

A photograph of a wooden cross with a white cloth draped over it, set against a blue sky with white clouds. The text '2017 Lent Resources' is overlaid in the top left corner.

*2017  
Lent  
Resources*

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# FOR WHO AND HOW WE ARE

*reflections through the season of Lent*

*March 1 – April 16, 2017*

It's a strange thing, to be invited to study and think and write about Lent ... in the middle of the summer and into the fall! It's warm, and families are on vacation. Then the leaves are turning and (most of!) the temperatures fall. But while we're still thinking about sunburns and back-to-school, about football games and backyard firepits ... somehow we're also looking beyond that – to a season past the hustle and bustle of 'the holidays', one that slows us into contemplation and reflection on the very nature of holiness itself. If we give it our attention, if we take it and ourselves seriously, this season, this reflection, holds the power to show us who - and how - we are in the world.

So here we are, arrived on the doorstep of the church's holy season: Lent. This time beautifully and strangely and humbly carved out to actually – with permission, with encouragement, with specific direction and intent – turn inward. We spend 40 days in wilderness – with our Lord, our spirits, our shortcomings – and emerge to new life, possibility, and transformation. What a strange and lovely thing ... just like each of us.

And just like each of us, in their words and stories and wanderings and wonderings, all gathered and embraced in the expansive nature of God, our ancestors gather and recall and proclaim throughout scripture: Our God has loved us, and loves us still. Our God knows and loves and needs us, already, for where and how and who we are. Lent is about reflecting on and connecting with God's grace, mercy, and power. As we not only recall but retrace Christ's ministry, death, and resurrection, we are transformed: once and always and still. When we take time with the texts of our faith:

- *psalms*, where the width and depth and breadth of human emotion and experience find voice;
- *prophets, wisdom and law*, correcting course and redirecting our steps;
- *epistles*, speaking encouragement and challenge to the earliest of the early church; and
- *gospels*, unfolding the very divine Truth as it is revealed in (and among) very human life, we can learn, remember, or learn again, just what it means to be rooted, and grounded, and resurrected in the love and for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord.

This devotional follows the Revised Common Lectionary calendar for Lent/Easter, Year A.

-- Readings (NRSV) are noted/included for each day – choosing the gospel passages for the weekend (and throughout Holy Week) and rotating the first testament and epistle readings through the weekdays – accompanied by a brief prayer for the day. A full schedule of daily readings is provided on pages 4-5.

-- Short devotionals are added on Sundays and days of seasonal significance (Ash Wednesday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday).

My commitment in this season of Lent is to pray for you – whoever and however you are. If any few words offer some moment of connection, of insight, of penitence, of prayer, then they will have served well. As you take time – whether reading each day, or catching a few days'-worth at once! – to explore the word of God for the people of God, may the deep and abiding presence of God both anchor and propel you. Hold fast to the word of the Lord, reflecting with humility and awe on what God has done in Christ. Move into the world, empowered by the word, living testament to the death-defying, life-giving, world-changing power of the Risen Christ!

*Courtesy Richards*

## About the Author

Rev. Courtney Richards is a lifelong member of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); taught, baptized, encouraged, and eventually ordained among the faithful at First Christian Church, El Paso TX.

Following 16 years as associate minister at Geist Christian Church (Indianapolis IN) – beginning in youth, young adult, and outreach ministries, later transitioning to hold portfolios in church growth and membership ministry – Courtney has served since the fall of 2012 as Connections Pastor at Harvard Avenue Christian Church (Tulsa OK). In this growing and thriving congregation, her gifts - for relationships, welcome, and hospitality; communication, logistics and event planning; leadership development; writing, teaching, and pastoral care – are joined by the generous, inviting, and compassionate staff colleagues, lay leaders, and congregation that strive together to ‘Be loved. Believe. Become.’ each day at Harvard Ave. and beyond.



Courtney sits on the board of directors of Tulsa Metropolitan Ministry, and is actively engaged in the multifaith community in Tulsa; was a founding board member of a local and global service organization, Ambassadors for Children (Indianapolis); represented the Disciples for six years as part of the National Council of Churches’ Ecumenical Young Adult Ministry Team; and was honored to serve the Disciples Church on the Advisory Committee for Week of Compassion. She was curator and co-editor (with Rev Julie Richardson) of a collection of essays by brilliant young adults telling stories of doing justice and loving mercy: *It’s Not All About You: Young Adults Seeking Justice* (Chalice Press, 2012).

In between things of the church variety, Courtney loves to travel (short road trips hold her together between big adventures), read without holding a highlighter (especially historical fiction and novels), enjoys films (especially indie/art) and theatre, and is a huge fan of live local music and musicians. She holds a B.A. from Angelo State University, and an M.Div. from Brite Divinity School at Texas Christian University. She wonders from time to time about pursuing her doctorate. Don’t hold her to that.

# Daily Readings for Lent

Ash Wednesday, March 1 – Easter, April 16

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

Sunday March 5	Monday March 6	Tuesday March 7	Wednesday March 8	Thursday March 9	Friday March 10	Saturday March 11
<i>Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7</i>	<i>Psalm 32; 1</i>	<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Psalm 121</i>	<i>Psalm 121</i>	<i>Psalm 121</i>
<i>Psalm 32</i>	<i>Kings 19:1-8</i>	<i>Genesis 4:1-16</i>	<i>Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28</i>	<i>Isaiah 51:1-3</i>	<i>Micah 7:18-20</i>	<i>Isaiah 51:4-8</i>
<i>Romans 5:12-19</i>	<i>Hebrews 2:10-18</i>	<i>Hebrews 4:14-5:10</i>	<i>Matthew 18:10-14</i>	<i>2 Timothy 1:3-7</i>	<i>Romans 3:21-31</i>	<i>Luke 7:1-10</i>
<i>Matthew 4:1-11</i>						

Sunday March 12	Monday March 13	Tuesday March 14	Wednesday March 15	Thursday March 16	Friday March 17	Saturday March 18
<i>Genesis 12:1-4a</i>	<i>Psalm 128</i>	<i>Psalm 128</i>	<i>Psalm 128</i>	<i>Psalm 95</i>	<i>Psalm 95</i>	<i>Psalm 95</i>
<i>Psalm 121</i>	<i>Numbers 21:4-9</i>	<i>Isaiah 65:17-25</i>	<i>Ezekiel 36:22-32</i>	<i>Exodus 16:1-8</i>	<i>Exodus 16:9-21</i>	<i>Exodus 16:27-35</i>
<i>Romans 4:1-5, 13-17</i>	<i>Hebrews 3:1-6</i>	<i>Romans 4:6-13</i>	<i>John 7:53-8:11</i>	<i>Colossians 1:15-23</i>	<i>Ephesians 2:11-22</i>	<i>John 4:1-6</i>
<i>John 3:1-17 or Matthew 17:1-9</i>						

Sunday March 19	Monday March 20	Tuesday March 21	Wednesday March 22	Thursday March 23	Friday March 24	Saturday March 25
<i>Exodus 17:1-7</i>	<i>Psalm 81</i>	<i>Psalm 81</i>	<i>Psalm 81</i>	<i>Psalm 23; 1</i>	<i>Psalm 23</i>	
<i>Psalm 95</i>	<i>Genesis 24:1-27; 2</i>	<i>Genesis 29:1-14</i>	<i>Jeremiah 2:4-13</i>	<i>Samuel 15:10-21</i>	<i>1 Samuel 15:22-31</i>	
<i>Romans 5:1-11</i>	<i>John 1-13</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 10:1-4</i>	<i>John 7:14-31, 37-39</i>	<i>Ephesians 4:25-32</i>	<i>Ephesians 5:1-9</i>	
<i>John 4:5-42</i>						

