. As we go forward in these uncertain times help us, Lord, to trust in your heavenly guidance. In these challenging days communities all around the world stand in need of your grace, mercy, and love. Lord, give us a renewed, unwavering faith that we might stand for what is right and against what is wrong. We ask for your help in the name of Jesus,*

*Amen*

*Rev. John F. Adams*

## Additional Readings:

*Isaiah 43:16-21;  
Psalm 126;  
Philippians 3:4b-14;  
John 12:1-8*



## Monday March 14

2 Corinthians 5:11-15 CEV

*“So always be cheerful!*

*As long as we are in these bodies, we are away from the Lord.<sup>7</sup> But we live by faith, not by what we see.<sup>8</sup> We should be cheerful, because we would rather leave these bodies and be at home with the Lord.<sup>9</sup> But whether we are at home with the Lord or away from him, we still try our best to please him.<sup>10</sup> After all, Christ will judge each of us for the good or the bad that we do while living in these bodies.*

*<sup>11</sup>We know what it means to respect the Lord, and we encourage everyone to turn to him. God himself knows what we are like, and I hope you also know what kind of people we are.<sup>12</sup> We are not trying once more to brag about ourselves. But we want you to be proud of us, when you are with those who are not sincere and brag about what others think of them.*

*<sup>13</sup>If we seem out of our minds, it is between God and us. But if we are in our right minds, it is for your good.<sup>14</sup> We are ruled by Christ's love for us. We are certain that if one person died for everyone else, then all of us have died.<sup>15</sup> And Christ did die for all of us. He died so we would no longer live for ourselves, but for the one who died and was raised to life for us.*

### Prayer:

Dear Lord, Thank You for forgiveness. We pray for strength to forgive because we know that You have constantly forgiven us. To forgive is freedom. We surrender all hurt, anger, jealousy and any other emotion that interferes in our relationship with You. Let Your likeness be seen through us. It is in Your redemptive name that we ask these things. Amen.

Jenelle Kellam

### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 20;**  
**Exodus 40:1-15;**  
**Hebrews 10:19-25**

## Tuesday March 15

Luke 9:10-17 NRSV

*<sup>10</sup>On their return the apostles told Jesus all they had done. He took them with him and withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida.<sup>11</sup> When the crowds found out about it, they followed him; and he welcomed them, and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed to be cured.*

*<sup>12</sup>he day was drawing to a close, and the twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away, so that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside, to lodge and get provisions; for we are here in a deserted place.”<sup>13</sup> But he said to them, “You give them something to eat.” They said, “We have no more than five loaves and two fish—unless we are to go and buy food for all these people.”<sup>14</sup> For there were about five thousand men. And he said to his disciples, “Make them sit down in groups of about fifty each.”<sup>15</sup> They did so and made them all sit down.<sup>16</sup> And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd.<sup>17</sup> And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.*

### Prayer:

Lord, we know that the wages of sin is death. We know that only You can deliver us from our ungodly ways and restore us to wholeness. But who pays for the dreams deferred in places like Flint, Michigan where the government knew the city's drinking water was poisoned with lead and other toxins and did nothing? Who fixes broken school systems that would rather send our children to prisons over colleges? Who corrects people of faith who spend more time beating people up with the Bible than studying what's in it? We know that You are in the business of radical love and can heal the sickest of sick. But, we are distracted by widespread corruption, public greed and personal debt. Dear God, help us to be Your hands and feet. Help us to be the change we seek - not just for ourselves but also for the world around us. And when the

*world is too much to bear, please guide us to a safe quiet place where we can have a little talk with Jesus and be encouraged by His will, His way, and His example. O'God! We surrender all to You.*

Amen.

