

2018

Lent

Resources



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Introduction: Let Us Commit To This!!!

Can I be honest? I might as well keep it one hundred (REAL) with you from the beginning, right? This is not going to be easy. The sacrifice that happens during the Lenten Season might be one of the most challenging things I have ever had to commit to. I am sure that there are some who are telling me to live a little while longer, and I will have to experience some things that are much more difficult than my annual season of Lent sacrifice. This may very well be the case; but as of right now, it is one of the most challenging things I have ever had to commit to.

When I think about it, it has been the most challenging because it's an exercise that is solely reliant upon one's Faith. Without faith, you will not be able to endure this season. Trust me! If you are attempting to tackle this process without faith, you will not finish. You will not make it to the end. You will not be able to find the motivation to endure the testing and the trying that come throughout this season. I don't want to sell someone something that is packaged without any flaws. I would like for each of you to know what to somewhat expect when you are in the middle of this process and the testing is turned up to the max. So much so, that you are left with making one of two decisions. Do I give up now and enjoy life as it was before I started this process? A place where you had to experience some things, but it didn't mess with your comfort level. You were being challenged, but you were not being pushed out of your comfort zones while being pushed. Frustrated with how things were unfolding around you, but still comfortable. Yes, that is one decision you can make while you are in the middle of this process, or you can choose to not even take yourself through all of the trouble of trying to commit to something that you know you will not finish. And just decide from the beginning, that this type of testing and trying isn't something that you are really going to be committed to.

I am only presenting this to you in such a way, because I know, I have been there before and have decided not to finish. I have decided from the beginning that I wasn't going to

commit to undergoing this season of sacrifice. And I have also been in the middle of it, struggling with the choice of whether I should just give up and return to my comfort zone, and that's exactly what I did. I chose comfort over transformation. I mean, I could hear Tony "Duke" Evers, the trainer for Apollo Creed in Rocky IV, in my head shouting the exact words he shouted when Apollo was being destroyed Ivan Drago. "This was supposed to be an exhibition.....Throw in the towel, throw in the D@** towel." And that is what I did. I threw in the towel. To me, at that moment, comfort was more important than change.

Then there is the other decision you can make. Yes, the other decision. You can say, "This is not for me," and "Throw in the towel." Or you can make the other decision, which is to commit to the process and choose greatness over mediocrity. You can decide within yourself that you are willing to endure the testing and the trying, the trials and the tribulations, the bumps and the bruises and everything else that will come to convince you otherwise. The decision to stick to it, to stay in it, to push through it, or to grind it out, is one that will pull you out of your comfort zone and offer change to whatever you are seeking God for at this moment in time.

In this season, let us choose the latter. Let us choose commitment over comfort. Let us choose sacrifice over pleasure. For now, let us choose change over the ordinary. Let us choose transformation over all other things. But, let us not only commit for the betterment of ourselves. Let us commit knowing that we are connected to the whole. And by being connected to the whole, we must commit to change, expecting that God is going to do great things through us. Not for us to benefit from God's goodness in isolation, but for us to benefit from God's goodness in a way that allows all of God's people the ability to obtain such an experience. There is no other time better than now to allow God the opportunity to use you in a way that causes people to look on you and have a God like experience. It's the response to you committing yourself to a process that

freely gives God access to using you for kingdom building. Not that God requires our permission, but when we freely give ourselves back to God to be used for kingdom work, I believe, God smiles. God smiles because it shows God that we are willing to be Christ-like. Inasmuch, we are willing to carry our own cross, in order to bring resolution to all of the chaos that is transpiring around us.

So commit to this season because so much depends on your commitment to God, transforming you for the work that will come after. So much depends upon your commitment! If you are really concerned about your brothers and sisters, you understand that so much depends upon your commitment. If you are truly concerned about eradicating racism and being pro-reconciling, you understand that so much depends upon your commitment. If you are really concerned about providing a safe haven for refugees and being welcoming to immigrants from all countries, you understand that so much depends upon your commitment. If you are really concerned about embracing all people who are constantly being oppressed for matters that they are unable to control or decisions that they feel free to make for themselves without being ridiculed, chastised, carried, and lampooned out of hate, you understand that so much depends upon your commitment. If you are really concerned about eliminating poverty, changing this system of mass incarceration, and fighting for all matters of injustice, you understand that so much depends upon your commitment.

Yes, you understand that so much depends on your committing, and for that God smiles! God smiles because, now that you understand, now that you know what is at stake, now that you know your reasons for sacrifice. God is happy! God is happy that his son, Jesus Christ, didn't have to give of himself for the sake of the whole, for all of creation, and it be for nothing. Let us commit to this because Christ committed to this. Let us commit to others, because Christ committed to us. Let us trust the process and commit to it! Amen.

About the Author

The Rev. Antonio "TONY" Gerome Redd along with his wife, Erica Perkins Redd, , Amaris Gabrielle Redd, and expected bundle of joy,



currently reside in Henrico, Virginia. Tony accepted his call to ministry under the direction of the Rev. Dr. Kenneth Davis at Mount Olive East Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) on January 11, 2004. While at Mount Olive East, he served as the Young Adult Minister, while directly providing consultation to the Youth Ministry department. Tony currently serves as the Minister to Christian Education, Evangelism and the Assistant to the Senior Pastor at Second Baptist Church West End in Richmond, Virginia. It is there where he serves under the direction of Senior



Pastor Rev. Dr. James Henry Harris, the Distinguished Professor of Homiletics at the School of Theology at Virginia Union University.

He is a graduate of Virginia State University (2009), where he received a Bachelor of Science in Health. Most recently he graduated from the School of Theology at Virginia Union University (STVU) with a Master of Divinity (2014) and a Master of Arts in Christian Education (2015). Tony is the Young Adult President for the National Convocation and also serves as a member of the Young Adult Commission. "Over the past thirteen years, ministry has taught me many lessons that aid me in being a better mediator of words inside and outside of the pulpit.

I have come to better understand the task of preaching; that which causes one to reflect closely on the parishioners' current condition, and provide them with the answers to their most relevant questions."



Daily Readings for Lent 2018

Ash Wednesday, February 14 – Easter, April 1

Wednesday February 14, 2018 Ash Wednesday	Thursday February 15, 2018	Friday February 16, 2018	Saturday February 17, 2018
<i>Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12</i>	<i>Deuteronomy 30: 15-20</i>	<i>Isaiah 58: 1-9a</i>	<i>Isaiah 58: 9b-14</i>
<i>Psalm 51:1-17</i>	<i>Psalm 1: 1-2. 3. 4 and 6</i>	<i>Psalm 51: 3-4. 5-6ab. 18-19</i>	<i>Psalm 86: 1-2. 3-4. 5-6</i>
<i>2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10</i>	<i>Luke 9: 22-25</i>	<i>Matthew 9: 14-15</i>	<i>Luke 5: 27-32</i>
<i>Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21</i>			

Sunday February 18, 2018	Monday February 19, 2018	Tuesday February 20, 2018	Wednesday February 21, 2018	Thursday February 22, 2018	Friday February 23, 2018	Saturday February 24, 2018
<i>Genesis 9:8-17</i>	<i>Leviticus 19: 1-2. 11-18</i>	<i>Isaiah 55: 10-11</i>	<i>Jonah 3: 1-10</i>	<i>1 Peter 5: 1-4</i>	<i>Ezekiel 18: 21-28</i>	<i>Deuteronomy 26: 16-19</i>
<i>Psalm 25:1-10</i>	<i>Psalm 19: 8. 9. 10. 15</i>	<i>Psalm 34: 4-5. 6-7. 16-17. 18-19</i>	<i>Psalm 51: 3-4. 12-13. 18-19</i>	<i>Psalm 23: 1-3a. 4. 5. 6</i>	<i>Psalm 130: 1-2. 3-4. 5-7a. 7bc-8</i>	<i>Psalm 119: 1-2. 4-5. 7-8</i>
<i>1 Peter 3:18-22</i>	<i>Matthew 25: 31-46</i>	<i>Matthew 6: 7-15</i>	<i>Luke 11: 29-32</i>	<i>Matthew 16: 13-19</i>	<i>Matthew 5: 20-26</i>	<i>Matthew 5: 43-48</i>
<i>Mark 1:9-15</i>						

Sunday February 25, 2018	Monday February 26, 2018	Tuesday February 27, 2018	Wednesday February 28, 2018	Thursday March 1, 2018	Friday March 2, 2018	Saturday March 3, 2018
<i>Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16</i>	<i>Daniel 9: 4b-10</i>	<i>Isaiah 1: 10. 16-20</i>	<i>Jeremiah 18: 18-20</i>	<i>Jeremiah 17: 5-10</i>	<i>Genesis 37: 3-4. 12-13a. 17b-28a</i>	<i>Micah 7: 14-15. 18-20</i>
<i>Psalm 22:23-31</i>	<i>Psalm 79: 8. 9. 11 and 13</i>	<i>Psalm 50: 8-9. 16bc-17. 21, 23</i>	<i>Psalm 31: 5-6. 14. 15-16</i>	<i>Psalm 1: 1-2. 3. 4 and 6</i>	<i>Psalm 105: 16-17. 18-19. 20-21</i>	<i>Psalm 103: 1-2. 3-4. 9-10. 11-12</i>
<i>Romans 4:13-25</i>	<i>Luke 6: 36-38</i>	<i>Matthew 23: 1-12</i>	<i>Matthew 20: 17-28</i>	<i>Luke 16: 19-31</i>	<i>Matthew 21: 33-43. 45-46</i>	<i>Luke 15: 1-3. 11-32</i>
<i>Mark 8:31-38 or 9:2-9</i>						

Sunday March 4, 2018	Monday March 5, 2018	Tuesday March 6, 2018	Wednesday March 7, 2018	Thursday March 8, 2018	Friday March 9, 2018	Saturday March 10, 2018
<i>Exodus 20:1-17</i>	<i>2 Kings 5: 1-15b</i>	<i>Daniel 3: 25. 34-43</i>	<i>Deuteronomy 4:1. 5-9</i>	<i>Jeremiah 7: 23-28</i>	<i>Hosea 14: 2-10</i>	<i>Hosea 6: 1-6</i>
<i>Psalm 19</i>	<i>Psalm 42: 2. 3; 43: 3. 4</i>	<i>Psalm 25: 4-5ab. 6 and 7bc., 8, 9</i>	<i>Psalm 147: 12-13. 15-16. 19-20</i>	<i>Psalm 95: 1-2. 6-7. 8-9</i>	<i>Psalm 81: 6c-8a. 8bc-9. 10-11ab, 14, 17</i>	<i>Psalm 51: 3-4. 18-19. 20-21ab</i>
<i>1 Corinthians 1:18-25</i>	<i>Luke 4: 24-30</i>	<i>Matthew 18: 21-35</i>	<i>Matthew 5: 17-19</i>	<i>Luke 11: 14-23</i>	<i>Mark 12: 28-34</i>	<i>Luke 18: 9-14</i>
<i>John 2:13-22</i>						

Sunday March 11	Monday March 12	Tuesday March 13	Wednesday March 14	Thursday March 15	Friday March 16	Saturday March 17
<i>Numbers 21:4-9</i>	<i>Isaiah 65: 17-21</i>	<i>Ezekiel 47: 1-9. 12</i>	<i>Isaiah 49: 8-15</i>	<i>Exodus 32: 7-14</i>	<i>Wisdom 2: 1a. 12-22</i>	<i>Jeremiah 11: 18-20</i>
<i>Psalms 107:1-3, 17-22</i>	<i>Psalms 30: 2, 4-6, 11-12a, 13b</i>	<i>Psalms 46: 2-3. 5-6. 8-9</i>	<i>Psalms 145: 8-9. 13cd-14. 17-18</i>	<i>Psalms 106: 19-20. 21-22. 23</i>	<i>Psalms 34: 17-18. 19-20. 21 and 23</i>	<i>Psalms 7: 2-3. 9bc-10. 11-12</i>
<i>Ephesians 2:1-10</i>	<i>John 4: 43-54</i>	<i>John 5: 1-16</i>	<i>John 5: 17-30</i>	<i>John 5: 31-47</i>	<i>John 7: 1-2. 10. 25-30</i>	<i>John 7: 40-53</i>
<i>John 3:14-21</i>						