Sunday March 26	Monday March 27	Tuesday March 28	Wednesday March 29	Thursday March 30	Friday March 31	Saturday April 1
<i>Isaiah 7:10-14</i>	<i>Psalms 146</i>	<i>Psalms 146</i>	<i>Psalms 146</i>	<i>Psalms 130</i>	<i>Psalms 130</i>	<i>Psalms 130</i>
<i>Psalms 45 or Psalms 40:5-10</i>	<i>Isaiah 59:9-19</i>	<i>Isaiah 42:14-21</i>	<i>Isaiah 60:17-22</i>	<i>Ezekiel 1:1-3; 2:8-3:3</i>	<i>Ezekiel 33:10-16</i>	<i>Ezekiel 36:8-15</i>
<i>Hebrews 10:4-10</i>	<i>Acts 9:1-20</i>	<i>Colossians 1:9-14</i>	<i>Matthew 9:27-34</i>	<i>Revelation 10:1-11</i>	<i>Revelation 11:15-19</i>	<i>Luke 24:44-53</i>
<i>Luke 1:26-38</i>						

Sunday April 2	Monday April 3	Tuesday April 4	Wednesday April 5	Thursday April 6	Friday April 7	Saturday April 8
<i>Ezekiel 37:1-14</i>	<i>Psalms 143</i>	<i>Psalms 143</i>	<i>Psalms 143</i>	<i>Psalms 31:9-16;</i>	<i>Psalms 31:9-16</i>	<i>Psalms 31:9-16</i>
<i>Psalms 130</i>	<i>1 Kings 17:17-24</i>	<i>2 Kings 4:18-37</i>	<i>Jeremiah 32:1-9, 36-41</i>	<i>1 Samuel 16:11-13;</i>	<i>Job 13:13-19</i>	<i>Lamentations 3:55-66</i>
<i>Romans 8:6-11</i>	<i>Acts 20:7-12</i>	<i>Ephesians 2:1-10</i>	<i>Matthew 22:23-33</i>	<i>Philippians 1:1-11</i>	<i>Philippians 1:21-30</i>	<i>Mark 10:32-34</i>
<i>John 11:1-45</i>						

Sunday Passion or Palm Sunday	Monday April 10	Tuesday April 11	Wednesday April 12	Thursday Maundy Thurs.	Friday Good Friday	Saturday April 15
<i>Isaiah 50:4-9a</i>	<i>Isaiah 42:1-9</i>	<i>Isaiah 49:1-7</i>	<i>Isaiah 50:4-9a</i>	<i>Exodus 12:1-4, (5-10), 11-14</i>	<i>Isaiah 52:13-53:12</i>	<i>Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24</i>
<i>Psalms 31:9-16</i>	<i>Psalms 36:5-11</i>	<i>Psalms 71:1-14</i>	<i>Psalms 70</i>	<i>Psalms 116:1-2, 12-19</i>	<i>Psalms 22</i>	<i>Psalms 31:1-4, 15-16</i>
<i>Philippians 2:5-11</i>	<i>Hebrews 9:11-15</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 1:18-31</i>	<i>Hebrews 12:1-3</i>	<i>1 Corinthians 11:23-26</i>	<i>Hebrews 10:16-25 or Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9</i>	<i>1 Peter 4:1-8</i>
<i>Matthew 26:14-27:66 or Matthew 27:11-54</i>	<i>John 12:1-11</i>	<i>John 12:20-36</i>	<i>John 13:21-32</i>	<i>John 13:1-17, 31b-35</i>	<i>John 18:1-19:42</i>	<i>Matthew 27:57-66 or John 19:38-42</i>

Sunday Easter Day
<i>Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6</i>
<i>Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24</i>
<i>Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43</i>
<i>John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10</i>

# Daily Meditations

## Wednesday March 1 Ash Wednesday

*Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;*

*according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions.*

*Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me.*

*Against you, you alone, have I sinned, and done what is evil in your sight,*

*so that you are justified in your sentence and blameless when you pass judgment.*

*Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me.*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

*Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you.*

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

*and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.*

*O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.*

*For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.*

*The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;*

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

*Psalm 51:1-17*

Copying the way Jesus prepared for his ministry, new believers spent forty days in study and prayer, sometimes even removed to a solitary place. This period ended with a watchful vigil all night before Easter, then Easter morning there would be baptism, dying to an old life and rising from the waters to new life in Christ.

Because being community means being together, the community supported the new believers by doing the same thing. These 40 days of Lent are about preparation, reflection, self-examination, discipline, and include the whole community.

We are here to confess our sins, to sacrifice on the altar of repentance, to seek forgiveness, even knowing that through God's great love for us, shown most truly in Jesus Christ, we have already received it. And while we are here, we receive the sign of ashes, the mark of grace. Not marked so that others will see, and ask, and know. But marked so that WE see, and WE ask, and WE know that we are God's, and that God is with us.

Today, oil and ash and the touch of one who loves you will make a mark on your head.

Because in the beginning dust and breath and The One who loves you made you who you are.

Don't give up on that.

We spend 40 days here in Lent. We prepare as individuals, and we welcome new believers as a community, and we confess who we are, and we do not give up until God has shown us who we can be.

## Prayer

***God of ashes, and of re-creation, open my heart in this season. Search me and know me and remind me again, that while sitting with my sin, I rise in your forgiveness. Turn my shortfall into your glory.***

***Amen***

## Thursday March 2

*The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, "Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you." So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk across. Jonah began to go into the city, going a day's walk. And he cried out, "Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.*

*When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human being or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. Human beings and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish."*

*When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it.*

*Jonah 3: 1 – 10*

### Prayer

Lord of power and wonder,  
may your word be proclaimed  
in me. In my fasting I cry out  
to you, that I may turn from  
any evil that I have done,  
any violence I have wrought,  
in body or in spirit. Take  
my discipline as sign of my  
faithfulness to you, that your  
forgiveness will sustain me.

Amen

### Friday March 3

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of you, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. For God, whom I serve with my spirit by announcing the gospel of his Son, is my witness that without ceasing I remember you always in my prayers, asking that by God's will I may somehow at last succeed in coming to you. For I am longing to see you so that I may share with you some spiritual gift to strengthen you — or rather so **that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.** I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that I have often intended to come to you (but thus far have been prevented), in order that I may reap some harvest among you as I have among the rest of the Gentiles. I am a debtor both to Greeks and to barbarians, both to the wise and to the foolish — hence my eagerness to proclaim the gospel to you also who are in Rome.

For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

Romans 1: 8 – 17

### Prayer

God of giving and receiving,  
of covenant and community:  
In this season of discipline,  
prayer, sacrifice, and  
deepening, I pray that my  
faith may be strengthened by  
the faith of those around me  
– and that the work I do in  
service of spiritual connection  
might be a benefit not only  
to my own well-being, but  
would encourage those  
around me to look toward the  
ways of Christ.

Amen

### Saturday March 4

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

"If any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. **Woe to the world because of stumbling blocks!** Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to the one by whom the stumbling block comes!

Matthew 18: 1 – 7

### Prayer

God who guides my steps,  
and corrects my course:  
Direct my feet in this season,  
draw my heart into your  
will. For the ways I have  
been a stumbling block,  
I ask forgiveness; in the  
moments I've fallen, I am  
always grateful for your sure  
renewal.

Amen



### Week One March 5 - 11

### Sunday March 5

Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, '**Do not put the Lord your God to the test.**'"

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"

Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Matthew 4: 1 – 11

Here's the thing about 'righteousness'. It means right relationship. But we turn it into self-righteousness pretty quickly. That's exactly what the ashes of Wednesday tell us NOT to do: 'remember you came from the dust, and to dust you shall return.'

Charity is not charity when an intent to garner attention and influence lies behind it. Prayer is not prayer when the one praying is more interested in calling attention to their own efforts, eloquence, or importance than in conducting honest communication with God. Fasting, which enacts humanity's utter dependence upon God, instead mocks that dependence when the fast is poisoned by attempts to impress others with the depths of the faster's devotion.