Quan Williams

### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 20;**  
**Judges 9:7-15; 1**  
**John 2:18-28**

## Wednesday March 16

Habakkuk 3:2-16 NRSV

*<sup>2</sup>O LORD, I have heard of your renown, and I stand in awe, O LORD, of your work.*

*In our own time revive it;  
in our own time make it known;  
in wrath may you remember mercy.*

*<sup>3</sup>God came from Teman,  
the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah  
His glory covered the heavens,  
and the earth was full of his praise.*

*<sup>4</sup>The brightness was like the sun;  
rays came forth from his hand,  
where his power lay hidden.*

*<sup>5</sup>Before him went pestilence,  
and plague followed close behind.*

*<sup>6</sup>He stopped and shook the earth;  
he looked and made the nations tremble.  
The eternal mountains were shattered;  
along his ancient pathways  
the everlasting hills sank low.*

*<sup>7</sup>I saw the tents of Cushan under affliction;  
the tent-curtains of the land of Midian  
trembled.*

*<sup>8</sup>Was your wrath against the rivers, O  
LORD?  
Or your anger against the rivers,  
or your rage against the sea,  
when you drove your horses,  
your chariots to victory?*

*<sup>9</sup>You brandished your naked bow,  
sated were the arrows at your  
command. Selah  
You split the earth with rivers.*

*<sup>10</sup>The mountains saw you, and writhed;  
a torrent of water swept by;  
the deep gave forth its voice. The sun  
raised high its hands;*

<sup>11</sup> the moon stood still in its exalted place,  
at the light of your arrows speeding by,  
at the gleam of your flashing spear.

<sup>12</sup> In fury you trod the earth,  
in anger you trampled nations.

<sup>13</sup> You came forth to save your people,  
to save your anointed.  
You crushed the head of the wicked house,  
laying it bare from foundation to roof.  
Selah

<sup>14</sup> You pierced with their own arrows the  
head of his warriors,  
who came like a whirlwind to scatter us,  
gloating as if ready to devour the poor  
who were in hiding.

<sup>15</sup> You trampled the sea with your horses,  
churning the mighty waters.

<sup>16</sup> I hear, and I tremble within;  
my lips quiver at the sound.  
Rottenness enters into my bones,  
and my steps tremble beneath me.  
I wait quietly for the day of calamity  
to come upon the people who attack us.

#### Prayer:

Dear Master, we say that we want to be faithful and follow You. We believe that we are mature enough to handle the whole truth about Your plans for our lives. Then, as soon as we feel overwhelmed by the weight of our assignments, the seeming impossibility of Your vision, we doubt Your wisdom. We act as if heartbreak and grief are for others. We act as if being a good Christian means that calamity should never knock on our door. Have mercy on us God. Teach us to trust Your timing and not our own. Remind us that the same God who can work miracles in the lives of our neighbors, can lift up our own bowed down head. You are a promise keeper Lord. You are better to us than we are to ourselves. And

while this Lenten season is not about us, help us to know that it is, however, about our relationship with You. Help us to never forget that we serve a Savior that died for us and, yes, got up for us! Create in us a sober mind and clean heart that can handle standing and fighting for the right causes. Increase our faith so that we never tire of loving, following, and trusting You. We pray this prayer in Your son Jesus name.

Amen.

Quan Williams

#### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 20;**  
**Luke 18:31-34**

### Thursday March 17

*Isaiah 53:10-12 NRSV*

<sup>10</sup> Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him with pain.

When you make his life an offering for sin,  
he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days;  
through him the will of the LORD shall prosper.

<sup>11</sup> Out of his anguish he shall see light;  
he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge.

The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous,  
and he shall bear their iniquities.

<sup>12</sup> Therefore I will allot him a portion with the great,

and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;  
because he poured out himself to death,  
and was numbered with the transgressors;  
yet he bore the sin of many,  
and made intercession for the transgressors.

#### Prayer:

God, we are suffering. Each day, we struggle with the needs of ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our communities, and our world. When we become overwhelmed with hurt and negativity, help us return our focus to You. In our moments of pain, may we reflect Your own sacrifice. We know that the weight of this world is a heavy one. May we lift it on our shoulders knowing that this burden is nothing compared with the weight of the cross you carried for us. Give us the strength to keep lifting, and the faith to lift our hearts to you when the load feels unbearable. In Christ's name we pray,

Amen.