Sunday March, 18	Monday March 19	Tuesday March 20	Wednesday March 21	Thursday March 22	Friday March 23	Saturday March 24
<i>Jeremiah 31:31-34</i>	<i>2 Samuel 7: 4-5a. 12-14a. 16</i>	<i>Numbers 21: 4-9</i>	<i>Daniel 3: 14-20. 91-92. 95</i>	<i>Genesis 17: 3-9</i>	<i>Jeremiah 20: 10-13</i>	<i>Ezekiel 37: 21-28</i>
<i>Psalms 51:1-12 or 119:9-16</i>	<i>Psalms 89: 2-3. 4-5. 27 and 29</i>	<i>Psalms 102: 2-3. 16-18. 19-21</i>	<i>Daniel 3: 52. 53. 54. 55. 56</i>	<i>Psalms 105: 4-5. 6-7. 8-9</i>	<i>Psalms 18: 2-3a. 3bc-4. 5-6. 7</i>	<i>Jeremiah 31: 10. 11-12abcd. 13</i>
<i>Hebrews 5:5-10</i>	<i>Romans 4: 13. 16-18. 22</i>	<i>John 8: 21-30.</i>	<i>John 8: 31-42</i>	<i>John 8: 51-59</i>	<i>John 10: 31-42</i>	<i>John 11: 45-56</i>
<i>John 12:20-33</i>	<i>Matthew 1: 16. 18-21. 24a or Luke 2: 41-51a</i>	<i>Psalms 17: 1. 6-7. 8b and 15</i> <i>John 11: 1-45</i>				

Passion or Palm Sunday March 25, 2018	Monday March 26	Tuesday March 27	Wednesday March 28	Maundy Thursday March 29	Good Friday March 30	Holy Saturday March 31
<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>Mark 14:1-15:47 or 15:1-39</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>

Easter Sunday April 1, 2018
<i>Acts 10:34-43</i>
<i>Psalms 118:1-24</i>
<i>1 Corinthians 15:1-11 or Acts 10:34-43</i>
<i>John 20:1-18 or Mark 16:1-8</i>

Daily Meditations

Wednesday February 14 Ash Wednesday

As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything. ¹¹We have spoken frankly to you Corinthians; our heart is wide open to you. ¹²There is no restriction in our affections, but only in yours. ¹³In return—I speak as to children—open wide your hearts also.

2 Corinthians 6:2b-13 NRSV

"There Is No Obstacle Before You... Open Wide Your Hearts!"

There comes a time in everyone's life, or at least there should, when one recognizes why and what they should live for. When one arrives at this point, there is no turning back. It's at this moment when you forget about the obstacle that has been set before you. There are no obstacles any longer. Nothing is able to stand between you and what you are purposed to do in life, once you recognize that purpose. Absolutely nothing! There are no words anyone can utter. There are no things that can be offered as recompense for doing otherwise. Nothing!

As a result of having a three year old in my household, my wife and I have had to sit and watch Disney's animation *Moana* a number of times. If I could count the times we've watched this film in its entirety, some would think that we were abnormal. But I digress! There is a moment in this film when the little village girl, Moana, recognizes who she is and what she must accomplish in order to fulfill her purpose in life. With the help of her grandmother, Gramma Tala, Moana recognizes that she has been chosen by the Ocean to voyage out beyond the reef, find the demigod Maui, and restore the heart of Te' Fiti. If it were left up to her father, Moana would never travel beyond the reef. That was the rule for the entire village. Everything had to be done within the reef. However, for Moana, the vitality of her people was contingent upon her traveling beyond the reef and fulfilling her purpose. You know it: find the demigod Maui and restore the heart of Te' Fiti. Exactly! That is exactly what Moana did. If Moana doesn't accomplish this task, if she takes the advice of her father and fears traveling beyond the reef, her people will not survive. Restoring the heart of Te' Fiti restored life back to all of creation.

Wow! The narrative of Moana sounds so familiar! Right?

As you set out to find yourself drawing closer to what God has purposed you to do in life, journeying beyond life's reef, I pray that you take Moana-like courage along your journey. Know that God has not placed any limitations on you. Know that with God, you are able to accomplish whatever it is that has been assigned to your life. With God, you are able to overcome anything that will be set up along your path for your demise. But not only that! Know that your purpose in life, like Moana's, is attached to the vitality of your entire village, your entire family, your entire community (faith and social). You

must know that when you set out for this journey, there will be people depending on you to pull through. Yes, there too will be some depending on your failure! But set out knowing that God has purposed you to extend life to others, through Jesus Christ. Your success is not something that should be inwardly obtained for personal satisfaction. Your success is something that must be outwardly disposed for the welfare and well-being of the entire village. "Open wide your hearts!"

Blessings!

Prayer:

Open wide our hearts God! As we set out to draw closer to you in this season, make it clear to us that there are no obstacles standing before us. If we put you before us, there is nothing that can keep us from fulfilling what has been assigned to our lives. So open wide our hearts, help us with embracing the call, for the sake of the village. And because you have proven yourself to us so many times before, we are for certain that you will do it again. In the only name that matters, we pray,

Amen

Thursday February 15

We entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²⁴For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{6:1} As we work together with him, we urge you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. ²For he says, "At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you." See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation! ³We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, ⁴but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: through great endurance,

in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, ⁷truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹as unknown, and yet are well known; as dying, and see—we are alive; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10 NRSV

Prayer:

God of love and liberation, God who is with us in the struggle to free the oppressed, to end hunger, to create safe homes for people and to care for your creation, help us. Help us to feel your strength when the work wears us down and when oppressors attack us and the work. Help us to maintain integrity of the struggles to demand peace with justice. Help us to live in the courage, love, inspiration and motivation found in you and in the body of Christ who fight together.

Amen

Chesla T. Nickelson, MDiv, MAMFT Program Director/ Merger Staff Office of Disciples Women Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Indianapolis, Indiana



Friday February 16

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming, it is near — ²a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

¹²Yet even now, says the LORD, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; ¹³rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the LORD, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. ¹⁴Who knows whether he will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD, your God? ¹⁵Blow the trumpet in Zion; sanctify a fast; call a solemn assembly; ¹⁶gather the people. Sanctify the congregation; assemble the aged; gather the children, even infants at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room, and the bride her canopy. ¹⁷Between the vestibule and the altar let the priests, the ministers of the LORD, weep. Let them say, "Spare your people, O LORD, and do not make your heritage a mockery, a byword among the nations. Why should it be said among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

Prayer:

God of Wonders, we come to you amidst the ashes. As we begin this Lenten journey, we come to you as we take toll of all the ways life has been taken. We have witnessed destruction and devastation within our homes and our hearts. We are broken and ashy.

We release our grief and anger, our desire for vengeance. We confess our selfishness and apathy toward the pain of others. With your waters of healing, cleanse us from sin. Restore our hearts to the wonder of your spirit.

Your works remind us that you can transform even the remnants of life. Your hands create and your hope renews. Invite us the wisdom to remind us that we are yet alive. Give us courage to speak words of power amidst the ash. Walk with us through this season into lives of deeper faithfulness.

Amen

Shannon Dycus
Co-Pastor
First Mennonite Church
Indianapolis, Indiana

Saturday February 17

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. ⁵Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. ⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. ¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. ¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. ¹⁷My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

Psalms 51:1-17 NIV

Prayer:

God of Mercy, You have called me into light and a loving relationship with you. I acknowledge that there are times when my thoughts, my words, and my actions do not reflect the light you have called me into. I acknowledge that my love for You, myself, and my neighbor wanes and my witness gets shaky. But out of the abundance of your mercy, I ask for your forgiveness for my wrongdoings and that Your Holy Spirit would enable me to recommit my life to you. 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. God, I ask that your light and your love would flow through me so that I may speak of your goodness, advocate for your justice, rejoice over your greatness, and intercede for all who are lost. May I never take for granted your unmerited favor. May I walk faithfully in your light and your love.

God, In Your Mercy, Hear My Prayer.

Amen

Rev. Dr. Delesslyn A. Kennebrew,
J.D.,M.Div.
Pastor/Teacher/Visionary
The Living Room Christian
Fellowship, Atlanta, Georgia

Sunday February 18

Shout the message! Don't hold back. Say to my people Israel: You've sinned! You've turned against the LORD. ²Day after day, you worship him and seem eager to learn his teachings. You act like a nation that wants to do right by obeying his laws. You ask him about justice, and say you enjoy worshiping the LORD. ³You wonder why the LORD pays no attention when you go without eating and act humble. But on those same days that you give up eating, you think only of yourselves and



abuse your workers. ⁴You even get angry and ready to fight. No wonder God won't listen to your prayers! ⁵Do you think the LORD wants you to give up eating and to act as humble as a bent-over bush? Or to dress in sackcloth and sit in ashes? Is this really what he wants on a day of worship? ⁶I'll tell you what it really means to worship the LORD. Remove the chains of prisoners who are chained unjustly. Free those who are abused! ⁷Share your food with everyone who is hungry; share your home with the poor and homeless. Give clothes to those in need; don't turn away your relatives. ⁸Then your light will shine like the dawning sun, and you will quickly be healed. Your honesty will protect you as you advance, and the glory of the LORD will defend you from behind. ⁹When you beg the LORD for help, he will answer, Here I am!" Don't mistreat others or falsely accuse them or say something cruel. ¹⁰Give your food to the hungry and care for the homeless. Then your light will shine in the dark; your darkest hour will be like the noonday sun. ¹¹The LORD will always guide you and provide good things to eat when you are in the desert. He will make you healthy. You will be like a garden that has plenty of water or like a stream that never runs dry. ¹²You will rebuild those houses left in ruins for years; you will be known as a builder and repairer of city walls and streets.

Isaiah 58:1-12 CEV

"For The Sake of Others!"

What if we started the journey giving answers to some of the tough questions that may come once we have invested a lot of time in our yearning for transformation? Wouldn't that be transforming in itself? You know, the tough questions that always seem to arise right dead smack in the middle of the journey; when we have adjusted our lives to experience

something temporarily, yet hoping to be permanently transformed. Wait! Maybe it's not multiple questions. Maybe it's just one question that disguises itself as more than one. Yes, one question that evolves over time and causes us to believe that we are addressing something for the first time.

It is possible that I may not be speaking to everyone reading today's insert. Maybe this one is only for those of us whom have pledged to give up social media, television, eating fried foods, drinking soda or coffee. This just may be the second time you've decided to accomplish one of these daunting tasks in the wake of a new year. I cannot speak for us all, but such may have been the same pledge taken as a New Year's Resolution for many of us. Who knows!

Oh yes, the question you ask! Why am I doing this? It's the question we ask ourselves when we get entrenched deep into the process, and there is no substantial evidence presented before us that provides us with a reason to continue to push through it. It's like when I step on the scale and I see that the number hasn't changed. As a matter of fact, it did change; it went in the wrong direction this time around. What the....., (inserts temporary unrighteous nature)! Ha! I am not alone, and neither are you. We all have crossed that bridge one time or another. Hey, we may be in the midst of crossing that bridge. But it's the relevant question that overwhelms us and causes us to rethink why we are approaching this crossroad along our journey once again. What is all of this sacrifice for, if there are no immediate results that I can attribute to success?

If our interests are ingrained in self, we will never be delivered from having to address this question over and over again. If we are seeking for God to do for us in the beginning, something that cannot embrace the whole in the end, then we will never be able to evade this question. So it will do us tremendous good to get it right in the beginning. This is not to prevent us from having to address the question again, because the question will arise over and over again. But getting our reason for undergoing this process right the first time, will allow

Prayer:

Most gracious and all wise God, I come to you with thanksgiving in my heart and adoration in my mouth. Knowing that it was nobody but you; thou who walks before me, with me, and behind me. When I didn't know the dangers that surrounded me, you put a hedge of protection around me and my love ones. So God, I ask that you forgive me for my sins and continue to allow your angels to intercede on my behalf. Thank You! And I will forever give your name the praise, glory and honor.

Amen

Whitney Redd
Elementary Educator
Union City, Georgia

Wednesday February 21

God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth."²The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.³Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.⁴Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.⁵For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.⁶Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.⁷And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it."

Genesis 9:1-7

Prayer:

Gracious God, we know the power that you have blessed us with. It is a power given to us through your covenant with Noah. Help us to not be abusers of this power God. Direct us in a way where we are only able to

use all that you have blessed us with, for the betterment of your people. This power can be taken for granted. It can be abused and misused when it exists in the hands of those who are in search of self-gratification. So humble us almighty God. Let our hands be hands that you can trust to utilize such power for building our communities up, and not for tearing them down. Keep your son Christ Jesus big on the inside of us, to constantly remind us of one who utilized the power he had for the good. It is in that name we pray,

Amen!



Thursday February 22

For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.¹²Who are they that fear the LORD? He will teach them the way that they should choose.¹³They will abide in prosperity, and their children shall possess the land.¹⁴The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes his covenant known to them.¹⁵My eyes are ever toward the LORD, for he will pluck my feet out of the net.¹⁶Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.¹⁷Relieve the troubles of my heart, and bring me out of my distress.¹⁸Consider my affliction and my trouble, and forgive all my sins.¹⁹Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.²⁰O guard my life, and deliver me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.²¹May integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for you.²²Redeem Israel, O God, out of all its troubles.