Am I saying don't give things up for Lent? No. If it's something that is helpful and meaningful and directs your spirit and moves you to greater faithfulness, sure – give something up. But we also need to give up our insatiable need to let everyone know just how much we're giving up for Jesus. 'Cause you know what? Nobody cares.

Nor should they. We're not giving things up for them. We're not giving things up for us to be noticed by them. We're not even giving things up to be noticed by God. It isn't about our action. Lent is not about us. It is about what God wants to do with us if we will get ourselves out of God's holy way.

Fasting isn't about not eating. Lent isn't a lose-weight-in-40-days plan. Fasting is removing distractions. It's about removing something to make space for something greater. If we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength, then we need to be sure that our heart, mind, soul and strength are adequately prepared. We need to be sure that nothing is in between us and our desire of being closer to God. We need to abstain from things that get in the way. And things are always in the way. We fast, not so that we are made less, but so that God can make us more.

### Prayer

*Christ who showed me right relationship, I know I have often focused more on getting credit for my faithfulness than I have on simply being faithful. Forgive me that shortcoming, and those that stem from it. May this season of Lenten reflection and discipline move me toward new opportunities for love.*

*Amen*

### Tuesday March 6

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

*Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

*While I kept silence, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long.*

*For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;*

*my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity;*

*I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin.*

*Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you;*

*at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them.*

*You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble;*

*you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.*

*I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.*

*Do not be like a horse or a mule, without understanding,*

*whose temper must be curbed with bit and bridle, else it will not stay near you.*

*Many are the torments of the wicked, but steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the Lord.*

*Be glad in the Lord and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart.*

Psalm 32

### Prayer

*Lord who hears us when we pray: Today I ask not for myself, but I discipline myself to pray for others. For the needs and concerns of those I know, for the celebrations and joys of the community around me, and for the neighborhood, city, state, nation, and global community of which I am a part. With thanksgiving that you are a God big enough to hear, to know, to answer all prayers.*

*Amen.*

### Tuesday March 7

*Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

*Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.*

*So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,*

*"You are my Son, today I have begotten you";*

*as he says also in another place,*

*"You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek."*

*In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he*

was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 4:14 – 5:10

### Prayer

**God of all things: Even when I am anxious in the world, I know that when I pray, I can do so with bold confidence that you hear, that you attend, that you will not turn me away. May my bold willingness to pray turn to willingness to act boldly, confident that your strength carries me forward.**

**Amen.**

## Wednesday March 8

The Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets, which you broke. **Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself there to me, on the top of the mountain.** No one shall come up with you, and do not let anyone be seen throughout all the mountain; and do not let flocks or herds graze in front of that mountain." So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the former ones; and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tablets of stone. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name, "The Lord." The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed,



"The Lord, the Lord,  
a God merciful and gracious,  
slow to anger,  
and abounding in steadfast love and  
faithfulness,  
keeping steadfast love for the thousandth  
generation,  
forgiving iniquity and transgression and  
sin,  
yet by no means clearing the guilty,  
but visiting the iniquity of the parents  
upon the children and the children's  
children,  
to the third and the fourth generation."  
And Moses quickly bowed his head  
toward the earth, and worshiped. He said,  
"If now I have found favor in your sight,  
O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go with us.  
Although this is a stiff-necked people,  
pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take  
us for your inheritance."

The Lord said to Moses: Write these  
words; in accordance with these words  
I have made a covenant with you and  
with Israel. He was there with the Lord  
forty days and forty nights; he neither ate  
bread nor drank water. And he wrote on  
the tablets the words of the covenant, the  
ten commandments.

Exodus 34: 1 – 9, 27 – 28

### Prayer

**God of morning and night, of mountains and valleys, work in my heart to be open to you always. Whatever you would have me do, and however it may change me, discipline my spirit to be ready for your will.**

**Amen**

## Thursday March 9

I lift up my eyes to the hills - from where  
will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made  
heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved; he  
who keeps you will not slumber.

**He who keeps Israel will neither  
slumber nor sleep.**

The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your  
shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day, nor  
the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil; he  
will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and  
your coming in from this time on and  
forevermore.

Psalms 121

### Prayer

**God of Israel, of all who have  
been and will be: Knowing  
that you keep me in your care  
fills me with wonder. For the  
times I have slumbered in my  
faithfulness, and have not kept  
you as close as I should, I seek  
forgiveness. In those moments  
I am least faithful, somehow  
you are yet even more faithful  
to me. I am grateful.**

**Amen**

## Friday March 10

Who is a God like you, pardoning  
iniquity and passing over the  
transgression of the remnant of your  
possession?

He does not retain his anger forever,  
because he delights in showing clemency.

He will again have compassion upon us;  
he will tread our iniquities under foot.

You will cast all our sins into the depths  
of the sea.

**You will show faithfulness to Jacob  
and unswerving loyalty to Abraham,  
as you have sworn to our ancestors  
from the days of old.**

Micah 7: 18 – 20

## Prayer

**Lover of grace and Author of mercy: In my moments of challenge and disgrace, your constancy and compassion overwhelm. Guide me in the ways of mercy and grace, that I might encounter those in my life with your constant compassion.**

**Amen**

## Saturday March 11

After Jesus had finished all his sayings in the hearing of the people, he entered Capernaum. A centurion there had a slave whom he valued highly, and who was ill and close to death. When he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish elders to him, asking him to come and heal his slave. When they came to Jesus, they appealed to him earnestly, saying, "He is worthy of having you do this for him, for he loves our people, and it is he who built our synagogue for us." And Jesus went with them, but when he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to say to him, "Lord, do not trouble yourself, for I am not worthy to have you come under my roof; therefore **I did not presume to come to you. But only speak the word, and let my servant be healed.** For I also am a man set under authority, with soldiers under me; and I say to one, 'Go,' and he goes, and to another, 'Come,' and he comes, and to my slave, 'Do this,' and the slave does it." When Jesus heard this he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd that followed him, he said, "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith." When those who had been sent returned to the house, they found the slave in good health.

Luke 7: 1 – 10

## Prayer

**God of the enslaved and the free, of the sick and the well: Where is my faith, Lord? Sometimes it fails me. Teach me by these words, that I might remember that your power does not depend on mine ... that YOU are the one who saves. May I pray and act with confidence, knowing that by your word, it can be done.**

**Amen**

## Week Two March 12 - 18

## Sunday March 12

Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white. Suddenly there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him.

**Then Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three dwellings here, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah."** While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, "This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!"

When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear. But Jesus came and touched them, saying, "Get up and do not be afraid." And when they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus himself alone. As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus ordered them, "Tell no one about the vision until after the Son of Man has been raised from the dead."

Matthew 17:1-9

Don't we want to just stay where we are? To not go any farther than we have (or than we have to), especially when we may feel we've already come a long way? Can we really blame Peter for his enthusiasm here: Lord, we have been with you, you have invited us to this journey, this place, this moment. And now this incredible thing has happened – this revealing of our forebear and our prophet, and of your own divine being. Let's just hold this in place. I have to wonder if he not only stood amazed at the moment, but maybe kind of glad that it had finally happened (and now he could be done?).

And then a voice is heard, the confirmation of what they were beginning to understand: Jesus' mission and meaning is not just in the world but for the world. How could they do anything other than drop to the ground in fear? And THEN to be told But don't say anything to anybody for a while yet. I'm not sure if that would be the harder part or the easier: Because after all, how would we say Here is what happened and here is what I think it means.

How DO we do that? In our own lives, day to day ... how do we say I believe in Jesus and try with all that I am to follow him as he would have me.

Do we do it by insisting that we know the way? Are we so sure that we are faithful that we cannot conceive of other ways to get to the same place? Do we demand mountain top experiences every time we're in worship and look with skepticism at the value of what we don't think is 'good' church?