Lindsey Beekman

#### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 31:9-16;**  
**Hebrews 2:1-9**

### Friday March 18

*2 Corinthians 4:16-18 NRSV*

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

<sup>17</sup> For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,<sup>18</sup> because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

#### Prayer:

God. Transform me from the inside out. Renew and reconstruct my soul. Obliterate my old habits and give me strength to walk in Your light. Clothe me, Father, in new peace, as I accept my new identity as Your child. I humble myself to know that sin is horrible although forgiveness is marvelous. Therefore, I repent of all sins and receive Your forgiveness. Thank You for being so gracious! Thank You for the power of Your Word to bring change to this old, brittle soul! I believe that Your Word is working in me today. Help me to accept the call to Discipleship so that



others can experience Your glory as well. May my character exemplify You and my actions honor You. Empower me to enjoy You to the extent at which the world marvels over how fulfilling You are. More than anything, enlighten me to give sacrificially as Jesus did. As I love and fulfill the needs of those around me, may my motives be pure and acceptable unto You. I praise you for the joy you've set before me: a life lived more abundantly, as I rest in the new mindset of Christ. For it is in Jesus' name that I pray.

Amen.

Erica PerkinsRedd

### Additional Readings:

*Psalm 31:9-16;  
Isaiah 54:9-10;  
Hebrews 2:10-18*

### Saturday March 19

*Psalm 31:9-16 NIV*

*9Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;*

*my eyes grow weak with sorrow,  
my soul and body with grief.*

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

*11Because of all my enemies,  
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors  
and an object of dread to my closest  
friends—  
those who see me on the street flee from  
me.*

*12I am forgotten as though I were dead;  
I have become like broken pottery.*

*13For I hear many whispering,  
“Terror on every side!”  
They conspire against me  
and plot to take my life.*

*14But I trust in you, LORD;  
I say, “You are my God.”*

*15My times are in your hands;  
deliver me from the hands of my  
enemies,  
from those who pursue me.*

*16Let your face shine on your servant;  
save me in your unfailing love.*

### Prayer:

*Dear Lord, my God, We just want to take the moment to say thank You. Thank God for being I Am in our life, in the darkest and toughest moments. Continue to rock us in Your arms so that the power of love over shadows the hate of the world. Let our hearts experience forgiveness while offering it as well. Be with us, stand for us, and let us forever find fulfillment and nourishment from eating at the table of the Lord. In Jesus name.*

Amen.

Whitney Redd

### Additional Readings:

*Leviticus 23:1-8;  
Luke 22:1-13*

### Holy Week March 20 - 26

### Sunday March 20 Palm Sunday

*Luke 19:28-40 NRSV*

*28After he had said this, he went on ahead,  
going up to Jerusalem.*

*29When he had come near Bethphage and Bethany, at the place called the Mount of Olives, he sent two of the disciples, 30saying, “Go into the village ahead of you, and as you enter it you will find tied there a colt that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it here. 31If anyone asks you, ‘Why are you untying it?’ just say this, ‘The Lord needs it.’” 32So those who were sent departed and found it as he had told them. 33As they were untying the colt, its owners asked them, “Why are you untying the colt?” 34They said, “The Lord needs it.” 35Then they brought it to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it. 36As he rode along, people kept spreading their cloaks on the road. 37As he was now approaching the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen,*

*38saying,  
“Blessed is the king  
who comes in the name of the Lord!*

*Peace in heaven,  
and glory in the highest heaven!”*

*39Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, order your disciples to stop.” 40He answered, “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.”*

*“Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I’m not concerned about that now. I just want to do God’s will. And He’s allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I’ve looked over. And I’ve seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the Promised Land!”*

- Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I have had the privilege on a few occasions to sit down and listen to Dr. Martin Luther King's "Mountain Top" speech. There is so much that could be said about the power behind the words spoken by Dr. King in public for the very last time. However, recently I chose to listen to this speech to see if I could hear or feel a difference in the sound of Dr. King's voice. I was trying to determine the reason why King chooses to explain the conversation he had with God concerning which point in time he would choose to live in if he could. This caused me to listen more intently to the sound of his voice as opposed to the actual words he spoke. I believe that him choosing to speak about this dialogue he had with God, suggested that he was truly content with everything he had done in life up to this point. I did not have to fast forward to the climax in his conversation where he speaks of his Moses like mountain top experience. No, everything I needed to hear was captured in this moment at the early stages of his speech. So, from this point forward, all I was concerned about was attempting to determine whether Dr. King was speaking in confidence, or whether he was speaking in fear. And what I gather from the sound of his voice, from his cadence, and from the authority within the raising of his voice, Dr. King was as confident in this moment as he has ever been.

With this understanding, I had to ask myself a question. How can one seem to be so sure about their current position in life, while keeping in the forefront the reality of knowing



that you are nearing the end of your journey? This is troubling for me to fully understand, but what I heard coming through my headphones, was the voice of a man who did not fear anything that would come between him and the call that had been placed on his life. He alluded to it throughout the speech, that he had almost experienced death knocking down his door once before. But even the experience of almost losing his life did not keep him from doing what he was purposed to do. It was almost as if he was heading in a direction where the reality of him losing his life would be staring him right in the face, opposed to just sitting back and watching the chips fall where they may.

Likewise, we gather this same sense of feeling by reading the Luke narrative of Jesus riding into Jerusalem. By this time, Jesus was very much aware that there is an entire institution set up to kill him. But even with this understanding, we see him choosing to look his destiny in the face. His destiny is one that does not have a happy ending. However, like the tone of voice I heard coming through my ears when listening to Dr. King, refusing to back down by any means, the same I see through Christ in this text. Both individuals have to face the reality of being crucified and assassinated, yet they refuse to turn away from it, because turning away

from what was sure to come, would mean that they would leave their work unfinished.

So, I must ask the question. How many times have you left work unfinished, in fear of facing the consequence that comes with it? Did you fear your life because of it? Were you put in a place that would cause your voice to be muted? If you completed what you set out to do, how many people connected to you would turn away from you if they knew the impact of the consequences you would face? Maybe this is what you really feared, losing relationship with those who mean the most to you.

As we near our devotional journey during this Lenten season, let us not lose focus of what God has set before us in lieu of the consequences that humankind has put in place for us. There is a goal that we should be striving to obtain together and it cannot come to past if we continue to leave our job unfinished. God has a reward that is greater than anything we could ever imagine, if we only keep our hand to the plow. The amazement of what shall be exceeds any consequence received by completing what God has ordained us to do. So keep fighting for the oppressed. Keep inspiring the disenfranchised. Keep marching for what you know is right. Keep

journeying down the road to justice. Keep placing yourselves in places where many are afraid to step foot in. Keep speaking without conviction. Finish the work, and don't look back.

### Prayer:

*Merciful God, there is no one else but You who can understand the burdens we carry alone. You have provided us with the tools to do what we have been called to do, but the burden that comes with it has caused us to recant on numerous occasions. So we plea to You at this very moment. We ask that You stand up in us as we boldly step towards finishing what has been left undone so many times before. You have provided us latitude with Your grace and we do not take that for granted. Therefore, we meet You where You are at this very moment, in order that we may be able to move towards putting a period at the end of our life's journey. It is through the greatest example that You have set before us that we pray the prayer. In Jesus name,*

*Amen.*

### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29**

### Monday March 21

*John 12:1-11 CEB*

*Six days before Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, home of Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead.<sup>2</sup> Lazarus and his sisters hosted a dinner for him. Martha served and Lazarus was among those who joined him at the table.<sup>3</sup> Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three-quarters of a pound, of very expensive perfume made of pure nard. She anointed Jesus' feet with it, then wiped his feet dry with her hair. The house was filled with the aroma of the perfume.<sup>4</sup> Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), complained,<sup>5</sup> "This perfume was worth a year's wages! Why wasn't it sold and the money given to the poor?"<sup>6</sup> He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief. He carried the money bag and would take what was in it.)*

<sup>7</sup>Then Jesus said, "Leave her alone. This perfume was to be used in preparation for my burial, and this is how she has used it. <sup>8</sup>You will always have the poor among you, but you won't always have me."