Psalms 25:11-22

Prayer:

Lord thank you for lighting the path of our way. We pray for clear understanding as we travel through this life. When times get tough, help us to remember to pause and pray for direction so your spirit can guide us toward the lighted path. Thank you for your covenant and your unfailing love.

Amen

Dominique Preston Sr.
Associate Director of Programs
Recreational Sports
Virginia Tech University
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Friday February 23

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" ⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."

Mark 1:1-8

Prayer:

God we long for your Spirit to lead us down our paths along this journey. Your Spirit will go before us and make our task much less difficult to accomplish. So baptize us with your Spirit afresh. Allow our eyes to stay focused and fixed on the plan that you have for us in the season. In such a manner

that we will understand the importance of setting ourselves aside, for the sake of our sisters and brothers who too dwell in this world of chaos. With the love of Christ we pray,

Amen

Saturday February 24

⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." ¹²And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him. ¹⁴Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, ¹⁵and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Mark 1:9-15

Prayer:

As your son was sent into the wilderness to be tempted, there are moments throughout this process where we feel as if we are experiencing our own wilderness. We are in a wilderness where things seem to not improve, but yet get worse. We are in a wilderness where the enemy's attacks seem to weigh on us heavier than any other time before. And though this may be true, God, you remind us that in your word there is proof through your son. Not only will you send us into the wilderness, but you will also bring us out of the wilderness. With that knowledge, our prayer is that when you bring us out, we strive to not fail in fulfilling the purpose that was revealed to us while we existed in it.

Amen

Sunday February 25

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. ²Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. ⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. ⁵Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. ⁶Yet you desired faithfulness even in the womb; you taught me wisdom in that secret place. ⁷Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. ¹⁰Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. ¹⁴Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, you who are God my Savior, and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. ¹⁵Open my lips, Lord, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. ¹⁷My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise.

Psalms 51:1-17 NIV



"Deep Internal Cleansing!"

Having someone expose your weaknesses and shortcomings is probably a more awakening experience when it is accomplished in private, rather than when matters make their way into the public eye. In public, the opportunity for you to deny or own what has been said about you is welcomed by the opinion of the listeners who are before you when such information has been released. If such is true, public opinion more times than none is eventually much more forgiving than we can imagine. Yes, there comes a moment in time when you are at a low point in life, but if your response is calculated and viewed to be sincere, people have a way of eventually offering you a chance to do better and get it right the next time around. However, there is another element to being exposed in private with someone who respects you enough to bring to you the information they have come to know about you. That's respectful! Yeah, but it is also a very dreadful experience. Your relationship with them is why they felt the need to share such information with you in private. And because that relationship means so much to the both of you, it leaves you in a space where you are left with believing that you are always having to prove to them that you have remorse, and you are no longer the person you were when this information was initially shared with you.

When it happens, at that moment, it is as if God is standing before us and there is no way to ever remove ourselves of this humbling experience. It is then when we are on a mission of undergoing a deep internal cleanse to free ourselves of everything from within, in order to hopefully rectify a damaged relationship. And not that alone, but we are also attempting to demonstrate to God how appreciative we are for not being exposed in public, and how much we are grateful of being offered a second chance to get it right. We understand that some things may never return to ordinary -- concerning our personal relationship with that acquaintance, no matter how hard we try! But the second chance



that God gives us to get it right is everything. That must not be taken for granted.

Conversation with my grandmother used to leave me in a space that likens itself to such. Whenever we would talk, she would always remind me of that mischievous kid I used to be growing up. She didn't just remind me of the mistakes I once made, or the wrongs I had done once before, but she would always follow that up with elevating me to this seemingly high place. It was as if it was the greatest thing that ever happened to her, for God to transform me from what I used to be, and set me apart for this journey in ministry. Granny would say, "Tony I am so proud of you! It's my prayer that you continue down the path that God has set for you. It would break my heart for you to come this far and turn back on God now." I will never know if my granny had something on me that she just didn't feel comfortable sharing with me or not. She could have! We're all a work in progress, right? Whether she did or didn't, it made me feel as though I always needed to be in a process of deep internal cleansing. I wasn't so much worried about how much anyone else thought of me. But for me, letting my grandmother down was as if I had let God down. There isn't a bone in me that could've been strong enough to overcome the damage that would've been done had I let Granny down.

For me it was and remains to be my Granny that keeps God always standing before me in a way that aids me in remaining focused on the call that God has placed on my life. She lived life in a way that set an example for how to care for and love my family, my community, and God's people.

Who/What is it for you? Name it today! Identify it so that you are able to keep God in front of you on this journey; in such a way, that you are constantly undergoing a process of deep internal cleansing. The cleansing frees you of the toxins that life brings and influences you to always yearn for a clean and pure heart.

Much Love!

Prayer:

God, it is this day that we are thankful. We are thankful for the many opportunities you have made for us to get things right the second or third time around. We also extend this moment of thanksgiving, for the people you have placed in our lives that hold us accountable in moments when our focus has shifted away from you. It is because of them that we are able to see you constantly working on our behalf, even when we are not fully concerned about the call you have assigned to our lives. So our prayer is that you keep us connected, in hopes that we will never be absent of your presence, even when we have neglected you. Constantly purify us for this work that you have set us apart for.

Amen

Monday February 26

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. ²And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous." ³Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, ⁴"As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁵No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. ⁶I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. ⁷I will establish my covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you

and to your offspring after you. ⁸And I will give to you, and to your offspring after you, the land where you are now an alien, all the land of Canaan, for a perpetual holding; and I will be their God." ⁹God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised.

¹¹You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you.

¹²Throughout your generations every male among you shall be circumcised when he is eight days old, including the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring.

¹³Both the slave born in your house and the one bought with your money must be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant.

¹⁴Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." ¹⁵God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. ¹⁶I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her."

Genesis 17:1-16

Prayer:

Dear Lord our God, I come to you thanking you for all of your blessings. I come to you with a sense of joy for what you have done for me and all of your people. I also come to you today in a place of distress; in a place of struggle. In these times where it seems dark, I pray that you will remind us that you are the light. I pray to be reminded of your promises; I need to be reminded that you hear the voices of your people going through hardships. I need to be reminded that you hear the prayers of the oppressed. I pray to be reminded of Abraham and his faith. Because when I'm reminded of Abraham I know through our faith that our

prayers will be answered. So in these trying times Lord; please bless us that we will not grow weak, but that we may grow stronger in your promise and faith. In your name I pray!

Amen

William Jared Kellam
IT Engineer/Specialist
Wells Fargo (Data Center
Management)
Winston-Salem, North Carolina

Tuesday February 27

¹³For 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. ¹⁴If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

¹⁵For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation.

¹⁶For this reason it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (for he is the father of all of us,

¹⁷as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations")—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. ¹⁸Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become "the father of many nations," according to what was said, "So numerous shall your descendants be." ¹⁹He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

²²Therefore his faith "was reckoned to him as righteousness." ²³Now the words, "it was reckoned to him," were written not for his sake alone, ²⁴but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.

Romans 4:13-25

Prayer:

Lord, I lift up my heart and hands to you in praise and honor, for you believed in us to send down your promise. In the midst of everyday chaos and unrelenting distraction, my faith is questioned. It is tested. It is tried.

Through this, though, I remain steadfast, as I know you have carefully put me in a position to serve others, a place through which – through your light – I may lighten the paths of others. In your kingdom, I am only one; however, I am one who can show others that your promise is theirs to have as well. I am thankful that I am reassured everyday of this through your love. I'm reassured there is a grander promise waiting for us. I am reassured that our promise comes by faith.

Please allow me the strength to continue serving your kingdom, against all hope, with unwavering faith and with the audacity to passionately remind myself and others of your promise.

Amen

Carmen Colunga Spencer
Elementary Educator
Houston Independent Schools
District
Houston, Texas

Wednesday February 28

*You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him;
stand in awe of him, all you offspring of*

Israel! ²⁴For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him. ²⁵From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. ²⁶The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD. May your hearts live forever! ²⁷All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. ²⁸For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations. ²⁹To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. ³⁰Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, ³¹and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.

Psalm 22:23-31

Prayer:

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

Amen

Ronda Brown
Social Security Administration
Petersburg, Virginia



Thursday March 1

And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

²Six days later, Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and led them up a high mountain apart, by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, ³and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them.

⁴And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus.

⁵Then Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." ⁶He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.

⁷Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

⁸Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them anymore, but only Jesus. ⁹As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them to tell no one about what they had seen, until after the Son of Man had risen from the dead.

¹⁰So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean. ¹¹Then they asked him, "Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?" ¹²He said to them, "Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things.

How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt?

¹³But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him."

Mark 9:1-13



Prayer:

Dear most loving and wise God, thank you for grace! Thank you, God, for the promise to never leave us or forsake us. Thank you, God, for your hands of protection that you display in our lives! By faith, we know that we are safe and can call on you anytime and know that you will always be there to comfort us! In Jesus name,

Amen

Jeneen Preston
Conference Registrar
Continuing Professional Ed-
Operating
Virginia Tech University
Blacksburg, Virginia

Friday March 2

³¹Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

³²He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

³³But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." ³⁴He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake

of the gospel, will save it.

³⁶For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? ³⁷Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? ³⁸Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

Mark 8:31-38

Prayer:

Gracious and Merciful God, we continue to be amazed at all that you bring us through. There are times when life paints an unwanted picture. The test and the trials we go through, many times, are unwelcomed and dreadful. If the process provided us with a heads up, truthfully, it would be difficult to commit to it, knowing the struggles that are soon to consume us. But that is the risk we take to fulfilling the purpose that has been assigned to our lives. Therefore, in order to remain committed to you, we push through all of these trials knowing that our reward lies in the hands of the one who calms all of our fears. So we don't shy away from the challenge. We don't run in the opposite direction. We don't choose our own lives instead of gaining more for the kingdom. We don't, because we know you will remain committed to us, even when our commitment to you often waivers. So we lift you up and give you all glory and honor.

Amen

Saturday March 3

³¹What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? ³²He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? ³³Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.

³⁴Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. ³⁵Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ³⁶As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered." ³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am

convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 8:31-39

Prayer:

You are before us God. Therefore, nothing can stand against us. We will win! And in the end, all things that we encounter on the way only come to make us better. It's the love of God in Christ Jesus that makes all of this possible.

Amen!

Sunday March 4

"Beware of practicing your piety before others in order to be seen by them; for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven."² "So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward."³ "But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing,⁴ so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."⁵ "And whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward."⁶ "But whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you."

Matthew 6:1-6 NRSV



"It's Between You and God"

If you're anything like me, whenever you are doing something or have done something great, you want to let the world know. It is as if you are helpless unless you bring others in the know of your goodness. I mean it is your goodness right? At least that's what we tell ourselves! More often times than none, we tell others to build us up. Our stories are full of so many I's that whatever else is involved in the story has to take a back seat to us. In the end, our self-gratification and self-glory only leads us to being left empty. Empty to the point where we believe that the only way for us to be made whole, is to tell more and more people about the goodness we obtained.

What is missing? God is missing! Rarely do we think about whether or not God was lifted up in our stories in such a way that was higher than ourselves. We don't think about it, because we don't intend for God to be lifted up higher than us; unless, we need God to actually display God's goodness towards us. You know, the times when we are sinking deep in our misery and there is no one able to rescue us but God. So we lift God up then, because to us, God is very much needed in our current situation. But even when we are lifting God up in these moments, we sometimes fail to lift God up to the place we once placed ourselves. "You mean when we wanted to let the world know about it?" One might ask. Exactly! Our failure in doing so causes our goodness to dissipate. As if it was ever ours in the first place. We then must remove ourselves from the high chair and place God where God should have been from the beginning. There's no reward in that! Not at all!

Let us begin to learn how to keep God higher than ourselves, so that God is able to do what God does. In keeping God in the Godspace, we recognize that our goodness is only accessible if we seek the one who is higher than us. When we come to understand that, there will be no need to boast to others about our goodness. We will have recognized that what we are in the process of accomplishing is only able to be obtained if we allow

God's goodness to be put on display. So just keep it on the hush. Whatever God is doing with you in this season, however God is doing it, just keep it between you and God. Trust me, when God does what God does, you won't have to tell a soul. It will speak for itself. Now, there is reward in that! It is well!