Or do we listen first and speak after? Do we invite conversation instead of cultivating monologues? Do we draw on a spirit of faith rather than fear, of community rather than competition, of inspiration rather than desperation? Can we find it within ourselves to meet Jesus on the mountaintop, to gather the richness of that moment, and to hold and carry and use it wisely, at the right time, in the right way, not for our own glory and attention, but for the good of God's world?

## Prayer

**God of revelation, Christ the revealed: When I am ready to stay put, nudge me forward again. When I am stunned or awed, transform that into active faith. When I am weary or afraid, say again that I have nothing to fear. Use me as you will, through light and dark, on mountains and in valleys, that your will may be done in your world for your sake.**

**Amen**

## Monday March 13

**Happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways.**

*You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;*

*you shall be happy, and it shall go well with you.*

*Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house;*

*your children will be like olive shoots around your table.*

*Thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord.*

*The Lord bless you from Zion.*

*May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.*

*May you see your children's children.*

*Peace be upon Israel!*

Psalm 128

## Prayer

**God of all things: May I remember that 'fearing' you is not being afraid; may I turn my heart to wonder, connection, commitment, awe. As I reflect on who I've been and yet can be, help me to look forward, beyond myself and into the lives of those around me.**

**Amen**

## Tuesday March 14

*So also David speaks of the blessedness of those to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works:*

*"Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin."*

*Is this blessedness, then, pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised? We say, "Faith was reckoned to Abraham as righteousness." How then was it reckoned to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the ancestor of all who believe without being circumcised and who thus have righteousness reckoned to them, and likewise the ancestor of the circumcised who are not only circumcised but who also follow the example of the faith that our ancestor Abraham had before he was circumcised.*

*For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*

Romans 4: 6 - 13

## Prayer

**God who loves me as I am but does not leave me where I am: May I not be so consumed by the things and tricks I think will bring me a shortcut to faithfulness. Turn my heart instead to those things which deepen and strengthen the faith I already have. How can I best show my love for you? Guide my spirit and my actions to most truly honor you.**

**Amen**

## Wednesday March 15

*Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. I will sanctify my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations shall know that I am the Lord, says the Lord God, when through you I display my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. I will save you from all your uncleannesses, and I will summon the grain and make it abundant and lay no famine upon you. I will make the fruit of the tree and the produce of the field abundant, so that you may never again suffer the disgrace of famine among the nations. Then you shall remember your evil ways, and your dealings that were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves for your iniquities and your abominable deeds. It is not for your sake that I will act, says the Lord God; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and dismayed for your ways, O house of Israel.*

Ezekiel 36: 22 - 32

## Prayer

*God of all nations, all people and time: Your power and majesty are beyond all I can imagine. When I feel most full of myself and my success, remind me that all my good comes from you, and humble me to give you the praise you so deserve. Fill my heart with your grace and my words with your praise.*

*Amen*

## Thursday March 16

*O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!*

*Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving;*

*let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!*

*For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.*

*In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.*

*The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.*

*O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!*

*For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*

*O that today you would listen to his voice!*

*Do not harden your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness,*

*when your ancestors tested me, and put me to the proof, though they had seen my work.*

*For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people whose hearts go astray, and they do not regard my ways."*

*Therefore in my anger I swore, "They shall not enter my rest."*

Psalm 95

## Prayer

*God of depths and heights, of sea and dry land, you have formed all things – in the world and in me. I pray for your wisdom and guidance, to clear my own spirit of the clutter of pride, a redirecting of my path and a return to your ways. In all things, may I seek you, and respond to your love for me and for all people with all of my heart.*

*Amen*

## Friday March 17

*Then Moses said to Aaron, "Say to the whole congregation of the Israelites, 'Draw near to the Lord, for he has heard your complaining.'" And as Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses and said, "I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, 'At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.'"*

*In the evening quails came up and covered the camp; and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, "What is it?" For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, "It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat. This is what the Lord has commanded: 'Gather as much of it as each of you needs, an omer to a person according to the number of persons, all providing for those in their own tents.'" The Israelites did so, some gathering more, some less. **But when they measured it with an omer, those who gathered much had nothing over, and those who gathered little had no shortage; they gathered as much as each of them needed.** And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it over until morning." But they did not*

*listen to Moses; some left part of it until morning, and it bred worms and became foul. And Moses was angry with them. Morning by morning they gathered it, as much as each needed; but when the sun grew hot, it melted.*

Exodus 16: 9 – 21

## Prayer

*God of generosity and justice: So often, I am neither generous nor just. I pray that in this season of reflection and discipline, I might gather the gifts that you offer, and remember that your measure, your word, and your will, are my focus. Forgive my greed and renew my gratitude.*

*Amen*

## Saturday March 18

*Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard, "Jesus is making and baptizing more disciples than John" – although it was not Jesus himself but his disciples who baptized – he left Judea and started back to Galilee. **But he had to go through Samaria.** So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.*

John 4: 1 – 6

## Prayer

*Guiding Savior, Light on the way: Redirect me. When I choose my own path, I can miss both the beauty and the challenge. Remind me that following you generates both the wonder and the wisdom that can make me more of who you have in mind. When I go by a new way, I have the chance to meet and do and see and learn more than I can imagine.*

*Amen*

## Week Three March 19 - 25

### Sunday March 19

So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water." Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is

spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." Just then his disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" They left the city and were on their way to him.

Meanwhile the disciples were urging him, "Rabbi, eat something." But he said to them, "I have food to eat that you do not know about." So the disciples said to one another, "Surely no one has brought him something to eat?" Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work. Do you not say, 'Four months more, then comes the harvest'? But I tell you, look around you, and see how the fields are ripe for harvesting. The reaper is already receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor." Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony, "He told me everything I have ever done."

So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days. And many more believed because of his word. They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world."

John 4: 5 – 32

One of the great gifts of ministry is the chance to visit with families as their new baby has just arrived. That visit to the hospital within the first day or two of the little one's life is a precious gift of vulnerability and welcome, of prayer and promise, and I never ever take lightly that I am afforded such tremendous grace.

After 20+ years in this gig, even though I'm not a parent myself, I've gotten a lot of baby-holding practice, and I have a pretty good rock/sway/pat/hum instinct.

But still now and then, one of them just isn't happy with the feel or smell of anyone but momma. And that's absolutely fine with me! When a child cries in those first days, hearing their own sounds in the 'outside' world for the first time – or when a toddler or older child shies away from parents' encouragement toward a hug or other performed affection – it's FINE. I'm not bothered, and they shouldn't be embarrassed. Part of my responsibility as a pastor is, from the very first moment, to show with word and action that we are all loved as we are, and that dwelling in us is the gift of self-determination and own-direction: We get to decide who and how we are addressed, called, held, and known.

This 'woman at the well' is always a wonder to me. Reading this text, in regular rotation or at special occasions, always reveals something new. During Lent – today – it shows me that asking God for what I need is not a bad thing. Jesus tells her there is something better; she tells him she wants it. In the social construct and reality of the day, it is a remarkable statement. In the wider setting of spirit and truth, it is a bold move of audacious faith – to ASK for promised transformation, not just hope it comes.

