



Devotions of Discovery
2025 Lenten Season
Mount Hermon Baptist Church

Before jumping right into this devotional guide, take a moment and ask yourself, what is lent? Of course you can cheat and look for the Google answer but what I'm asking is, what does lent mean to you personally?

There are at least a couple of directions this could take for me but as Psalm 139:14 makes clear, each of us is wonderfully and fearfully made and there will be different answers for each of us. Consider a couple of possibilities as you move into this season.

I don't hear the expression, 'spring cleaning' as much as I once did but we all pretty much know what it means. We accumulate a lot of junk around and about us. That junk may even begin to overwhelm us and put a burden on our physical living spaces. Let's compare that to some things that we allowed to creep into our lives innocently enough but all of a sudden, they demand more time than they should be allowed. Before I say anything about too much screen time, I'll have to own it. You read about a topic that sounds interesting and it has more tentacles than an octopus. Each facet that you run down branches and branches until it's consumed a couple of hours or more. What could I have been doing with that time? Prayer, scripture reading, checking on my brothers and sisters in need or a lot of other things that would be much more beneficial. Lent is a good time to throw out those things that clutter our life and begin new and more eternally rewarding ventures.

There's also a similarity between tree roots and what our time of lent should look like. The soil temperature has to get very cold to stop tree roots from continuing to grow. Sometimes, we just get tired. Our roots may need a few leaves to drop off so we can concentrate on building foundational strength. Lent is a good time to regain focus and look for things that offer vital nutrients from the Living Word in preparation for a new and fruitful season to come. Nurture and feed the ground your roots sink into. Find exciting Bible verses you may have inadvertently overlooked, read the old favorites again and ask, "How did I forget that?"

- The strange thing is that even though Lent is supposed to be a solemn and serious time, I suspect the reawakening and remembrance of what Christ has done will replenish the joy in your heart. Let that joy grow and then burst forth in new fullness as we move forward to Easter.

March 6, 2025

1 John 5: 13 – 15

13 I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life.

14 And this is the boldness we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. 15 And if we know that he hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have obtained the requests made of him.

Devotion

Looking at Jesus' words "You may ask me for anything in my name, and I will do it" may sound like the words of a genie. Jesus isn't speaking about granting any wish we might have. As the apostle John explains in our reading for today, what we pray for should be in line with God's will.

How do we know what God's will is? We learn about God's will through reading and studying his Word. Prayer goes with knowing God's Word and will. As God reveals himself to us in the Word, we grow in love for God and in our desire to serve him and others. We know God calls us to love our neighbors, to care about them, and to live peaceably with justice for and with all people. We, as Christians, are called to pray (and work) for justice and fair policies. We desire for people to learn and grow and flourish as God intends. There is nothing magical about prayer. Prayers centered on the foundation of God's Word places us in a position of wanting what God wants and seeking His kingdom. And we are assured that God answers our prayers as we ask them in Jesus' name.

Prayer

Father, lead us by your Word and Spirit. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

March 7, 2025

Luke 10: 1 – 7

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. ² He said to them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. ³ Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴ Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵ Whatever house you enter, first say, ‘Peace to this house!’ ⁶ And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you. ⁷ Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the laborer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house.

Devotion

The seventy-two met Jesus. Twelve disciples followed Jesus closely for the better part of his ministry. And we read in Luke 10 about seventy-two additional people who were selected and appointed by Jesus to spread the wonderful word about him. Jesus’ good news is not just for one group or for people in one place. The good news is for everyone everywhere.

Seventy-two is more than the twelve. Even this group could not go everywhere and tell everyone about Jesus. They traveled to various towns where Jesus himself was planning to go. And these who Jesus sent represent the start of a mission to tell the world how God has shown his love through Jesus Christ. This mission continued after Jesus’ death and after his resurrection, and the mission continues today.

The good news is that Jesus offers forgiveness of sin and new life. Those who have heard the good news have the opportunity to share this good news with others. This is the unique mission of the Lord’s church. The mission will continue until everyone has heard this good news. And like the seventy-two messengers, we are invited to share Jesus’ love today. Something this amazing can’t be kept a secret. Let’s pass the message of Jesus’ love to everyone!

Prayer

Lord, you are the God of all nations and peoples. We thank you today for entrusting us with sharing the good news of Jesus. Empower and strengthen us for the task. Let us be mindful of the joyful good news message today. Amen.