<sup>9</sup>Many 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. <sup>10</sup>The chief priests decided that they would kill Lazarus too. <sup>11</sup>It was because of Lazarus that many of the Jews had deserted them and come to believe in Jesus.

#### Prayer:

Dear God, we come to you right now just asking for clarity and understanding. That the things we see are seen in the way You intended them to be seen; we pray for clear sight, that we may see the tricks and the disguises of evil. We pray that the words we hear are heard in the way You intended us to hear them; that when we are called to do works that we will listen and obey. We pray that whenever we are in times of confusion You remove all falsehood and reveal to us what is only truth. In your name we pray.

Amen.

William Jared Kellam

#### Additional Readings:

**Isaiah 42:1-9;**  
**Psalm 36:5-11;**  
**Hebrews 9:11-15;**  
**John 12:1-11**

## Tuesday March 22

Isaiah 49:1-7 CEV

<sup>1</sup>Everyone, listen, even you foreign nations across the sea.

The LORD chose me and gave me a name before I was born.

<sup>2</sup>He made my words pierce like a sharp sword

or a pointed arrow;  
he kept me safely hidden  
in the palm of his hand.

<sup>3</sup>The LORD said to me,  
"Israel, you are my servant;  
and because of you  
I will be highly honored."

<sup>4</sup>I said to myself,

"I'm completely worn out;  
my time has been wasted.  
But I did it for the LORD God,  
and he will reward me."

<sup>5</sup>Even before I was born,  
the LORD God chose me  
to serve him and to lead back  
the people of Israel.  
So the LORD has honored me  
and made me strong.

<sup>6</sup>Now the LORD says to me,  
"It isn't enough for you  
to be merely my servant.  
You must do more than lead back  
survivors from the tribes  
of Israel.

I have placed you here as a light  
for other nations;  
you must take my saving power  
to everyone on earth."

<sup>7</sup>Israel, I am the holy LORD God,  
the one who rescues you.  
You are slaves of rulers and of a nation  
who despises you.  
Now this is what I promise:  
Kings and rulers will honor you  
by kneeling at your feet.  
You can trust me! I am your LORD,  
the holy God of Israel,  
and you are my chosen ones.

#### Prayer:

God, You spoke and the world was created, You spoke and each person on earth was created in Your image, You spoke and asked us to care for Your world and people. Forgive us when we neglect all your children, let us truly be the hands and feet of Christ. Give us a burden for those in physical and spiritual need. Guide us to be the children of the light.

Amen

Susan Prather

#### Additional Readings:

**Psalm 71:1-14; 1**  
**Corinthians 1:18-31;**  
**John 12:20-36**

## Wednesday March 23

Hebrews 12:1-3 NRSV

<sup>1</sup>Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup>looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

<sup>3</sup>Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary or lose heart.

#### Prayer:

My Redeemer, We praise You because you are all sufficient! Thank You for exemplifying Your love for us through Jesus Christ. Bless the ministries that you have given us. As Jesus did not decline the work proposed to him, instill in us a spirit of obedience so that we do not dismiss our responsibility of the next generation. Give us a vision to be that of the love, life and mind of Christ. Provide us the wisdom to speak a word in season to those who are weary. Help us to give to the poor in spirit and those who hunger after You. When we, ourselves, are suffering, remind us of your mercies and promises.