#### Prayer

**Transforming God, emboldening Christ: I pray to be alive in your spirit and strong in your truth. I pray that as I consider who I have been and who I can become, I will realize and know that living water flows all around me, and that I have both the opportunity and the responsibility to drink at its source.**

**Amen**

## Monday March 20

*Sing aloud to God our strength; shout for joy to the God of Jacob.*

*Raise a song, sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.*

*Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our festal day.*

*For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob.*

*He made it a decree in Joseph, when he went out over the land of Egypt.*

*I hear a voice I had not known:*

*"I relieved your shoulder of the burden; your hands were freed from the basket.*

*In distress you called, and I rescued you; I answered you in the secret place of thunder;*

*I tested you at the waters of Meribah. -Selah-*

*Hear, O my people, while I admonish you; O Israel, if you would but listen to me!*

***There shall be no strange god among you; you shall not bow down to a foreign god.***

*I am the Lord your God, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.*

*Open your mouth wide and I will fill it.*

*But my people did not listen to my voice; Israel would not submit to me.*

*So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels.*

*O that my people would listen to me, that Israel would walk in my ways!*

*Then I would quickly subdue their enemies, and turn my hand against their foes.*

*Those who hate the Lord would cringe before him, and their doom would last forever.*

*I would feed you with the finest of the wheat, and with honey from the rock I would satisfy you."*

Psalm 81

## Prayer

***God of my ancestors, and of my present; God of my today, and of my tomorrow: When I am distracted by other gods, when I am drawn toward other loyalties, renew my strength, my faith, my heart for you. You are the Lord my God, you have carried me through every distress. Be with me still, that I may know you more.***

***Amen***

## Tuesday March 21

*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, and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.*

1 Corinthians 10: 1 – 4

## Prayer

***God in Christ, who feeds me each day: I pray that my words and my work may welcome those in my path. I want to seek out those you would invite, and offer the food and drink of your mercy and grace. Deepen my compassion and widen my welcome, that all might see you in me, and share in your good gifts.***

***Amen***

## Wednesday March 22

*Hear the word of the Lord, O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel. Thus says the Lord:*

*What wrong did your ancestors find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthless things, and became worthless themselves?*

*They did not say, "Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us in the wilderness, in a land of deserts and pits,*

*in a land of drought and deep darkness, in a land that no one passes through, where no one lives?"*

*I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things.*

*But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination.*

*The priests did not say, "Where is the Lord?"*

*Those who handle the law did not know me;*

*the rulers transgressed against me;*

*the prophets prophesied by Baal, and went after things that do not profit.*

*Therefore once more I accuse you, says the Lord, and I accuse your children's children.*

*Cross to the coasts of Cyprus and look, send to Kedar and examine with care;*

*see if there has ever been such a thing.*

*Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods?*

*But my people have changed their glory for something that does not profit.*

*Be appalled, O heavens, at this, be shocked, be utterly desolate, says the Lord,*

***for my people have committed two evils:***

***they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water,***

***and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water.***

Jeremiah 2: 4 – 13

## Prayer

**God of Jacob and of Israel, of my life at all times: In this moment of pause and reflection, I must be honest to say that I have often neglected what you have given, and relied on my own wisdom more than your true grace. Forgive my deep failings, and inspire new energy toward faithfulness.**

Amen

## Thursday March 23

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul.*

*He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.*

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;*

*your rod and your staff — they comfort me.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;*

***you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.***

*Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,*

*and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.*

Psalm 23

## Prayer

**God of abundance and overflowing: I am quick to remember the times I have been slighted, felt scarcity, seen little return for what I see as great effort. May I remember instead, more readily, and more honestly, the great goodness with which you overflow my life. May I remember instead that you have anointed me for your good.**

Amen

## Friday March 24

*And Samuel said,*

*"Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,*

*as in obedience to the voice of the Lord?*

*Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.*

*For rebellion is no less a sin than divination,*

*and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry.*

*Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,*

*he has also rejected you from being king."*

*Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Now therefore, I pray, pardon my sin, and return with me, so that I may worship the Lord." Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel." As Samuel turned to go away, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. And Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. Moreover the Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind." Then Saul said, "I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God." So Samuel turned back after Saul; and Saul worshiped the Lord.*

1 Samuel 15: 22 – 31

## Prayer

**God of correction and of grace: Thank you for the people in my life who speak admonishment over me when I need it – who are faithful to me in my journey – who remind me of who you are and who I should be in response. May I remain in their care, and rely on your grace. May I return to worshipping you.**

Amen

## Saturday March 25

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary.*

*And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

*Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."*

*Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

Luke 1: 26 - 38

## Prayer

**God of perplexing invitations: In this time of pondering, this season unlike any other, may I remember that my questions, my wondering, my concerns are signs OF faith, not its lack. May I take that which draws me inward and use it toward outward displays of your love for the world.**

**Amen**

## Week Four March 26 - April 1

### Sunday March 26

As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. **The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?"** Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?"

He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes.

Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the

Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself." His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore his parents said, "He is of age; ask him."

So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his disciples?" Then they reviled him, saying, "You are his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing." They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out.

Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said

to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgment so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?" Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

John 9: 1 – 41

Isn't it just like us – to see someone healed, restored, made new, transformed ... and to immediately hold suspect their words, motives, claims, reality? We do it all the time!

We live our lives captive to a competitive culture. We've built entire structures and systems that question the integrity even of things that we know are good! We distrust motives, or second-guess outcomes, or hold suspect the very character of someone telling their own story. It is reinforced by our media, our technology, our politicians, and yes – our churches. Somehow we have become convinced that 'there can only be one' – one way to do things, one person who gets credit, one side that wins, one group that benefits. And not only do we focus on winning – we have made sport of denigrating 'the loser'. An entire lexicon has come into use because of our insistence on '\_\_\_-shaming' and 'snark' and oh good heavens, the memes. We've even developed technology that will help us cover our virtual tracks. We disbelieve women about assault, we denigrate students who argue injustice, we even witness words and action recorded onscreen and immediately argue that it has been doctored. (And sometimes it has.)

We operate from a model of scarcity, instead of living out of (and into) our abundance.

It was no different in Jesus' time, just not as technically sophisticated. When Jesus made mud to cover the eyes of a blind man, who then



washed them and could see – and said so! – the very first reaction was: He’s making it up. That’s not him. It’s a different guy. He must not have really been blind. If this man received Jesus’ favor, we need to absolutely know why, why this guy, who he is, how it happened, and why on earth HE deserves it. Because if Jesus gives attention to you, that means he’s giving less to me. And I can’t have that – I can’t share Jesus, his power, his attention, his wonders – now can I?

Or can I?

### Prayer

*Great Physician and healing presence: Work in my heart today. Open my eyes to your goodness, and to the abundance of your grace. Let me not hold so tightly to what seems right and best that I forget there is enough – more than enough, in fact, infinitely enough – for all to receive.*

Amen

## Monday March 27

*Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!*

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

*Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.*

*When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.*

*Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,*

*who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;*

*who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.*

*The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.*

*The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.*

*The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow,*

*but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations.*

*Praise the Lord!*

Psalm 146

### Prayer

*God of freedom and release: In moments that I become too proud, thinking that my discipline, my faithfulness, my work toward your good have made me better than I am – instill in me humility, that I might praise you for who you are, and be grateful for all YOU have done.*

Amen

## Tuesday March 28

*For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God’s will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience, while joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

Colossians 1: 9 – 14

### Prayer

*Wise and understanding God: Who do I need to pray for? I have spent so much of this season considering my own shortcomings, my own need. Where can I turn my spirit’s longing for you into intercession for those around me? How do my friends, family, and community need what I have found in you? May I pray for them, for they are yours too.*

Amen

## Wednesday March 29

*Instead of bronze I will bring gold, instead of iron I will bring silver;*

*instead of wood, bronze, instead of stones, iron.*

*I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster.*

*Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders;*

*you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.*

*The sun shall no longer be your light by day,*

*nor for brightness shall the moon give light to you by night;*

*but the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.*

*Your sun shall no more go down, or your moon withdraw itself;*

*for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your days of mourning shall be ended.*

*Your people shall all be righteous; they shall possess the land forever.*

*They are the shoot that I planted, the work of my hands, so that I might be glorified.*

*The least of them shall become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation;*