Prayer:

Great God, we give you all the glory you deserve. In this season, allow us to humble ourselves enough that we cease from having the desire to take credit for the things you have done through us. To boast about these things in absence of giving you what you deserve, leaves us empty. Therefore, because of our thirst for wholeness and our urge to see the cup running over, we offer up a plea that we will never forget to acknowledge you. For we seek a reward that cannot be found in humankind. It is one that shall only be obtained through our relationship with you.

Amen

Monday March 5

Then God spoke all these words:

²I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery;³ you shall have no other gods before me.⁴ You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me,⁶ but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.⁷ You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.⁸ Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy.⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work.¹⁰ But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work— you, your son or your daughter, your

male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. ¹¹For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it. ¹²Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. ¹³You shall not murder. ¹⁴You shall not commit adultery. ¹⁵You shall not steal. ¹⁶You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. ¹⁷You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor. ¹⁸When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, ¹⁹and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." ²⁰Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." ²¹Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Exodus 20:1-21

Prayer:

You are the only wise God, and there is none other. We lift you up this day knowing that without you, we are nothing but dust. As we adventure out to accomplish much, remind us that nothing can be done without you at the forefront. So God, we make a claim, that there is nothing that will take precedent over you. There are no materialistic things greater than you. There is not one being who can control the winds and the waters like you can. Many have tried and many have failed. Many will continue to try to accomplish such a feat, but they will fail also. So let us be like Moses in these turbulent times, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." As long as we continue to let you speak, we know that life will never end.

Amen!

Tuesday March 6

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. ⁵Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. ⁶Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. ⁹Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. ¹⁰I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. ¹¹Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. ¹²I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. ¹³I can do all things through him who strengthens me. ¹⁴In any case, it was kind of you to share my distress.

Philippians 4:4-14

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, I come to you humbly asking you to forgive us for the transgressions of today, tomorrow and yesterday. Lord we acknowledge that we are nothing without you, so we ask

that you grant us power in our weakest hours. Father, the Bible tells us that we can do all things through you that strengthen us, so again I ask you to anoint us in this hour. Lord, we know by your grace and mercy we are forgiven, and we love you for this.

Amen!

Aaron Knight
Chief Executive Officer
Progressive Community Outreach
Petersburg, Virginia

Wednesday March 7

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament^[a] proclaims his handiwork. ²Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. ³There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; ⁴yet their voice^[b] goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In the heavens^[c] he has set a tent for the sun, ⁵which comes out like a bridegroom from his wedding canopy, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. ⁶Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and nothing is hid from its heat. ⁷The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the LORD are sure, making wise the simple; ⁸the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is clear, enlightening the eyes; ⁹the fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever; the ordinances of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. ¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey, and drippings



of the honeycomb. ¹¹Moreover by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward. ¹²But who can detect their errors? Clear me from hidden faults. ¹³Keep back your servant also from the insolent;[d] do not let them have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless, and innocent of great transgression. ¹⁴Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 19

Prayer:

Dear Lord thank you for this day! Thank you for the blessings you have given us. Thank you for our friends and families. Thank you for the food in our stomachs, roofs over our heads, and the clothes on our backs. Dear Lord clear our mind, body and soul of the worldly thoughts and possessions, so that we do your deeds and exemplify your ways.

Dear Lord we ask that you would silence the noise of this world so that we may hear your words. Let us use those words to bless our lives and the lives of others. Let your light shine through our actions, our words, and our thoughts so that we may be an extension of you.

Give us strength in times of weakness, courage in times of fear, and health in times of sickness. Dear Lord lead us from the sins of this world. We ask this in your son Jesus' name

Amen

Matt Miles
Health and Physical Educator
J.L. Francis Elementary School
Richmond, Virginia

Thursday March 8

On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. ²Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³When the wine gave out, the mother of Jesus said

to him, "They have no wine." ⁴And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." ⁵His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." ⁶Now standing there were six stone water jars for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷Jesus said to them, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. ⁸He said to them, "Now draw some out, and take it to the chief steward." So they took it. ⁹When the steward tasted the water that had become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the steward called the bridegroom ¹⁰and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now." ¹¹Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

¹²After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother, his brothers, and his disciples; and they remained there a few days.

John 2:1-12

Prayer

God we thank you for leading us in a triumphal procession toward life everlasting and commanding us to spread the knowledge of your love everywhere we go, to share your goodness among those who are being saved and to those who are perishing, to make known the actions that bring life and death.

May we be careful not to boast of our own accomplishments, lest we allow pride to cast a shadow over the goodness and mercy you've shown toward us. Let us not covet earthly possessions, nor abuse spiritual gifts. Give us wisdom and discernment to avoid strife and dissension. Allow us to be instruments of grace, willing to forgive our debtors, give to the poor, and refrain from desiring selfish gain.

Father, we recognize that our fleshly senses are challenged

every day, but keep our hearts and minds focused on our purpose as we depend on you to give us the strength to resist earthly pleasures that don't glorify you. We realize that our flesh will fade and you will return for a church without spot or wrinkle. In a world that challenges our faith every day, Lord we ask you to build us up, equip us, and surround us with your love and protection.

Amen.

Joy Carter-Minor
Senior System Engineer ASW
Surveillance Systems
LEIDOS
Washington D. C.

Friday March 9

¹³The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. ¹⁵Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" ¹⁷His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" ¹⁹Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹But he was speaking of the temple of his body. ²²After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. ²³When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. ²⁴But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

John 2:13-25



Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, We come to you Lord thanking you for all the things that we have, and the things that we don't have. We ask Lord that you give us the strength to remain disciplined through this Lent season. We ask Lord that the things that we give up, be a lesson to us, that as long as we have you in our hearts, that there is no mission we can't accomplish. For these and the many blessings we ask for, in your son Jesus' name we pray.

Amen

Ryan Jones
Instructional Assistant
J.B. Fisher Elementary School
Richmond, Virginia

Saturday March 10

¹⁸For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. ¹⁹For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." ²⁰Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. ²²For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, ²³but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, ²⁴but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. ²⁵For God's foolishness is wiser than

human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. ²⁶Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹so that no one might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹in order that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

1 Corinthians 1:18-31

Prayer:

With the world filled with the wisdom of men and women, help me to be reminded that it is only through your wisdom God that I truly understand. I look not to signs and earthly wisdom, but I open my heart to those things that are foolish. Your power is made manifest through the cross and the cross alone. I am humbled by your love through Christ Jesus.

Amen

Keith N. Johnson Jr.
Bon Secours Hospice Chaplain
Richmond, Virginia

Sunday March 11

¹⁶"And whenever you fast, do not look dismal, like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces so as to show others

that they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, ¹⁸so that your fasting may be seen not by others but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. ¹⁹"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Matthew 6:16-21 NRSV

"You Don't Have To Look Like You're Going Through!"

Don't misinterpret the headline. You read it exactly as it is supposed to be read. "You don't have to look like you're going through" is vastly different than the more frequently used statement, "You don't look like what you've been through." The latter suggest that there is much you've experienced and faced. At the end of the day, you have overcome all of that, and you don't display any evidence of a person who looks like they've been through as much as you may have been through. However, the former says, what appears to be breaking you down is actually building you up. Trust the process! What seems to be tearing you apart is not doing that at all. Everything that you're in the process of experiencing is making way for God to bring you forth in a way that will allow you to be stronger than anything you will face after the fact. It's just pressure being applied in order to remove the blemishes. Does a diamond resemble its end at its beginning? No! Everything that presents itself like a flame of fire coming to consume you, is only heat required to knock off the dust and dirt. Does gold shine in the beginning like it does after undergoing the flames of the furnace? No! So when you feel the pressure being applied and the fire is burning hotter than it has ever burned before, just keep telling yourself, "I don't have to look like what I'm going through."

Remember, everything that we are attempting to accomplish in this season has an end goal that is greater than us alone. And though

we look to inhabit an end that meets everything we set out to accomplish in the beginning, we must not be so quick in picking the remote up to hit the fast forward button in order to get to the end. The process is necessary! Without the process we will not be able to fully appreciate the end when it comes. With no process, there will be no finished product to appreciate. We have to first appreciate the process in order to understand why God intends to achieve the end goal by bringing us through so much. So you might as well get comfortable in the middle of the process. It's the process that helps us with understanding how to behave accordingly, once we receive everything we desire to obtain in the end. Abandoning the process in hopes of returning to it once the end is near will leave us in a space of disappointment, because we will be holding on to something that will look vastly different from what we envisioned it to be in the beginning. "You don't have to look like what you're going through!" But you will, if you lack patience and choose to evacuate before it's all said and done.

Growing up, my dad was the master of many things when it came to cooking. And I used to pay very close attention to him while he was in the kitchen cooking, because I felt a calling to the art of cooking at a very young age. When I would find my dad in the kitchen cooking, I noticed that once he started the process, he never left the kitchen until everything was finished. This baffled me at times, because the way my dad went about cooking was totally different than the way my mom handled cooking. When Daddy cooked, that's all daddy did. Not mom though! When Ma cooked, somehow or another she could cook, sew, read an entire book, and watch television simultaneously. I thought that was a miraculous feat to accomplish. I mean, Ma could fry chicken in the cast iron without turning it, almost. However, with the many tasks Ma could accomplish while cooking and still get it done, and with the little Daddy did while cooking, it is with a heavy heart that I say, my daddy was the better cook (Inserts Sigh). Ma is somewhere saying, "Doesn't look like he missed anything from my cooking, does it?"

Ha! [shoulder shrug]

So, one day I asked my dad, "Why do you stay in the kitchen when you're cooking? Why don't you just sit down until you're finished?" My dad replied, (while motioning his straight arm and closed fist to help get his point across) "Son, when you start cooking, you have to take your time with it. You can't cut the heat up to high and try to cook it too fast. You have to keep an eye on it so that you'll know when it's getting ready to be done." Not when it's done, but when it's getting ready to be done. Yes! Daddy said, "When it's getting ready to be done, that's when you get your plate ready because that's when it's time to eat!" And sure enough, my dad was right! No matter how hard I try to do things differently when I enter the kitchen, what I know is exactly what he explained to me at an early age. When you are preparing a meal, you have to be patient. You cannot turn the heat up to high and try to cook it too fast, and you have to keep an eye on what you're cooking from start to finish. I have burnt many biscuits, lost many beans to the bottom of the pot, and have had some of the most golden crisp pork chops look better on the outside than they did on the inside. All of this because I desired not to be patient, or chose to be like Ma and attempt to multitask while cooking. Shucks!

Good day Saints, enter this week knowing that you must be patient and you must keep an eye on what God is doing in your life throughout the process. Like my Daddy says, "You have to keep an eye on things, so you'll know when it's getting ready to be done." So keep both eyes focused on what God is doing with you and around you in this season. That way you will know when God is getting ready to be done. And when you see that God is getting ready to be done, wash your hands and get your plate ready. That is when it will be time to eat. "God is great! God is Good! Let us thank him for our food. By God's hands we are fed. Give us Lord our daily bread. Amen!" Just be patient, you don't have to look like what you're going through. Trust the process!

Great God!

Prayer:

God, you are the author and the finisher of our faith. You are the one who knew our beginning, while at the same time having an eye on our end. In all that, you yet display patience with us. You desire not to rush us along the journey. You intend on allowing us the privilege of enduring everything along the way, and you do not push us past the very things that are placed along the way to build us up. Therefore, if you can display patience with us, we make a promise to display patience as well. And while we are going through, while we are feeling as though the walls are being torn down all around us, we trust that you're only sending us through much in order to obtain much. So we will rejoice because of it all. We will smile because of it all. We will delight in the midst of it all. Yes, we know, We don't have to look like we're going through!

Amen!

Monday March 12

When the Canaanite, the king of Arad, who lived in the Negeb, heard that Israel was coming by the way of Atharim, he fought against Israel and took some of them captive.² Then Israel made a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will indeed give this people into our hands, then we will utterly destroy their towns."³ The LORD listened to the voice of Israel, and handed over the Canaanites; and they utterly destroyed them and their towns; so the place was called Hormah.⁴ From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom; but the people became impatient on the way.⁵ The people spoke against God and against Moses, "Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food."⁶ Then the LORD sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died.⁷ The people came to Moses and said, "We have sinned by

speaking against the LORD and against you; pray to the LORD to take away the serpents from us." So Moses prayed for the people. ⁸And the LORD said to Moses, "Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole; and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live." ⁹So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

Numbers 21:1-9

Prayer:

Dear God, for you, are the God of the oppressed, and since being on this land, we have tasted the lash on our backs and felt the bullets pierce our skin. Father, you heard our cries and moved us from a place of enslavement into the wilderness so we may learn the power of who we are in You.