Let us look to Christ who exemplified the ultimate faith. Jesus endured the cross because He knew of the joy set before him. Give us patience and perseverance for the difficulties that lie ahead. Help us to meditate upon Christ's endurance so that we are not moved by the words and actions of men. In due time, relieve us from our troubles; but in the meantime, sustain us by Your might! And even in the midst, there is peace in knowing that You are with us. Thank you in advance for the joy that is set before us! We give You glory, for You are the predecessor and fulfiller of our faith. It is so.

Amen

Erica PerkinsRedd

## **Additional Readings:**

**Isaiah 50:4-9a;**  
**Psalm 70;**  
**John 13:21-32**

### **Thursday March 24 Maundy Thursday**

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26 NRSV**

<sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, <sup>24</sup>and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup>In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

## **Prayer:**

*Most gracious God, we come together as an offering to You. A few has some but none has all, so we bind our hearts and minds to worship You as one. We are a community of witnesses of Your glory. Lord God, continue to touch our eyes that we see as You see; touch our mouths to use Your language and speak as You speak; touch our feet to go where You lead us; and touch our hearts so we can love ourselves and those around us as You love us. Give us more compassion, empathy, and desire to help those in need.*

*Strengthen us as we stand in the gap for those who are unable to make their petitions known. Direct us as we seek justice for the least among us. Help us to join Your work with gladness and purpose. You are our best example. You are the joy in the midst of bleak situations. You are our certainty when we encounter unsteady circumstances. You are our strong tower when betrayal greets us. You are still the way, the truth and the light. God, we desire to be more like You each day. Hear the concerns of our hearts in this Lenten season.*

*Amen.*

*Rev. Samantha Richardson-Epps*

## **Additional Readings:**

**Exodus 12:1-14;**  
**Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19;**  
**John 13:1-17, 31b-35**

### **Friday March 25 Good Friday**

*"Who Can Be Found?"  
(excerpt from a sermon entitled,  
"What It Feels Like To Be Left Hanging)  
Luke 23:44-49 NRSV*

<sup>44</sup>It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, <sup>45</sup>while the sun's light failed; and the curtain of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup>Then Jesus, crying with a loud voice, said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." Having said this, he breathed his last. <sup>47</sup>When the centurion saw what had taken place, he praised God and said, "Certainly this man was innocent." <sup>48</sup>And when all the crowds who had gathered there for this spectacle saw what had taken place, they returned home, beating their breasts. <sup>49</sup>But all his acquaintances, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

Such a travesty, a mishandling of this key moment in time, an absurd and distorted representation of what was experienced by the Son of God, minimizes the impact of the empty tomb. This type of injustice exemplified by those of us who identify ourselves as followers, reduces the influence that Christ resurrected can have on virgin ears. There is a transformation that is waiting to take place within us children of God, if we only give attention to what was endured by our savior prior to him even transitioning from a dead corpus to a resuscitation of his physiological self well after it had already been mummified.

Picture this if you would, the text says it was noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. Saints it is in the middle of the day and it is dark outside. The moon has eclipsed the sun and there is now being experienced in time a moment when darkness is consuming everything in its path. Jesus is there on the cross, and the tide has seemingly shifting away from him rather than in favor of him. For the majority of his

ministry crowds have followed him in overwhelmingly large numbers. Most of who desired to be in his presence and gain from him something that would nourish their physical and spiritual bodies. His chosen twelve flocked with him and stuck to him like glue, relishing at the fact that this man had the power to perform such miraculous things that caused their learning experiences to transition into worshiping moments. Points when they worshiped him so much, that it confused them as to why they were unable to perform the same. And let us not given attention to the fact that just days earlier, he was the main attraction coming into town, riding in on an ass, with palms being laid before him as if they were paying respects to a bride being escorted down the aisle. Now he is again the main attraction; however, the reaction of those before him is different. They have spat on him, ripped his clothes, mocked him, chastised, whipped and beat him, laughed at him, put him on display in two different courts, made a spectacle, an embarrassment, and a fool. Better yet, he is now portrayed as one in the likeness of the very same thing he road into town on.