*I am the Lord; in its time I will accomplish it quickly.*

Isaiah 60: 17 – 22

## Prayer

**God of planting and of harvest: May your work in me not go in vain. With gratitude for all you have planted, as I root in you, may I live in ways that draw life. I pray to be nourished by your word and fed by your grace, that I might serve you in every way, to your glory and for your sake.**

**Amen**

## Thursday March 30

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.*

*Lord, hear my voice!*

*Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!*

*If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?*

*But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.*

***I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope;***

*my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning,*

*more than those who watch for the morning.*

*O Israel, hope in the Lord!*

*For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.*

*It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.*

*Psalms 130*

## Prayer

**God of hope, of words that bring life and new life: In you I place my trust. In moments of great strain, of wondering and wandering and loss, renew my strength and reclaim me as your own. Speak to me again of my soul's hope in you; may my watching be met with your steadfast love.**

**Amen**

## Friday March 31

*Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel, Thus you have said: "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel? And you, mortal, say to your people, **The righteousness of the righteous shall not save them when they transgress; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, it shall not make them stumble when they turn from their wickedness; and the righteous shall not be able to live by their righteousness when they sin.** Though I say to the righteous that they shall surely live, yet if they trust in their righteousness and commit iniquity, none of their righteous deeds shall be remembered; but in the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. Again, though I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," yet if they turn from their sin and do what is lawful and right — if the wicked restore the pledge, give back what they have taken by robbery, and walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity — they shall surely live, they shall not die. None of the sins that they have committed shall be remembered against them; they have done what is lawful and right, they shall surely live.*

*Ezekiel 33: 10 – 16*

## Prayer

**God of righteousness and of forgiveness: I know I am quick to claim blessing, and slow to name sin. I want to be honest in naming the ways I separate myself from you. In doing so, I am then more likely to remember your grace, and to give thanks.**

**Amen**

## Saturday April 1

*Then he said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you — that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And see, I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high."*

*Then he led them out as far as Bethany, and, lifting up his hands, he blessed them. **While he was blessing them, he withdrew from them and was carried up into heaven.** And they worshiped him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy; and they were continually in the temple blessing God.*

*Luke 24: 44 – 53*

## Prayer

**God of wonderful power and mystery: I do not always understand why or how you work as you do. Remind me that that's okay; that you are God and I am not, that you are in control and I am not, that all is in your care, including me. May your word be my guide, Christ's life my light.**

**Amen**

## Week Five April 2 - 8

## Sunday April 2

*Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son*

*of God may be glorified through it." Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."*

*The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them." After saying this, he told them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right." Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep.*

*Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him." When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days.*

*Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him.*

*Now Jesus had not yet come to the village,*

*but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"*

*Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."*

*When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.*

*John 11: 1 – 45*

His close friend was ill, nearing death. He was answering cryptic questions. He would be accused of not caring enough, soon enough, nor correctly. And still his friend would die.

AND he would say that it was all for God's glory. WHAT? How can he possibly mean that?

Quite often in caring for someone who's grieving, philosophical, existential and faith-related questions will come up and things are said by the bereaved, and by others, that jumble together in this strange and

endless ball of yarn. God needed him./ Things happen for a reason./ We can't know God's will. /God doesn't give you more than you can handle./ She's in a better place.

And responses jumble in our heads because of what we've heard: God did this? For a reason? What could that possibly be? God's clearly not aware of what I can really handle. The only place she should be is here with me. I know it says the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, but sometimes I think He is a little misguided in who he takes and when.

We are called to be present as representatives of Jesus – to remember what we were taught, love with all our hearts, and to be unafraid of doing so. Grief is not the time for setting someone right theologically. Grief is pouring out emotions and often the best comfort is listening.

All of this considered, think of this. Think of a time when you have been the one receiving comfort, when you have been the one to experience the death of a loved one. Do you remember the words from the memorial service? Do you remember what people said to you when they found out about the death? Do you remember what was written in a card a week or two or six weeks later? Maybe, in very specific instances, maybe occasionally. But mostly, what you remember is that with all of those things, you felt cared for. You felt that your loved one was well-regarded. You were surrounded by people who just wanted to love you.

And THAT is where we find ourselves squarely within the glory of God.

***God of grief, and of glory: I know that you can use all things to reveal your goodness. When I don't know what to say, or when I say the wrong thing, you have come and taken my words and my silence and transformed them into your love and grace. May I always be open to give and to receive such gifts with your generous spirit.***

***Amen***

## Monday April 3

Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness; answer me in your righteousness.

Do not enter into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you.

For the enemy has pursued me, crushing my life to the ground, making me sit in darkness like those long dead.

Therefore my spirit faints within me; my heart within me is appalled.

**I remember the days of old, I think about all your deeds, I meditate on the works of your hands.**

I stretch out my hands to you; my soul thirsts for you like a parched land. -Selah-

Answer me quickly, O Lord; my spirit fails.

Do not hide your face from me, or I shall be like those who go down to the Pit.

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust.

Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

Save me, O Lord, from my enemies; I have fled to you for refuge.

Teach me to do your will, for you are my God.

Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

For your name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life.

In your righteousness bring me out of trouble.

In your steadfast love cut off my enemies, and destroy all my adversaries, for I am your servant.

Psalm 143

## Prayer

**Lord of all, who knows me so well: I pray from the midst of the press of the world. I feel confronted and weighed down; I worry that my life will come undone. Remind me in my days of distress that you are ever-present in your love for me and steadfast in your faithfulness. Thank you for all you have done for me. I promise to remember and honor all you are.**

Amen

## Tuesday April 4

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast. **For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.**

Ephesians 2: 1 – 10

## Prayer

**Savior and Christ, you are the way to life. I pray for the wisdom to see the possibilities of my life in Christ, and for the courage to see, speak, and act in ways that reveal the immeasurable riches of God's grace, at work in the world.**

Amen

## Wednesday April 5

The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord in the tenth year of King Zedekiah of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadrezzar. At that time the army of the king of Babylon was besieging Jerusalem, and the prophet Jeremiah was confined in the court of the guard that was in the palace of the king of Judah, where King Zedekiah of Judah had confined him. Zedekiah had said, "Why do you prophesy and say: Thus says the Lord: I am going to give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; King Zedekiah of Judah shall not escape out of the hands of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be given into the hands of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him face to face and see him eye to eye; and he shall take Zedekiah to Babylon, and there he shall remain until I attend to him, says the Lord; though you fight against the Chaldeans, you shall not succeed?"

**Jeremiah said, The word of the Lord came to me:** Hanamel son of your uncle Shallum is going to come to you and say, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth, for the right of redemption by purchase is yours." Then my cousin Hanamel came to me in the court of the guard, in accordance with the word of the Lord, and said to me, "Buy my field that is at Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, for the right of possession and redemption is yours; buy it for yourself." Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord.

And I bought the field at Anathoth from my cousin Hanamel, and weighed out the money to him, seventeen shekels of silver.