There are times we stray in a weakness of aimless thoughts and actions. In those times, You are always faithful to not only give us grace but to love us enough to set us back on Your righteous path. Though the Snakes surround us and pierce our skin with their deathly venoms of:

- Hyper Economic injustice
- Rampant White Supremacy and Racism

- Unequal treatment under the law
- The violent destruction of the black body
- The rights and freedoms of all of our brothers and sisters – including LGBT community

Father - with each drop of venom we suffer, we will look towards You and Your healing grace.

Just like those former Hebrew slaves, those of us that believe will live and those that do not shall perish. We know that you are our God and you are full of Grace – even in the wilderness.

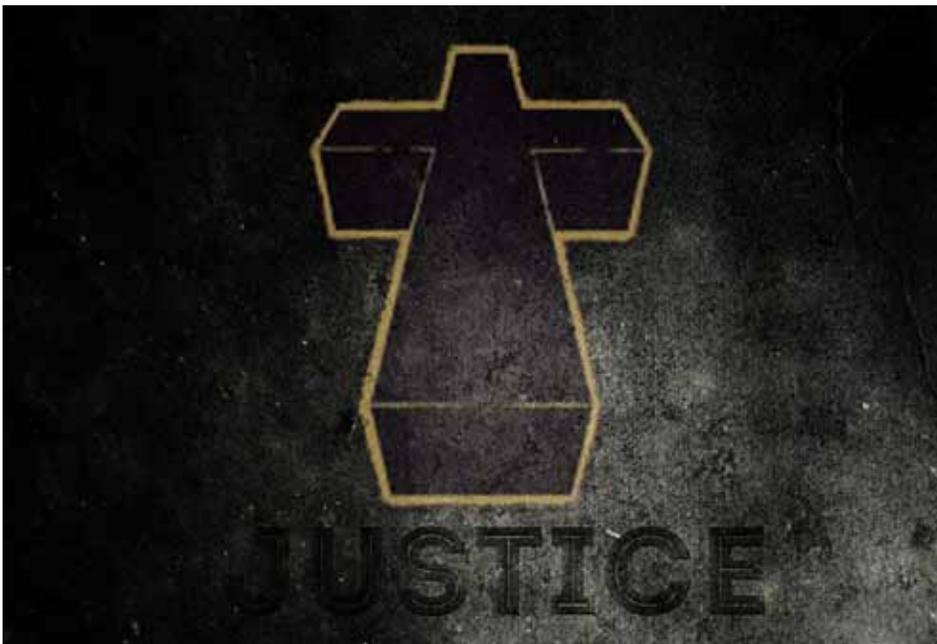
Amen

Lafayette Jefferson Jr.
Organizer
Free People Project
Petersburg, Virginia

Tuesday March 13

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever. ²Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble ³and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south. ⁴Some wandered in desert wastes, finding no way to an inhabited town; ⁵hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted within them. ⁶Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble,

and he delivered them from their distress; ⁷he led them by a straight way, until they reached an inhabited town. ⁸Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. ⁹For he satisfies the thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things. ¹⁰Some sat in darkness and in gloom, prisoners in misery and in irons, ¹¹for they had rebelled against the words of God, and spurned the counsel of the Most High. ¹²Their hearts were bowed down with hard labor; they fell down, with no one to help. ¹³Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; ¹⁴he brought them out of darkness and gloom, and broke their bonds asunder. ¹⁵Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. ¹⁶For he shatters the doors of bronze, and cuts in two the bars of iron. ¹⁷Some were sick through their sinful ways, and because of their iniquities endured affliction; ¹⁸they loathed any kind of food, and they drew near to the gates of death. ¹⁹Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress; ²⁰he sent out his word and healed them, and delivered them from destruction. ²¹Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. ²²And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices, and tell of his deeds with songs of joy. ²³Some went down to the sea in ships, doing business on the mighty waters; ²⁴they saw the deeds of the LORD, his wondrous works in the deep. ²⁵For he commanded and raised the stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. ²⁶They mounted up to heaven, they went down to the depths; their courage melted away in their calamity; ²⁷they reeled and staggered like drunkards, and were at their wits' end. ²⁸Then they cried to the LORD in their trouble, and he brought them out from their distress; ²⁹he made the storm be still, and the waves of the sea were hushed. ³⁰Then they were glad because they had quiet, and he brought them to their desired haven. ³¹Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wonderful works to humankind. ³²Let them extol him in the congregation of the people, and praise him in the assembly of the elders. ³³He turns rivers into a desert, springs of water into thirsty ground, ³⁴a fruitful land into a salty waste, because of the wickedness of its



inhabitants. ³⁵He turns a desert into pools of water, a parched land into springs of water. ³⁶And there he lets the hungry live, and they establish a town to live in; ³⁷they sow fields, and plant vineyards, and get a fruitful yield. ³⁸By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their cattle decrease. ³⁹When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, trouble, and sorrow, ⁴⁰he pours contempt on princes and makes them wander in trackless wastes; ⁴¹but he raises up the needy out of distress, and makes their families like flocks. ⁴²The upright see it and are glad; and all wickedness stops its mouth. ⁴³Let those who are wise give heed to these things, and consider the steadfast love of the LORD.

Psalms 107

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, first we just want to say thank you. We know that thank you is not sufficient enough for all you have done for us, but with praise in our heart we say thank you. It is only by your grace and mercy that we are able to be here today. We are living in hard times and we need you now more than ever. Times we are separated by views and beliefs when the one belief we need is You. We need you now father, we need your grace and mercy, we need your forgiveness and we need your love. Show us Father how to love more than hate and how to give more than we take. Father, we also ask that as we are blessed, allow us to shed your light towards others and be a blessing to others that they may see you in us. Thank you, Lord of all! In the mighty name of Jesus we do pray.

Amen

Keyode Rogers
Health and Physical Educator
L.C. Bird High School
Chester, Virginia

Wednesday March 14

Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. ²He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." ³Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." ⁴Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" ⁵Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. ⁶What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' ⁸The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." ⁹Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things? ¹¹"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. ¹⁶"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. ¹⁷"Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. ¹⁸Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. ¹⁹And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. ²¹But those who do

what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

John 3:1-21

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, We declare that you are indeed the God of our salvation. It is by your grace, through a confession of faith, that we are saved, and because of your renewing mercies that we are not consumed by all evil. Thank you for your unchanging hand that has redeemed us from iniquity and distress. Realizing that no man is perfect; and at times we have complained and even committed sins against your will, you have still given us the ultimate gift of eternal life. God, without you we can do nothing. We have been created in the likeness of Jesus Christ to complete the good works that you have set before us. Thank you for the strength that you have given and your love everlasting that has equipped us to endure the things of this earth until your awaited coming.

Amen

Jocelyn Logan
Health and Physical Educator
Huguenot High School
Richmond, Virginia

Thursday March 15

²²After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he spent some time there with them and baptized. ²³John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim because water was abundant there; and people kept coming and were being baptized ²⁴— John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. ²⁵Now a discussion about purification arose between John's disciples and a Jew. ²⁶They came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him." ²⁷John answered, "No one can receive anything except what has been

given from heaven. ²⁸You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, 'I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.' ²⁹He who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. For this reason my joy has been fulfilled. ³⁰He must increase, but I must decrease."

³¹The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is of the earth belongs to the earth and speaks about earthly things. The one who comes from heaven is above all. ³²He testifies to what he has seen and heard, yet no one accepts his testimony.

³³Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true. ³⁴He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure. ³⁵The Father loves the Son and has placed all things in his hands. ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure God's wrath.

John 3:22-36

Prayer:

My God, hear my prayer. When your goodness is present within us, please help us to show your worth. When you live within us and work through us in order to bring justice to those who are experiencing injustice, help us to remember that it is not of us, but that it's you that reside on the inside of us. May we be like John, who understood his purpose, and did not fail to prepare the people for the Messiah to come. If we succeed in sharing you with others, we will succeed in conquering evil in every aspect. Let your love conquer all, in and around us.

Amen

Friday March 16

You were dead through the trespasses and sins ²in 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. ³All 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. ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰For 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:

While we all have sinned and many have demons, Christ, you have brought us together in this setting to help each of us overcome. Having us sit together, work together, pray together, and fellowship together; God, you are saving us through Faith. You preach forgiveness and our actions of atoning for our mistakes, to absolve those who have trespassed and sinned against us. This demonstrates that we believe in the Faith and are appreciative of your mercy. We have to remember that the Church is not the only heavenly place. We sit together in the community; helping the less fortunate, educating the community on Christ, and holding our community leaders accountable to the public. This continuing belief in you shows our appreciation for the gift you have placed upon us and brings us one step closer to Christ our Savior.

Amen

Victor Millner
Personal Banker
Wells Fargo N. A.
Richmond, Virginia



Saturday March 17

¹¹So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision"—a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands— ¹²remember that you were at that time without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. ¹⁵He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, ¹⁶and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. ¹⁷So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; ¹⁸for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, ²⁰Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. ²¹In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; ²²in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Ephesians 2:11-22

Prayer:

Grow us together oh God! As each day goes by, it appears that creation is working against itself. Turmoil is all around us, and humankind is in array for many different reasons. Hate and evil is invasive, but I am convinced that your love can overwhelm it all. So that is why we continue to bow our heads and close our eyes. It is in these moments of silence, when we are able to hear from you and find resolutions to all the chaos that exists amongst us. Show us the way God! We desire to be better tomorrow than we were on today.

Amen

Sunday March 18

⁸God said to Noah and his sons, ⁹“I am now making my covenant with you and with your descendants, ¹⁰and with all living beings—all birds and all animals—everything that came out of the boat with you. ¹¹With these words I make my covenant with you: I promise that never again will all living beings be destroyed by a flood; never again will a flood destroy the earth. ¹²As a sign of this everlasting covenant which I am making with you and with all living beings, ¹³I am putting my bow in the clouds. It will be the sign of my covenant with the world. ¹⁴Whenever I cover the sky with clouds and the rainbow appears, ¹⁵I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals that a flood will never again destroy all living beings. ¹⁶When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings on earth. ¹⁷That is the sign of the promise which I am making to all living beings.”

Genesis 9:8-17 GNT

“God’s Word is Bond”

Open yourself up to what God desires to do with you and for you. If you maintain an open line of communication with God, you will come to recognize that whatever covenant God established with you, it shall be upheld. Even when we are unstable in our ways, God maintains

stability to prove to us that the covenant established between you and God is still in existence. Once God says it, it is done! God’s Word is Bond! God will always do what God has promised you. Not only is God’s Word Bond with you, but your right to exist in this world in such a way, is all due to the fact that God made a promise to those who came before you. No matter how removed you are from the covenant made between you and God or between your ancestors and God, God’s word is still Bond!

At any given day we can attest to God standing on the promises made years ago; by only catching a glimpse of a rainbow that can randomly pop up in the sky, once the sun begins to shine after a brief period of rain. That’s God keeping God’s word!

¹²As a sign of this everlasting covenant which I am making with you and with all living beings, ¹³I am putting my bow in the clouds. It will be the sign of my covenant with the world. ¹⁴Whenever I cover the sky with clouds and the rainbow appears, ¹⁵I will remember my promise to you and to all the animals that a flood will never again destroy all living beings. ¹⁶When the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living beings on earth. ¹⁷That is the sign of the promise which I am making to all living beings.”

Genesis 9:12-17 GNT

Because of Noah, God established a covenant with him for all people. Just as God established with Noah many years ago, there are so many other covenants that we are reaping benefits from, because God’s word is bond!

Imagine the type of world we could live in, if our words were bond. Just think about how wonderful existing would be in a world where people stood on the promises they made, and stood on what they said. Just think about it for a moment. Talk about eradicating racism, eliminating poverty, being a free and welcoming space to immigrants and refugees, embracing with love and open arms all people for who they rightfully choose to be, without judgement. What an amazing feeling it would be to dwell in community as one, being ok with disagreeing with your

brothers and sisters, but not allowing your disagreements to wedge you apart. If our word was bond, all of this could be possible. But until that day, you can rest assure that God’s Word will forever be bond. God’s not taking it back, and there’s not a thing you can do about it.

Let the Church say, “Amen!”

Prayer:

We are so glad that you continue to keep your word God. Because you have kept your word, we are comforted in knowing that there is one whom we can put our trust in. When family and friends fail to keep their word, we know that your word is bond. When community leaders and elected officials fail to keep their word, we can look to you and know that your word will never fail. So we lift up our prayer on this day, declaring that as a people, we will strive to be more like you. You have set the example for us God. Continue to strengthen us and cause us to stand on our word with others, like you have done with us for such a long time. Our hope is that we no longer fail our sisters and brothers when they are hurting and in despair. But we will show them that our word, like yours, is bond! With you standing up in us, we will begin to stand up for them. It is so!