And as he is hanging there, he looks out in a distance and notices that nobody has his back. Nobody is there to hold him up, or yet, take him down. As a matter of fact, anyone and everybody who were in his pocket while he was doing great things have chickened out. They are running or in the process of hiding out. The text says, "All of his acquaintances, including women, are watching from a distance," in fear, and looking on, as their King is left on a tree "HANGING." This is the reality of the then and the now that we have to first deal with on tonight, before we can even think about celebrating the get up. "What It Feels Like To Be Left Hanging."

Likewise, many of us on today must face this same reality not just for this moment, but for like moments in our own lives; moments when we have to wake up every morning with images of crucifixion on our television screens, in our newspapers, in our communities, in our schools, in the job sector, and even within our own

homes.

But, it is in these times when we come to understand, that even in your hanging there is still a place of comfort. Jesus in his reality understands that there is still a place or rest even in his hanging. And though it appears as if the entire world has turned against him, something resonates with him that still gives him assurance that all may not end well, but all will eventually be well. And so it is with us, we constantly face the reality of envisioning our bodies crucified in society and in the media daily, but something has held us, something has kept us, something has brought us over, something has shaped us, and some keeps us sane enough to keep on pushing.

How nice it would be if everyone we rocked with showed up when we were in a complex situation. What a feeling it would be to turn around and witness the masses cross over with us, not knowing what they will face on the other side. These happenings would set us in places where we are able to overthrow all the powers that be. Such happenings would position us in spaces where those on the other side would fear us for the power we possess and not just for the potential they see within us. But we have not arrive yet children, we have not reached the other shore just yet, the storm clouds rage and

the winds are still blowing. And we know that this has not been the first time darkness has consumed light. We know that this is not the first time the wicked nature of the world has appeared to overwhelmed goodness and grace. Yes, I have witnessed these type of crucifixions before, and I have encountered the experiences of life on my own, alone, with no one in sight, once, twice, maybe even three times before. But something tells me that I have been here before and even when the world leaves me out to suffer, I can still find in my hanging, I can still find in my pain, I can still find in my oppression, a place where comfort consumes my current position.

### Prayer:

*True and living God, bring to light the things You have placed within our very being that will move us meet the needs of the lost. Let us not lose sight of what we have been called to. Speak to the lack in our lives. The lack of passion we show to those who do not look like us. The lack of motivation to go to the places where You dwell, but we have feared to follow You to for a long time. Forgive us for not getting the job done when it required us to. Ignite the fire that has been burnt out by rejection,*

*complacency, and privilege. Let it be known that our wrongs will be made right as we move forward. This can be done, because we are assured that You will remain there by our sides at all times. With the power You allowed Jesus to conquer the grave with, we can conquer our own.*

*Amen!*

### Additional Readings:

*Isaiah 52:13-53:12;  
Psalm 22;  
Hebrews 10:16-25;  
Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9;  
John 18:1-19:42*

## Saturday March 26 Holy Saturday

*Matthew 27:57-66 NRSV*

<sup>57</sup>When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup>He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup>So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth <sup>60</sup>and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. <sup>61</sup>Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

<sup>62</sup>The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate <sup>63</sup>and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' <sup>64</sup>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." <sup>65</sup>Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." <sup>66</sup>So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.



**Prayer:**

God, Thank You for sending Your only begotten Son as an example for us to live by. Thank You for his sacrifice. Thank You for forgiving our sins through Christ Jesus. Father, we put our hearts in Your hands. Cleanse us of any impurities that are not of You. Wash our bodies, minds, and spirits. Forgive us of our sins. Release a refreshing over our lives so that we may live a life that is pleasing unto You. Birth in us a love that surpasses all understanding. Guide us with courage so that we may shine Your light and love wherever we go. In Jesus name Amen.