Jeremiah 32: 1 – 9, 36 – 41

## Prayer

**God of planting and building and prophecy: I read from the prophets and take to heart their corrections. Where might prophetic voices be speaking today? Where might I offer words of correction and new life? Convict and convince me again that the word of the Lord has come to us all, and open before me the ways to speak that word with power and compassion.**

**Amen**

## Thursday April 6

*Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress;*

*my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also.*

*For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing;*

*my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away.*

*I am the scorn of all my adversaries, a horror to my neighbors,*

*an object of dread to my acquaintances; those who see me in the street flee from me.*

***I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel.***

*For I hear the whispering of many—terror all around!—*

*as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life.*

*But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God."*

*My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.*

*Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.*

*Psalm 31: 9 – 16*

## Prayer

**God of all my rememberings, I am grateful that you remember me. In moments that I feel most isolated and abandoned, still you are with me. Open my eyes, as well, to the times I have done the abandoning, or left others uncared for. Deliver me from whatever separates me from good, from others, from my true life and purpose in you.**

**Amen**

## Friday April 7

***"Let me have silence, and I will speak, and let come on me what may.***

*I will take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand.*

*See, he will kill me; I have no hope; but I will defend my ways to his face.*

*This will be my salvation, that the godless shall not come before him.*

*Listen carefully to my words, and let my declaration be in your ears.*

*I have indeed prepared my case; I know that I shall be vindicated.*

*Who is there that will contend with me? For then I would be silent and die."*

*Job 13: 13 – 19*

## Prayer

**God of challenge and change, be with me in all things. Though I struggle to be who I should be, in this season I remember that struggle brings growth and that you are present through it all. Before I can ask, and when I neglect to ask at all, you are working in the world around me. May I sit with what is mine to hold, mine to do, and mine to change. In my silence, may I speak, and let come on me what may.**

**Amen**

## Saturday April 8

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

*Mark 10: 32 – 34*

## Prayer

***Christ who goes before me, keep my eyes fixed on you. Even when it is hard to hear, or to listen, may I turn my full attention to what you are trying to say. I want to listen with my heart, to take in both the challenges of the story and the promise of the gospel.***

**Amen**

## Holy Week April 9 - 15

## Sunday April 9 Palm Sunday

***When they had come near Jerusalem and had reached Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, "Go into the village ahead of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say this, 'The Lord needs them.' And he will send them immediately." This took place to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet, saying,***

***"Tell the daughter of Zion,***

***Look, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey,***

***and on a colt, the foal of a donkey."***

***The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; they brought the donkey and the colt, and put their cloaks***

on them, and he sat on them. A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!" When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, "Who is this?" The crowds were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee."

Matthew 21: 1 – 11

That's my favorite part of this whole scene: The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them. Not because I'm a control freak (no! I am not!), but because it's just such a simple thing in the midst of what had to have been such a strange series of events.

Granted, with crowd-gathering and healing-happening and parable-telling, 'strange series of events' is perhaps relative by the time Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem. Nevertheless, this particular set of 'how can we help, Jesus?' instructions had to have come off as ... somewhat odd.

You two. Yes, you. Go on ahead of us – no, the rest of us are going to walk slower, you guys go ahead. As soon as you get to the village, you'll see a donkey and a colt. Get 'em and bring 'em with you to where we're meeting. Oh and yeah, if anybody asks about it, just say 'The Lord needs them.' Nope, that'll cut it. You'll be fine. Seriously. It'll be fine. Go on.

And. They. Go.!

It just strikes me as comical and wonder-full every single time. I have this image of two of the 'others' – not the 'real' named disciples, but just some other followers who had been hanging around long enough that they'd started making the trips together too, moving merrily to the next village where Jesus was headed. And then they get this random instruction ... and head off to take care of it. Just like ... it's another day.

Because we make it so much harder than that, don't we? When we talk about following Jesus, about doing the things he's asked (and shown, and repeatedly taught)? We want reasons

and explanations and structures and systems and bylaws and committees and processes for decision making and permission and line items and approvals and affirmations and who knows what else.

But these two? ... went and did as Jesus had directed them.

### Prayer

**God of direction, Christ I follow: Remove my need for everything all the time. I want to simplify my understanding and redirect my action. Teach me to simply listen to you, Jesus; to listen and to respond. Not with fanfare or process, but with my whole heart.**

Amen

## Monday April 10

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those at the table with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

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

John 12: 1 – 11

### Prayer

**God who knows me better than I can know myself: I am mindful of the things that could be said about me – the ways I have fallen short, the things I have left undone, the times I have been thoughtless, selfish, arrogant. Renew my spirit, change my perspective, forgive my shortcomings, resurrect my hope. I pray that Christ's spirit might continue to work on my own.**

Amen

## Tuesday April 11

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.** Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

"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. Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

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?" 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. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light." After Jesus had said this, he departed and hid from them.

John 12: 20 – 36

### Prayer

**Servant Christ, whom I long to follow: You speak to me so clearly of who and how I should be. I desire so greatly to be one who serves as you served, who loves as you love. Forgive the times I have missed that mark; empower and inspire my greater service, that I might lose myself in your will, and others might know of you in whatever they see of me.**

Amen

## Wednesday April 12

After saying this Jesus was troubled in spirit, and declared, "Very truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he was speaking. One of his disciples - the one whom Jesus loved - was reclining next to him; Simon Peter therefore motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So while reclining next to Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

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

John 13: 21 – 32

### Paryer

**Lord who loves me without end: Sometimes what I want gets the best of me, and I forget who I am. I know what you need and want of me, and pray again and again to renew my commitment to you. Draw me out of the night that surrounds me, and into a love that fills me, that I might always be known for the person I can be, even as I struggle to be more than the person I am.**

Amen

## Thursday April 13 Maundy Thursday

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

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

After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord--and you are right, for that is what I am. So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have set you

an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.**"

John 13: 1 – 17, 31b – 35

The table is central to who we are – both how we believe, and how we worship. In Jesus' act at the last supper, transforming the Passover meal, his giving the bread to the disciples is an invitation to participate in his suffering. 'Share this with me,' he says. In celebrating Passover with his disciples, remembering an occasion where the blood of covenant sacrifice was used to mark the doors of the faithful, he names this as a new covenant. Jesus' words direct us to the necessity of what is to come, of the sacrifice that will save US. 'This cup is for you,' he says. This is the table. It tells us that 'the death of Jesus is not the end of the story ... the story continues beyond the cross. The death of Jesus is a covenant sacrifice that establishes a new community.'

This new community, then, is what we re-enact – what we remember, what we re-member, what we put



back together, what we embody – every time we share in the communion meal. It is part of the reason that we have men and women serve together. It is why a minister does not even have to be present for communion to happen. It is why deacons come from where they are seated within the congregation, in order to hold the bread and cup, and pass the trays, to serve the community with whom they worship. It is why it is important to our leadership to extend invitations to youth deacons.

It is why you do not have to be a member of our church, or of a Disciples church, or of any church ever, to share in the communion meal. It is why you do not have to pass a test first, or say the right thing (or anything at all). It is why we say ‘all who believe’ are invited to share in this moment of community, faith, and forgiveness. This is the table: If we are truly to gather and represent, every week, the most faithful re-embodiment of community, then we include everyone. THIS is how we ARE ‘disciples’ (little d, and big D): that we love one another.

### Prayer

***Christ who comes and bids me dine: Open my heart and expand my witness, that I might set a table with room enough for all. May I welcome any who would come to this meal; may I prepare and serve with full faith and great grace. As you have offered yourself for me, washing my feet and serving me bread and cup, so too may I serve those with whom I gather – and live in ways that gather more along the way.***

***Amen***

## Friday April 14 Good Friday

*After Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the Kidron valley to a place where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, because Jesus often met there with his disciples. So Judas brought a detachment of soldiers together with police from the chief priests and the Pharisees, and they came there with lanterns and torches and weapons.*

*Then Jesus, knowing all that was to happen to him, came forward and asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” They answered, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus replied, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they stepped back and fell to the ground. Again he asked them, “Whom are you looking for?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So if you are looking for me, let these men go.” This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken, “I did not lose a single one of those whom you gave me.”*

*Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it, struck the high priest’s slave, and cut off his right ear. The slave’s name was Malchus. Jesus said to Peter, “Put your sword back into its sheath. Am I not to drink the cup that the Father has given me?” So the soldiers, their officer, and the Jewish police arrested Jesus and bound him. First they took him to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year. Caiaphas was the one who had advised the Jews that it was better to have one person die for the people. Simon Peter and another disciple followed Jesus. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, but Peter was standing outside at the gate. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out, spoke to the woman who guarded the gate, and brought Peter in. The woman said to Peter, “You are not also one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.”*

*Now the slaves and the police had made a charcoal fire because it was cold, and they were standing around it and warming themselves. Peter also was standing with them and warming himself. Then the high priest questioned Jesus about his disciples*

*and about his teaching. Jesus answered, “I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all the Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard what I said to them; they know what I said.” When he had said this, one of the police standing nearby struck Jesus on the face, saying, “Is that how you answer the high priest?” Jesus answered, “If I have spoken wrongly, testify to the wrong. But if I have spoken rightly, why do you strike me?” Then Annas sent him bound to Caiaphas the high priest.*

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

*Then they took Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate’s headquarters. It was early in the morning. They themselves did not enter the headquarters, so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. So Pilate went out to them and said, “What accusation do you bring against this man?” They answered, “If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you.” Pilate said to them, “Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law.” The Jews replied, “We are not permitted to put anyone to death.” (This was to fulfill what Jesus had said when he indicated the kind of death he was to die.)*

*Then Pilate entered the headquarters again, summoned Jesus, and asked him, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus answered, “Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?” Pilate replied, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?” Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here.” Pilate asked him, “So you are a king?” Jesus answered, “You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.” Pilate asked him, “What is*

truth?"