Amen





Tuesday March 20

Happy are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD.
²Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart,
³who also do no wrong, but walk in his ways. ⁴You have commanded your precepts to be kept diligently. ⁵O that my ways may be steadfast in keeping your statutes! ⁶Then I shall not be put to shame, having my eyes fixed on all your commandments. ⁷I will praise you with an upright heart, when I learn your righteous ordinances. ⁸I will observe your statutes; do not utterly forsake me. ⁹How can young people keep their way pure? By guarding it according to your word. ¹⁰With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. ¹¹I treasure your word in my heart, so that I may not sin against you. ¹²Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes. ¹³With my lips I declare all the ordinances of your mouth. ¹⁴I delight in the way of your decrees as much as in all riches. ¹⁵I will meditate on your precepts, and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word.

Monday March 19

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. ³²It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. ³³But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more. ³⁵Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is his name: ³⁶If this fixed order were ever to cease from my presence, says the LORD, then also the offspring of Israel would cease to be a nation before me forever. ³⁷Thus says the LORD: If the heavens above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth below can be explored, then I will reject all the offspring of Israel because of all they have done, says the LORD. ³⁸The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when the city shall be rebuilt for the LORD from the tower of Hananel to the

Corner Gate. ³⁹And the measuring line shall go out farther, straight to the hill Gareb, and shall then turn to Goah. ⁴⁰The whole valley of the dead bodies and the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Wadi Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, shall be sacred to the LORD. It shall never again be uprooted or overthrown.

Jeremiah 31:31-40

Prayer:
Holy and Almighty God,
 As we continue in this Lenten season, help us to continue to remember the new covenant you made with your people, the covenant through your son, the Christ. Help us to remember his extraordinary act of love and sacrifice that is written on each of our hearts. Today may we each remember that no matter the obstacles in our lives, the covenant of Christ remains bigger than any of us alone.
 We pray to you, in your son’s name, together as one people,
 Amen
 Clayton Summers
 System Engineer
 Northrop Grumman
 Schaumburg, Illinois

Psalm 119:1-16

Prayer:
 Lord, we hear your clarion call for the repentance of your people. Forgive us for the ways in which we have not proclaimed the Gospel of justice and righteousness. Show your mercy towards us. When we enter into your sacred space, help us to hear more clearly the word of God. Consecrate the gathered assembly. Sanctify our spirits to be one with the Holy. Cleanse our hearts to reflect the heart of Christ. As we draw closer to Thee, hear our prayers. As we love one another, hear our prayers. As we commit to the work of justice, hear our prayers. Consecrate us now oh Lord to do thine will with grace and mercy.
 Amen
 Nicole D. McDonald, DMin
 Christian Theological Seminary
 PhD Student
 Indianapolis, Indiana

Wednesday March 21

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. ²He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; ³and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. ⁴And one does not presume to take this honor, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. ⁵So 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"; ⁶as he says also in another place, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek." ⁷In 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. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek. ¹¹About this we have much to say that is hard to explain, since you have become dull in understanding. ¹²For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic elements of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food; ¹³for everyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is unskilled in the word of righteousness. ¹⁴But solid food is for the mature, for those whose faculties have been trained by practice to distinguish good from evil.

Hebrews 5

Prayer:

God of Truth, As we surrender and seek You reveal to us the truth we have refused to see. Show us the ways in which we have been deceptive in our inmost being. Bring to our awareness the internal and external ways we have deceived ourselves and others. Shine your light on how we have refused to die to self and allow Your way of being to live fully and freely in and through us. Expose how

we have misused our power, positions and possessions in ways that do not serve others and advance Your kingdom. Give us the courage and strength to follow in the way of Jesus, especially when our souls are troubled and it's tempting to turn away from suffering that is necessary for justice and genuine love. We trust you with our very lives; with our every breath. Now lead us in Your way and grant us a willing and sustaining spirit.

In the Name of Jesus we pray.

Amen.

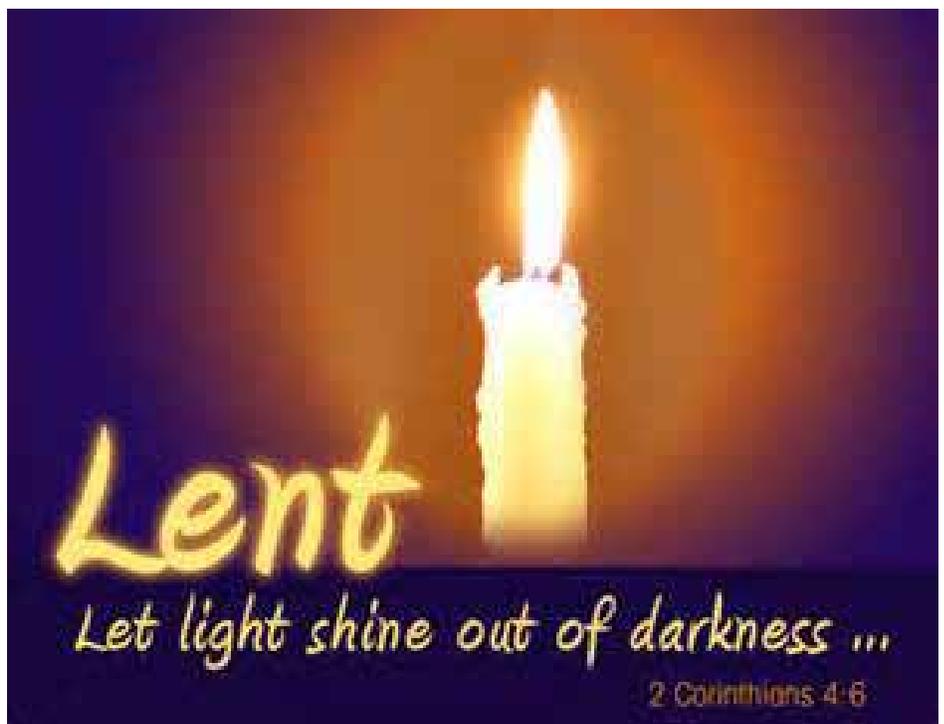
Larry J. Morris III
M. Div/MatthewS Student at
Claremont School of Theology
Claremont, California

Thursday March 22

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I know my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me. ⁴Against 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. ⁵Indeed, I was born guilty, a sinner when my mother conceived me. ⁶You desire truth in the inward being; therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart. ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have crushed rejoice. ⁹Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. ¹²Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit. ¹³Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will return to you. ¹⁴Deliver me from bloodshed, O God, O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance. ¹⁵O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. ¹⁶For you have no delight in sacrifice; if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased. ¹⁷The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. ¹⁸Do good to Zion in your good pleasure; rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, ¹⁹then you will delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar.

Psalms 51



Prayer:

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears... In this same trail of tears- we approach you God. These tearful waters tread deep with the pain of the parent who lost their child to gun violence, the trauma of witnessing our kin murdered in the name of World Star, the generational bruise of hateful persons in positions of power. Today, with my lips I declare all the ordinances of Your mouth! While they attempt to control my narrative, I declare that I am Your child. While they attempt to further sanction me, I declare that I am sanctified by Your Holy anger. While they continue in their vein of oppressive technique, I declare that Your blood and Your wisdom flow through me. From the tearful depth of this ancestral river, I approach you God and declare Your power be made manifest through me in this world!

Amen!

Lee B. Ivey III
MDiv & MACMHC Candidate '18
Christian Theological Seminary
Indianapolis, Indiana

**COME
TOGETHER**

Friday March 23

²⁰Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²²Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴Very 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. ²⁵Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. ²⁷"Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say— 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. ³²And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." ³³He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die. ³⁴The 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?" ³⁵Jesus 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. ³⁶While 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. ³⁷Although he had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him. ³⁸This was to fulfill the word spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "Lord, who has believed our message, and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" ³⁹And so they could not believe, because Isaiah also said, ⁴⁰"He has blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, so that they might not look with their eyes, and understand with their heart and turn —

and I would heal them." ⁴¹Isaiah said this because he saw his glory and spoke about him. ⁴²Nevertheless many, even of the authorities, believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they did not confess it, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³for they loved human glory more than the glory that comes from God. ⁴⁴Then Jesus cried aloud: "Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. ⁴⁵And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. ⁴⁶I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness. ⁴⁷I do not judge anyone who hears my words and does not keep them, for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. ⁴⁸The one who rejects me and does not receive my word has a judge; on the last day the word that I have spoken will serve as judge, ⁴⁹for I have not spoken on my own, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment about what to say and what to speak. ⁵⁰And I know that his commandment is eternal life. What I speak, therefore, I speak just as the Father has told me."

John 12:20-50

Prayer:

Lord, we pray as a community to open our hearts so that your will can be seen as we care for our neighbors. Throughout this season, allow us all to reconnect and experience the love of God and demonstrate a love of God's like no other time before.

Amen.

Clarissa Shepherd
Prevention Specialist
Four Rivers Behavioral Health
Metropolis, Illinois

Saturday March 24

If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, ²make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. ³Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. ⁴Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. ⁵Let the same mind be in you

that was[a] in Christ Jesus, ⁶who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, ⁷but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, ⁸he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross. ⁹Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:1-11

Prayer:

As we seek out to accomplish much, let the same mind be in us that was also in Christ. We make this plea understanding the stakes at hand. We understand what it will take in order to overcome all of the rocks and bumps along the way. We understand the yearning of flesh to desire to take all of the glory for everything good that comes from us. But God, all we desire to do is to dismantle hate and injustice, and in return offer the Love of God! So humble us, silent our voices, provide us with patience, and cover us so that we can only do what you have purposed us to do.

Amen

**Sunday March 25
Palm Sunday**

¹⁶When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: ¹⁸"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." ²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say



to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." ²²All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. They said, "Is not this Joseph's son?" ²³He said to them, "Doubtless you will quote to me this proverb, 'Doctor, cure yourself!' And you will say, 'Do here also in your hometown the things that we have heard you did at Capernaum.'" ²⁴And he said, "Truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet's hometown. ²⁵But the truth is, there were many widows in Israel in the time of Elijah, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, and there was a severe famine over all the land; ²⁶yet Elijah was sent to none of them except to a widow at Zarephath in Sidon. ²⁷There were also many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed except Naaman the Syrian." ²⁸When they heard this, all in the synagogue were filled with rage. ²⁹They got up, drove him out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they might hurl him off the cliff. ³⁰But he passed through the midst of them and went on his way.

Luke 4:16-30 NRSV

"Led by The Spirit"

To understand one's purpose in life, is at times, an extremely difficult concept to grasp. Purpose: the reason for which something is done or created, or for which something exists. The reasoning for our existence is purpose. There is a cause for us being here at this current moment in time. God has purposed us! God has intentions for us! God has a plan for our lives! And when one comes to know what it is that

God has purposed them to do in life, it then becomes one's obligation to accomplish this task. Not only is it difficult at times to understand your purpose, but it also tends to become an extremely arduous task in helping others to believe in what God has called you to.

God has called us to a place where we are able to see the travesty transpiring throughout the world. Not only has God positioned us to see it, but God has also called us to a place where we are now able to speak to everything that is transpiring throughout, resulting in these very same things to change. God has positioned us, inspired us, equipped us, and purposed us! It is by God's Spirit which has led us to this place in time. Yet, it appears as though, at times, we can only trust in that same Spirit to journey down this path with us.

So then, we discover that in purpose, there are times when being led by the Spirit can be the only thing we can rely on to accomplish the work that God has called us to. When we are led by the Spirit we recognize that sometimes purpose positions us in dangerous spaces. But if we remain faithful to what God has called us to, then we will witness that there is provision that will offer us a way of escape. Luke's Gospel records Jesus being led by the Spirit to publicly speak what God has called him to accomplish. And it is because of his public announcement that Jesus finds himself in a dangerous space surrounded by people who desire to take his life. But because he is led by the Spirit, he finds a way of escape.

When we, the children of God,

allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit, that's when we will come to understand what God has called us to. And even when we find ourselves in dangerous circumstances, the Spirit will offer us a way to escape the hand of iniquity, and continue the work by which God has called us to. When you are sure that what you are doing in life is ordained by God, there is no place or person that can prevent you from accomplishing what God has purposed you to do. When God has anointed you...When God has appointed you...When God has set you apart...When God has placed hands upon you...When God has embraced you with spirit and truth.... When God has brought you to a place in life where you are privileged to offer deliverance to those who are unable to deliver themselves...God will ensure that there is not a demon in hell that will be able to stop you. When you are led by God's Spirit and you know the power that exists within you, that is when you are able to provide the Spirit with access to lead you through dangers seen and unseen. Go forth and be led by the Spirit!
Until Next Time!