Chantea Wright

**Additional Readings:**

**Job 14:1-14;**  
**Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24;**  
**Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16;**  
**1 Peter 4:1-8;**  
**John 19:38-42**

**Prayer:**

To the one who forced the grave to give up the body and cause death to regurgitate, we come with sincere hearts, just to say thank You. The greatest example of life known throughout creation has been lived. The burden of the cross has been carried. The prophecy of being lifted up from the earth has been fulfilled. The tomb had been occupied. And now power and authority has ended up with the last say so. So with this knowledge, it would do You a disservice if we did not begin by giving honor to the one in which honor is due. You have allowed us to journey down this path of devotion once again. You have provided us with inspiration to keep pressing forward. You have offered us insight as to how the work should be carried out. Therefore, we desire to leave this place with the drive to carry out our daily work in such a way that will prevent us from returning to this place incomplete. So strengthen us God.

Provide us with all of the necessities required to stare in the face of evil, and cause it to flee. What we know

now is much greater than what we knew then. So turn back the desire to be concerned about ourselves, when there are those among us who experience a much harsher reality to their existence. But in return, convict us when we fail to allow Christ to be witnessed through our works. Not by what can be said out of our mouths, but by the things that can be done by our hands and feet. If we succeed at doing what You have intended for us, then we can be sure, that our communities will be made better. And this world will again resemble the creation that was reconciled through Your son Jesus. We pray this prayer in the only name that matters. In Jesus name we pray,

Amen!

**Additional Readings:**

**Acts 10:34-43;**  
**Isaiah 65:17-25;**  
**Psalm 118: 1-2, 14-24;**  
**Acts 10:34-43;**  
**John 20:1-18;**  
**Luke 24:1-12**

**"Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words."**  
– Francis of Assisi

## Sunday, March 27 Easter/Resurrection Sunday

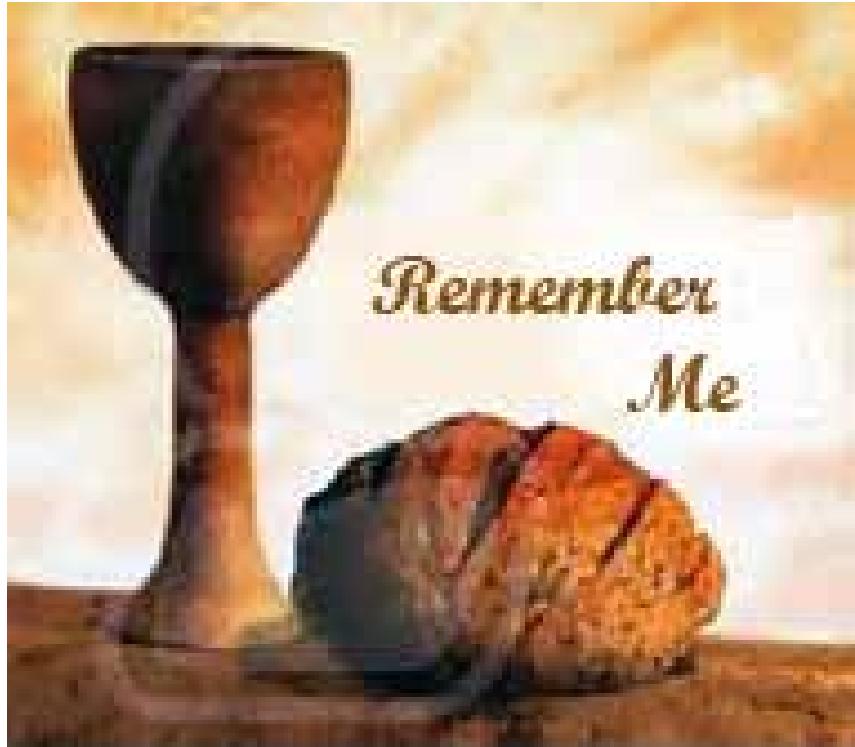
1 Corinthians 15:19-26 NRSV

<sup>19</sup>If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

<sup>20</sup>But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died. <sup>21</sup>For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; <sup>22</sup>for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ. <sup>23</sup>But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup>Then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father, after he has destroyed every ruler and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup>For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup>The last enemy to be destroyed is death.







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