After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again and told them, "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" They shouted in reply, "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Now Barabbas was a bandit. Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on his head, and they dressed him in a purple robe. They kept coming up to him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and striking him on the face.

Pilate went out again and said to them, "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." So Jesus came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, "Here is the man!" When the chief priests and the police saw him, they shouted, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Pilate said to them, "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever.

He entered his headquarters again and asked Jesus, "Where are you from?" But Jesus gave him no answer. Pilate therefore said to him, "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" Jesus answered him, "You would have no power over me unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." From then on Pilate tried to release him, but the Jews cried out, "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor." When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha.

Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!" They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus;

and carrying the cross by himself, he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull, which in Hebrew is called Golgotha.

There they crucified him, and with him two others, one on either side, with Jesus between them. Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross. It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Many of the Jews read this inscription, because the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, in Latin, and in Greek. Then the chief priests of the Jews said to Pilate, "Do not write, 'The King of the Jews,' but, 'This man said, I am King of the Jews.'" Pilate answered, "What I have written I have written."

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus, they took his clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each soldier. They also took his tunic; now the tunic was seamless, woven in one piece from the top. So they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see who will get it." This was to fulfill what the scripture says, "They divided my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots." And that is what the soldiers did. Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home. After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty." A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. Since it was the day of Preparation, the Jews did not want the bodies left on the cross during the sabbath, especially because that sabbath was a day of great solemnity. So they asked Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.

Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of

the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage of scripture says, "They will look on the one whom they have pierced."

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

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

John 18: 1 – 19:42

In that mystical connection that only the deepest love can know, a mother's anguish reaches the heart of her son, and even from his cross, he is compelled to put aside his own wounds and tend to hers. While the one relationship that tied them together is about to be lost to death, Jesus reminds them that love outlasts even death, and they are still united. Don't be afraid, he says ... Woman, here is your son. Here is your mother.

Woman, behold your son. Behold, your mother. In this moment in the Gospel, and in this moment in our world, 'family' is more than blood – more than ours, more than His. Family is the deepest – and broadest – of God's gifts. Mothers and sons and brothers and aunts and friends and partners share in a love that is empowered by the cross and entrusted to all.

Jesus Christ entrusts his mother's care and well-being to his friend and beloved disciple. He tells these two that now they are to cherish and strengthen each other with the same devotion they have shown him

these many years. He offers them the greatest blessing he can, telling them that their common love for him is now an even greater love for one another.

We have followed Jesus to this point, this Friday filled with pity. We may not have been there, at that cross, but we are here, today. Woman, behold your son. Behold, your mother.

Knowing that we are imperfect, that we are in need, our Savior meets us here, at the cross. In the shadow of this cross, our Savior cares for us so greatly that he not only gives us himself, he gives us one another. We may not have been there, at that cross, but we are here, today. Woman, behold your son. Behold, your mother.

There's the family you start out with, and there's the one you find along the way. Behold.

### Prayer

*Christ on the Cross, who loved me then and loves me still: I pray in sorrow at the death our world has caused, and pray with hope for those who surround me as I struggle to make things new. For these relationships and their promise, for your faith in me to tend to them, I am amazed, and humbled, and grateful.*

*Amen.*

## Saturday April 15 Holy Saturday

*After these things, Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had*

*ever been laid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

*John 19: 38 – 42*

Here we wait. Every year, the waiting. The day in between. Every year thinking, I should do something today. Something to mark the weight of the occasion ....

the holiness of sitting with loss and fear.

the wonder of the what's to come, but not avoiding the what comes first.

knowing that the whole story deserves hearing ...

and listening ...

and sitting ...

and waiting ...

But perhaps it is enough to know that we are waiting. As Joseph of Arimathea, as Nicodemus. In their cover of night, knowing that they needed to do something. Know there was something they could do, while they were waiting. And sitting. And letting it be dark when it feels dark. And waiting for what's next.

Because that's what today is - this Holy Saturday - dark and quiet and rich and ready and sitting and waiting.

Because waiting isn't passive. It's eager. It wonders. Waiting anticipates. Waiting knows there will be more. But the waiting has to happen. The sacredly mundane is mundanely sacred. Most of our days are the days in between. Like today.

Now. We. Wait.

### Prayer

*God of waiting and watching: In this season I have tried to still my spirit, to take moments between the madness, to listen more carefully for your voice. Today as I await anew for a promised resurrection, let me not skip too quickly toward the good I have done, and that is to come. May I remain quietly in vigil, having done what was needed, simply from duty yet also from love, knowing that you can work all things toward the good of your great purpose.*

*Amen.*

## Sunday, April 16 Easter/Resurrection Sunday

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him."*

*Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first. He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there, and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed; for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead. Then the disciples returned to their homes.*

*But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb; and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had been lying, one at the head and the other at the feet. They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?" She said to them, "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him." When*

*she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.*

*Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?" Supposing him to be the gardener, she said to him, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher). Jesus said to her, "Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*

*Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, "I have seen the Lord"; and she told them that he had said these things to her.*

*John 20: 1 – 18*

In dark and rain,  
In cold and snow,  
In sun and blue sky,  
Christ is Risen.

She was distraught to have lost him, and terrified that his crucified body had been dishonored, stolen, and would not be found. Yet she stood at the tomb, unwilling to leave, struggling to understand even words from angels that she could not get to make sense. The desperation, the weeping, the fear are so palpable here. And to turn, as a man appeared in the garden, and not know who he was. He even spoke to her, asked her questions, and she gave her same frightened and tear-filled response: If he has been taken away...

And then Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' . He calls her by name. And she knows it is Him. Because she is known by this one who loves her and whom she has loved, she knows him in return.

In us and for us,  
Not because of us,  
Nor even in spite of us,  
But simply for the love of us.

What a remarkable thing, to be so known. To have spent such time together, and seen so much. To know the struggles that have been faced, the plans that were made; to witness healing and meals and journeys and

teaching. The things of friendship and life and deep abiding love that aren't even recorded in the scriptures, which we can only begin to wonder and try to imagine. To be just that known, that tended to, that cared for, that seen for who you are and what you bring and all you need. To be seen – and called by name.

Wherever we are,  
However we've been,  
Whatever we wonder,  
Christ is Risen.

### **Prayer**

***Risen Christ! Risen Indeed!  
What a wonder to behold,  
what a joy to receive – this  
gift of new life, this promise  
of hope, this mystery of  
resurrection and all it can  
mean. May I never take for  
granted the great work you  
have done in the world, and  
the great work you hold out  
for me to do, too. I pray each  
day finds me more in awe of  
you: of your love for me, and  
for all people, and of your  
resurrection hope, alive in the  
world.***

***Amen***

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