Prayer:

There are times when being led by your Spirit is a difficult task to accomplish. But because you have called us for such a time as this, God we know that being led by your Spirit is our only route for survival. So we freely grant your Spirit access to guide us through. And it is by your Spirit that we will be able to accomplish everything you have purposed us to accomplish. And even though we walk through dark valleys, we shall not fear evil. By allowing your Spirit to lead us, we will overcome evil until evil exists no longer. We thank you in advance, because we know that it is already done.

Amen!

**Monday March 26
Holy Week**

Thus says the LORD: Where is your mother's bill of divorce with which I put her away? Or which of my creditors is it to whom I have sold you? No, because of your sins you were sold, and for your transgressions your mother was put away. ²Why was no one there when I came? Why did no one answer when I called? Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? By my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water, and die of thirst. ³I clothe the heavens with blackness, and make sackcloth their covering. ⁴The Lord GOD has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he awakens — awakens my ear to listen as those who are taught. ⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ⁹It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

Isaiah 50:1-9

Be gracious to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eye wastes away from grief, my soul and body also. ¹⁰For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my misery, and my bones waste away. ¹¹I 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. ¹²I have passed out of mind like one who is dead; I have become like a broken vessel. ¹³For I hear the whispering of many — terror all around! — as they scheme together against me, as they plot to take my life. ¹⁴But I trust in you, O LORD; I say, "You are my God." ¹⁵My times are in your hand; deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors. ¹⁶Let your face shine upon your servant; save me in your steadfast love.

Prayer:

Prayer for Strength for the Lord's Mission

As I awaken every day in these trying times that test my faith unrelentingly, I know that you are with me Lord. I know my life's mission is to serve you Lord, and my mission must proceed even in the face of adversity and even with the pain that is inflicted upon me by my enemies. Isaiah 50:6-9 describes the suffering that the servant endures from his enemies as he righteously carries out your mission Lord. I pray that you protect me from the pain endured by this world as I avoid temptation, speak your divine word, and remain hopeful at times when it seems all hope is lost. I pray that this is when my faith is its strongest. Psalm 31: 14-15 says, "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." May the blessing of your love forever guide my heart and guide my life as I continue your mission. Lord thank you for another day that you have blessed and spared my life. On this day I give you the pain!

Amen!

Corey Underwood
Health Educator
Potomac High School
Oxon Hill, Maryland

Prayer:

Father I come to you with humility and humbleness, realizing that you order my steps and speak sound knowledge and counsel to my soul. Although that counsel sometimes falls on deaf ears and as a result I am faced with distress and anguish. But you are a friend that sticks closer than any brother and deliver me from the hands of my enemies; even if the enemy is sometimes

myself. Lord I pray that you allow me to be a witness to someone else for we all should have the same mind set as Jesus Christ; humility, humbleness and servitude. Only through seeking your face will we be able to take "ourselves" out of the equation and consider the well-being and uplifting of others. Throughout the world this has often been forgotten, even to the point that some question your servants and attack your church. But father you said in your word "Let lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous" (Psalm 31:18). For it is already written, you conquer the grave, death and all adversaries; holiness is right and is triumphant in the end. As when your son was crucified, we will sometimes be mocked, ridiculed, and spat on; but every day I confide in the fact in knowing all my help comes from you and I shall come forth as pure gold.

Amen!

Brandon Penn
Systems Analyst
Old Dominion Freight Line
High Point, North Carolina

Tuesday March 27

O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his steadfast love endures forever! ²Let Israel say, "His steadfast love endures forever." ³Let the house of Aaron say, "His steadfast love endures forever." ⁴Let those who fear the LORD say, "His steadfast love endures forever." ⁵Out of my distress I called on the LORD; the LORD answered me and set me in a broad place. ⁶With the LORD on my side I do not fear. What can mortals do to me? ⁷The LORD is on my side to help me; I shall look in triumph on those who hate me. ⁸It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in mortals. ⁹It is better to take refuge in the LORD than to put confidence in princes. ¹⁰All nations surrounded me; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! ¹¹They surrounded me, surrounded me on every side; in the

name of the LORD I cut them off! ¹²They surrounded me like bees; they blazed like a fire of thorns; in the name of the LORD I cut them off! ¹³I was pushed hard, so that I was falling, but the LORD helped me. ¹⁴The LORD is my strength and my might; he has become my salvation. ¹⁵There are glad songs of victory in the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD does valiantly; ¹⁶the right hand of the LORD is exalted; the right hand of the LORD does valiantly." ¹⁷I shall not die, but I shall live, and recount the deeds of the LORD. ¹⁸The LORD has punished me severely, but he did not give me over to death. ¹⁹Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the LORD. ²⁰This is the gate of the LORD; the righteous shall enter through it. ²¹I thank you that you have answered me and have become my salvation. ²²The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. ²³This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. ²⁴This is the day that the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it. ²⁵Save us, we beseech you, O LORD! O LORD, we beseech you, give us success! ²⁶Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD. We bless you from the house of the LORD. ²⁷The LORD is God, and he has given us light. Bind the festal procession with branches, up to the horns of the altar. ²⁸You are my God, and I will give thanks to you; you are my God, I will extol you. ²⁹O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever.

Psalm 118

Prayer:

Father God in the name of Jesus, I come to you as humble as I know how. In reading Psalm 118, it really hit home, I'm that stone the builders rejected. All of my life rejection has been before me in so many different ways; family, friends, and people in general. It almost feels as though I have been incarcerated to society's view of who I should be. But I thank you for having another plan for me, in not allowing people to decide my destiny. I really don't desire anything today. I just want to tell you thank you. You've protected me from dangers seen and unseen. Even in my imperfections and constantly letting you down; You're still perfect with your grace and mercy. I ask you to forgive me for my sins, and continue to give me wisdom and knowledge. I know you have great things for me to do for your kingdom. Please continue to stick by my side guiding me the way you would like me to go. Shield and protect my family. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen

Lamar Brown
CAP Counselor for Children with Autism
Rivermont School
Danville, Virginia



Wednesday March 28

The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ²As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; ³the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" ⁴John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts and wild honey. ⁷He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. ⁸I have baptized you with water; but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit." ⁹In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. ¹¹And a voice came from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased."

Mark 1:1-11

Prayer:

Father we come today thanking you for your power, wisdom, and direction. Help us to remember that in everything we do we allow you to be the center of focus. In our walk of life help us to introduce Jesus so that others can see you in us. Let us be like John the Baptist and acknowledge that you are mightier and bigger than I. In Jesus Name we pray

Amen

Michael Palmer
IT Manager
New College Institute
Martinsville, Virginia

Thursday March 29 Maundy Thursday

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

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

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. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then 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. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus 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." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean. ¹²After 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? ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are

messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them. ¹⁸I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But it is to fulfill the scripture, 'The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' ¹⁹I tell you this now, before it occurs, so that when it does occur, you may believe that I am he. ²⁰Very truly, I tell you, whoever receives one whom I send receives me; and whoever receives me receives him who sent me."

John 13:1-17

³¹When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little 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.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 13:31-35

Prayer:

God that holds all power in your hands. Help us to withstand the last days of this journey with resilience. As we prepare to reign in victory, keep our eyes stayed on you. Help us to evade evil as it haphazardly attempts to cease in the end, what you had made clear to us in the beginning. Allow love to reign in such a way that through us, all will be able to witness your glory like never before. Though we may exist in places alongside the very ones that strive to see us fail, and anger intends to creep its way into our hearts, purify us and allow love to yet embrace them. And because of this, all will come to know that we are your disciples. As you performed through your son, Christ Jesus, may you perform the same in us!

Amen!

Friday March 30
Good Friday

²⁸After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), "I am thirsty."²⁹A 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.³⁰When Jesus had received the wine, he said, "It is finished." Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

John 19:28-30 NRSV

"Why Are You Still Speaking?"

We arrive now to a place in Scripture that is, for me, extremely challenging. According to John's Gospel, Jesus has already fulfilled the scripture by saying, "I Am Thirsty." But, in light of what the Gospel writer is suggesting to us, Jesus is not finished speaking just yet. The text says, "After this, when Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said (in order to fulfill the scripture), 'I am thirsty.'" But then it continues to say, "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."

The Scripture has been fulfilled; all that needed to happen has happened. The Jury has already come to a unanimous decision. The thorns have been placed on his head; the whipping has been applied. Jesus has been carried from judgement hall to judgement hall. He has walked the last mile; he has reached the peak of the hill. The cross has been lifted and everything that was foretold to being said, has been said. But yet, they are still gathered around him, long enough to dip the sponge full of wine and place it towards his mouth. Then, after they have done all of this, Jesus continues to speak; and he then says, "It is finished."

Let's be honest. What we have witnessed in the text up to this point is by far the most gruesome act of civil injustice ever displayed by humankind. An innocent man has been murdered. There is absolutely no evidence whatsoever that can be held against him. But in spite of the judge

insisting that they let him go free, the state, along with its people, choose to overrule the judge's recommendations, and move forward with killing this man, Jesus "The Christ." And not only have we witnessed such tragedy, but the most disheartening act, I would suggest, is hearing the writer imply that even after Jesus had said everything he was supposed to say, even after quenching his thirst, Jesus isn't done speaking.

OMG!!!! This should sound all too familiar. You have tried to live a life that is favorable in God's eyes. You have done all you could to ensure that the least of these received their due diligence. You have fought the fight and kept the faith. When they were hungry you opened up food pantries. When they were thirsty you sent truckloads of water to ensure that they might have access to clean water. When they were naked you initiated coat drives and opened up your closets to clothe them. When they needed shelter, you pointed them to the places that would receive them with open arms to cover them. When they were wrongfully imprisoned, you fought for their release and prayed for them on a consistent basis. And in lieu of what you, have done that appears to be just in the eyes of God and humanity, you are stilled chastised, attacked by vicious animals, and still find yourself facing armed forces when you are fighting on behalf of someone else's human rights. But not only that, even the ones who are supposed to know you better than the naysayers, they even attempt to engage in the wrongful acts of the oppressors, in attempts of putting an end to all that you have been fighting for.

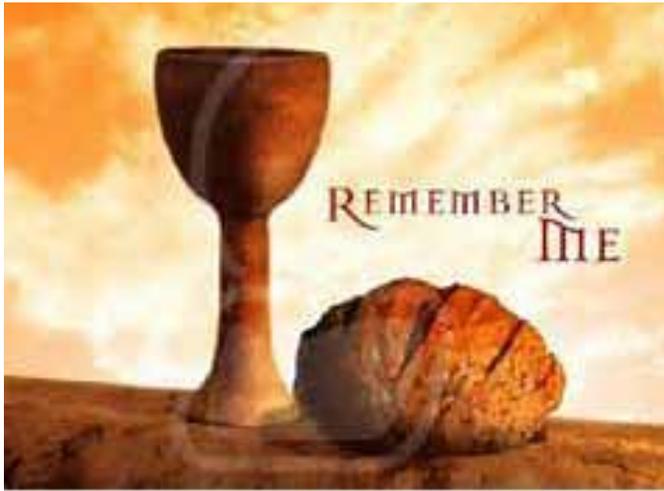
Such a sad reality one has to face in the midst of the most hellish moments of life. All who fail to hold up the law seem to have all of their actions justified. Government feeds deadly water through the pipelines of a whole jurisdiction and it's justified. A mayor covers up video footage of a brutal police killing for over a year, and he's justified. Police departments all across the country engage in terroristic acts more often than ISIS, and they are justified. Hate is invoked across this world persuading its minions to



beat, batter, and assault those who appear to be speaking truth to power, and is justified. Reckless decision-making has incited daily violence in places where religion has caused so much controversy. And all many of us choose to do is right. We desire to do unto others as we would have them do unto us. Yet, as a response, many continue to inform themselves inappropriately, and choose to silence us even when we are not done speaking for ourselves.

"When Jesus had received the wine, he said, 'It is finished.'" Why are you still speaking Jesus? It's apparent they are not concerned about you or what you stand for. They have no remorse for the wrong you have endured unjustly. Your own have deserted you, and they even suggest that everything you should have said, has been said. So, why are you still speaking, Jesus?

I suggest that Jesus still chooses to speak because even Jesus understands that it isn't over until He says it's over. Jesus helps us to understand that there was still something he needed them to witness before it really was all said and done. It's right there in the text....."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." Jesus never asked them a question. Jesus doesn't beg for anything to drink. Jesus makes a statement. And it is behind that statement that the people understood the power that came from the one who spoke it. And whenever someone speaks from a position of authority, everyone who is subjected



to their authority has to obey. In other words, what Jesus implies when he says, "It Is Finished," is now even you understand who is really the King. The King has spoken; and when the King speaks, you have to obey. Now it is finished!!!!!!