March 10, 2025

Luke 23: 26 – 49

The Crucifixion of Jesus

²⁶ As they led him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming from the country, and they laid the cross on him, and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A great number of the people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. ²⁸ But Jesus turned to them and said, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the days are surely coming when they will say, ‘Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.’ ³⁰ Then they will begin to say to the mountains, ‘Fall on us’; and to the hills, ‘Cover us.’ ³¹ For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two others also, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with him. ³³ When they came to the place that is called The Skull, they crucified Jesus there with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

³⁴ Then Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.”] And they cast lots to divide his clothing. ³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!” ³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine, ³⁷ and saying, “If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!” ³⁸ There was also an inscription over him, “This is the King of the Jews.”

³⁹ *One of the criminals who were hanged there kept deriding him and saying, “Are you not the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”* ⁴⁰ *But the other rebuked him, saying, “Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?”* ⁴¹ *And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong.”* ⁴² *Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”* ⁴³ *He replied, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”*

The Death of Jesus

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

Devotion

As we reflect on Jesus’ death, some will think of the cross. Some will note that it was made of wood, cut from a tree. Some may even recall that in death Jesus fulfilled a prophecy that said: “*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*” (Galatians 3: 13) In death on the cross, Jesus took upon himself the whole curse of sin, so that we can be forgiven and receive new life.

In the reading, Jesus also speaks about himself as a tree. He says, “*If people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?*” Jesus described himself as a living, green tree, and he appeared to challenge people to think what it is like when the tree is cut off (“*dry*”)—as he was when he died on the cross. The prophet Isaiah may help us to understand. Isaiah describes the Savior, the Lord’s suffering servant, as a shoot that has grown “*from the stump of Jesse*” (Isaiah 11: 1), and the Savior is later “*cut off from the land of the living*” because he was punished for the people’s sins (Isaiah 53: 8).

Jesus did all of this for the sake of humankind so that we all can have new life with God forever.

With Jesus, death does not have the last word, because He is the Word of life. Jesus is the resurrection and the life!

Prayer

Lord God, we are in awe of all you have done for our salvation. May we praise your name forever. Amen.

March 11, 2025

Matthew 26: 17 – 30

¹⁷ On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸ He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.

²⁰ When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; ²¹ and while they were eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.” ²² And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, “Surely not I, Lord?” ²³ He answered, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.” ²⁵ Judas, who betrayed him, said, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” He replied, “You have said so.”

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” ²⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”

³⁰ When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Devotion

Before Jesus died, God's people sacrificed a lamb each year during the Feast of Passover to remind them that God brought them out of slavery in Egypt. (Exodus 12)

Jesus' death took place at the beginning of Passover—when God's people sacrificed their lambs. God showed that Jesus' death is the once-for-all sacrifice to save His people from their slavery to sin. Today we remember Jesus' sacrifice by celebrating the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted this sacrificial meal the night before his death.

Christians call communion, the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist (which means "thanksgiving"). It serves as a celebration, but communion is also a confession that we all need God's forgiveness. Matthew makes this point as Jesus says that His blood is "*poured out . . . for the forgiveness of sins.*"

The *disciples* prepared the meal. They gathered to make ready the food and prepare the table—as we do for communion today.

When we eat the bread and drink from the cup, we remember together that we are sinners who need Jesus to die for us. We set that table and we need his sacrifice. And in the Lord's Supper our sin and guilt are met by the saving grace of God. So, in our eating the bread and drinking from the cup, we are assured that God's saving grace overcomes our sinfulness and guilt. It is because of Jesus' sacrifice. And Jesus took care of all of that at the cross.

Prayer

Lord, we are sorry for our sins. Thank you for dying in our place so that we are forgiven. We question and doubt many things in our lives, but Your love is unquestionable. In Jesus' name. Amen.

March 12, 2025

Matthew 18: 15 – 20

¹⁵ “If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. ¹⁶ But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. ¹⁷ If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. ¹⁸ Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.”

Devotion

Matthew 18 is a foundational principle for dealing with conflict. If you have a problem with someone, scripture instructs us to go and talk to them about it first before involving others. Scripture makes it seem pretty basic. And it serves as a foundational standard in the community. Making a public complaint or gossiping or backstabbing will create mistrust and disrupt community. Honestly addressing matters in a spirit of godly wisdom and love is a positive way of overcoming conflict.