Good day children of God! May the Lord Bless you real good! Before you allow others to close the book on your journey before it is complete, if someone seeks to know why you are still speaking, look them in the face and proclaim that it's not finished until God says it's finished. Jesus decided to keep speaking even when they thought he had said enough. Even when they thought that all life had been drawn from him because their truths were then subjected to His power.....if Jesus could keep speaking, then we must continue to speak. We have to speak to the matters that society chooses to overlook. We have to speak to the evils that continue to rule unjustly, in the face of a nation that prides itself on bullying its way into getting what is perceived to be rightfully theirs. We have to keep speaking in the face of injustice when those around us are choosing not to love mercifully, and failing to walk humbly with God. We have to keep speaking. And if we keep speaking, they will know where our power comes from. It's a power that causes a legion of demons to flee. With that power we will be able to declare "It Is Finished," when God says "It Is Finished."

"Would You Be Free From The Burden of Sin? There's Power In The Blood.... Power In The Blood!!!!!"

"Would You O'ER Evil A Victory

Win, There's Wonderful Power In The Blood!!!!"

"There is power...power...wonder working power in the precious blood of the lamb!"

Just Keep Speaking!!!!

Prayer:

Because we know who has the final say, this prayer we pray on this day. God you have allowed us to journey down this path. For some this has been an ongoing process of quieting all of the noise that invades our space. For others, this may be the first time that we've made it our purpose to seek you in these trying times. Whatever it is for us, together we have arrived at this junction along our journey wholeheartedly believing that we could not have made it this far without you leading us along the way. For this we say, "Thank you!" We offer thanks to you, because we understand that there can be no price tag for our sacrifices that exceeds the price paid by your son, Jesus Christ, when he gave his life for all of creation on Calvary's Hill. So again, we say, "Thank You!" After undergoing a process that demands so much from us, we arrive at the end of it tired, exhausted, weary, and enervated. But we know that the end is near, because the grave is in sight. Yes, the grave is in sight!

However, unlike Jesus, death does not send us to the grave at this appointed time. This time, we are in route to the grave to put to death things that continue to keep us divided as a people. We are in route to the grave to put to death racial inequality and gender inequality. We are in route to the grave to put to death homophobia and transphobia. We are in route to the grave to put to death sexual abuse, domestic abuse, psychological and emotional abuse. We are in route to the grave to put to death the divisive nature of those who abuse their power. We are in route to the grave to put to death injustice itself; known and unknown. But before we put to death these matters that have caused us so much pain, like Christ, we take control of the narrative by proclaiming, "It is finished!" It is finished and these things will no longer be able to control us. It is finished! There is a renewed strength that will soon ooze from our pores like never before. Resurrection is near! For this we say, "Thank you!"

Amen!

**Saturday March 31
Holy Saturday**

⁵⁷When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. ⁵⁸He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. ⁵⁹So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth ⁶⁰and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. ⁶¹Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb. ⁶²The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' ⁶⁴Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from

the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." ⁶⁵Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." ⁶⁶So they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.

Matthew 27:57-66

Prayer:

Dear Lord, Thank you for another opportunity to come to you in prayer. We know we only have access to you because of your sacrifice on the cross and your resurrection. In this season and every season, help us to remember your example as we model this sacrifice by giving ourselves to others:

Help us to remember that when we leave our own comfort to eat with those who are shunned and to defend those who are criticized and persecuted, we are modeling your sacrifice.

Help us to remember and to encourage others that even when those we've considered friends are silent or join in with our attackers, we can be confident that you will not let us be put to shame.

Help us to remember that even when our grief feels overwhelming and like we have no strength left, you hear us, and you have still equipped us to speak up for those facing injustice.

Help us to remember that you will return for us, and to encourage others with this truth.

Help us to remember to have the same servant's heart as you, and forgive us for the times we've forgotten.

In Christ's name we pray,

Amen.

Gladys Hairston
Program Officer
John Rex Endowment
Raleigh, North Carolina

Sunday, April 1 Easter/Resurrection Sunday

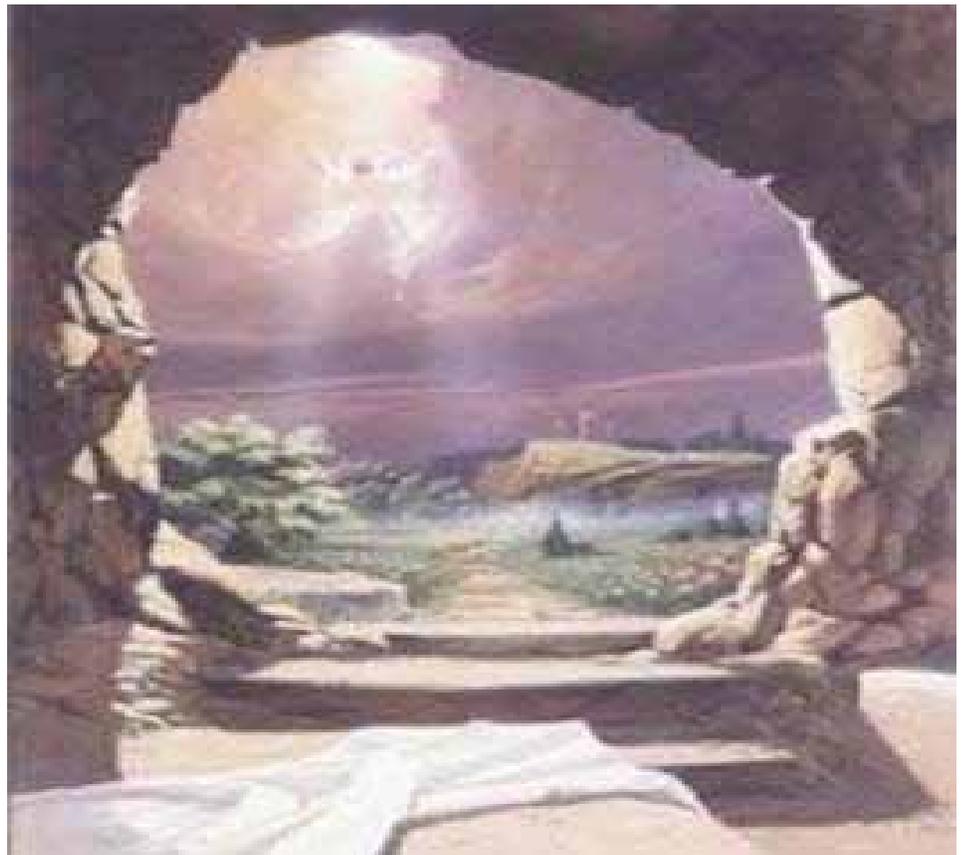
³⁴Then Peter began to speak to them: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all. ³⁷That message spread throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced: ³⁸how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. ³⁹We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; ⁴⁰but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, ⁴¹not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. ⁴²He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one ordained by God as judge of the living and the dead. ⁴³All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name."

Acts 10:34-43

Now I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, ²through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you— unless you have come to believe in vain.

³For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, ⁴and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. ⁹For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them— though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. ¹¹Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

1 Corinthians 15:1-11



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.² 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."³ Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.⁴ The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.⁵ He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there, but he did not go in.⁶ Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there,⁷ and the cloth that had been on Jesus' head, not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.⁸ Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in, and he saw and believed;⁹ for as yet they did not understand the scripture, that he must rise from the dead.¹⁰ Then the disciples returned to their homes.¹¹ But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb;¹² 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.¹³ 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."¹⁴ When she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not know that it was Jesus.¹⁵ 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."¹⁶ Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to him in Hebrew, "Rabbouni!" (which means Teacher).¹⁷ 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.'" ¹⁸ 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

Prayer:

Dear God,

Thank you for your unmerited grace and mercy that you so graciously give to me. It is through your mercy that I am cleansed from my inequities and made new each day. Your grace has made me whole and because of your love toward me, I can stand boldly as a child of God. I seek your guidance as I turn from my sinful ways and focus on the things that you have for me. Reinforce my vision so that I am not distracted by the things of the world and the temptations that surround me. Help me to offer the same grace toward my brothers and sisters in Christ. Open my eyes to see others as you see them and offer the same love, compassion, and grace. Be with me daily so that I can be a walking and living example of not only your love but your grace.

Amen

Charmica Epps
Higher Education Administration
Virginia State University
Petersburg, Virginia

Prayer:

Eternal God, we are grateful that Jesus' body was raised from the dead on the third day! According to Your Word, there is no other name under the heavens that can bring humankind into right relationship with the Creator of the Universe. Therefore, we lift up the name of Jesus for the saving of souls during this season of Lent. We pray that the Gospel of Jesus Christ will be preached during this Lenten season with the power of the Holy Spirit across this nation and in Second Baptist Church. We pray that adults and children will be compelled to receive the saving grace of Jesus Christ. We pray for the salvation of those who have not confessed Jesus as Lord and for those who do

not believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead on the third day. God your Word says for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth one confesses, resulting in salvation. Great God we pray for faith confessions by our family members, friends, coworkers and all the souls that are unsaved so that they might receive the gift of salvation. In Jesus' name we pray,

Amen.

Alton Hart Jr., M.D., M.P.H.
Virginia Department of Health
Director of the Crater Health District
Petersburg, Virginia

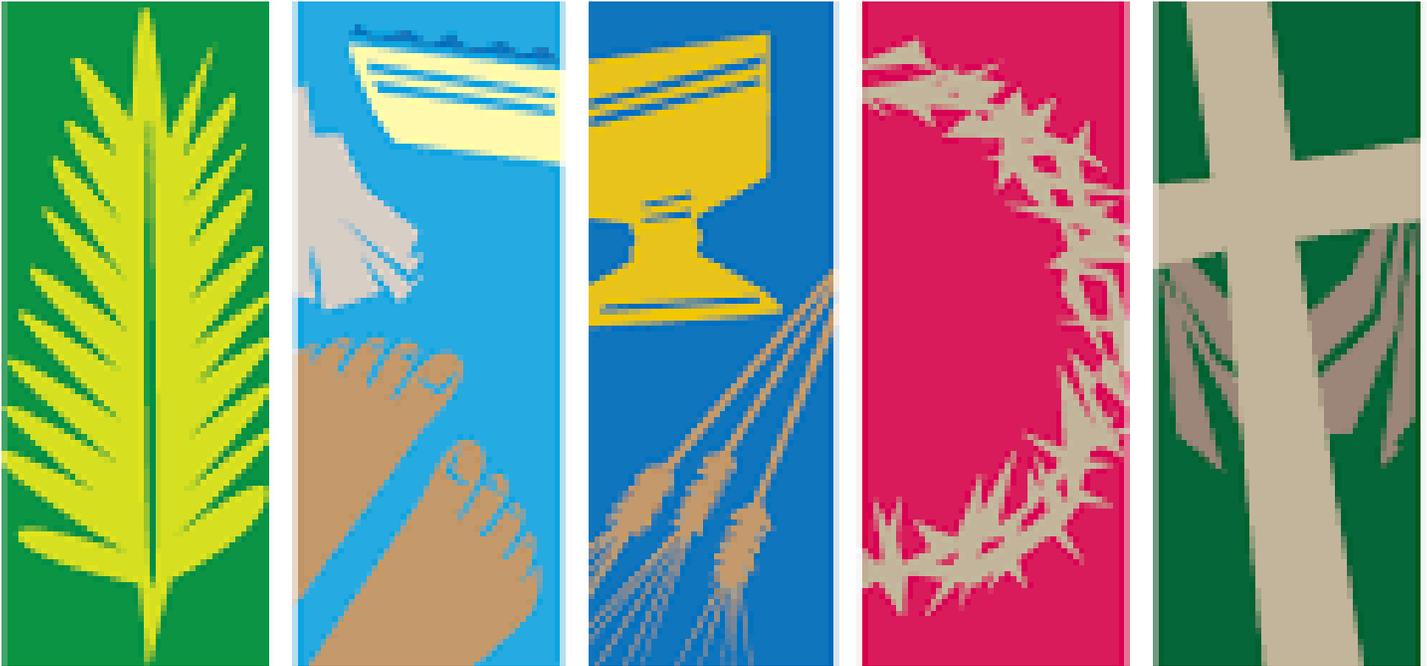
Prayer:

Almighty and righteous God, We come to you one more time, thanking you for all your many blessings. We thank you for your everlasting and ever present love. We thank you for continued protection from all hurt, harm and danger. Dear God we ask that you help us to remember to rely on your eternal promises and grow daily in our love and commitment to you. In your miraculous name we pray,

Amen

Sloane Mosley
Social Worker
Winston-Salem, North Carolina





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