Human history proves that conflicts will arise. Managing conflicts and issues directly and in a timely manner is important for a thriving healthy community.

Is there anyone with whom you need to discuss an issue and/or conflict? Using this foundational principle in dealing with it has every potential to make our community much stronger. It should be our foundational standard.

Prayer

Father, help us deal with conflicts wisely, and bring us into stronger relationships as a result. Amen.

March 13, 2025

Matthew 18:10-14

¹⁰ “Take care that you do not despise one of these little ones; for, I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven. ¹² What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

Devotion

Jesus says, “Take great care that you do not despise even *one* of these little ones; for I tell you, in heaven their angels continually see the face of my Father in heaven.”

Then Jesus gives us a picture of God who is always seeking every last and lost one of us. God is like a shepherd with a hundred sheep. If one of them strays God leaves the 99 and goes after the one. God is the seeking God, and the *one* might be you today.

Then Jesus says something that ought to be memorized by every Christian and carried in our heart:

It is not the will of your Father in heaven that *one* of these little ones should be lost.

Period. Without qualification. *It is not the will of God that one of these little ones should be lost.* God’s will is the salvation, the healing, and the wholeness of everyone. It’s about the immensity of the mercy of God, and how we are to live in that mercy. As Christians we are those who have “learned to be the forgiven,” and now pass on that forgiveness. Do we walk each day under God’s mercy? Do we even think of it? Have you forgiven another lately?

Prayer

O God, forgive me the debts which cannot be repaid, only forgiven, as I forgive others their debts which cannot be repaid, only forgiven. And help us to walk this day and every day “Under your Mercy.” Amen.

March 14, 2025

Matthew 12: 46 – 50

⁴⁶ While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. ⁴⁷ Someone told him, “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” ⁴⁸ But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” ⁴⁹ And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! ⁵⁰ For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

Devotion

Jesus assembled a group of disciples around him who became like family to him. They became close in their relationship. They shared events and quiet times together. They shared a passion for living in the kingdom of God. Jesus no doubt loved his earthly mother and brothers. And Jesus loved his community of disciples, followers, and friends too.

Think about the people who are surrounding you. What communities are you a part of that are like family, who love you unconditionally and support you in both good and bad times? Whom do you share life with? It is important for each of us to have a family around us to do life together. A family of friends who share a passion for living in the kingdom of God together.

Prayer

Father, help us find people to share life with as a family community. Provide a passion for living in the kingdom of God together. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

March 17, 2025

Matthew 5: 13

¹³ “You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

Matthew 13: 31 – 33

³¹ He put before them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³² it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.”

³³ He told them another parable: “The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”

Devotion

Salt and yeast have a few things in common. Both come in minute granules and are used for enhancing food. By the time the food is prepared and eaten, they become invisible, but the impacts they make are very noticeable. Yeast makes dough rise when you are baking bread, and salt is a seasoning and a preservative.

Jesus taught about quiet, behind-the-scenes work in God’s kingdom that makes a big difference in people’s lives.

There was a nurse who worked in a large city hospital. She was a shy person who didn’t say much but it was evident she loved her work. She served her patients and the hospital with dedication and discipline. She reflected on a story that as she came off her shift one night at 11 p.m., a colleague said, “I realized tonight that whenever I’m on the same shift as you, the work seems to go better. That surprised me because often I hardly even notice you are there.”

To Jesus, though, that’s not surprising. When we live our calling to be salt and yeast, we leave visible blessings behind.

A well-to-do friend asked a pastor to quietly pass along a sum of his money to a struggling family in the church. This family was significantly relieved and requested the donor's name so that they could say thank you. The pastor urged them simply to thank God for the love and care they received.

Dying to a desire to be noticed can leave behind powerful, unforgettable blessings.

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for quiet, powerful kingdom work. May we serve you faithfully for Jesus' sake. Amen.

March 18, 2025

Ecclesiastes 5: 1 – 7

5 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil. ² Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore, let your words be few.

³ For dreams come with many cares, and a fool's voice with many words.

⁴ When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfill what you vow. ⁵ It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfill it. ⁶ Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?

⁷ With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God.

Devotion

The best advice for giving a talk or a speech is “Keep it simple!” Keeping it simple, according to Jesus, is good advice for prayer as well.

In Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6 about prayer, Jesus advises: “Do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many

words.” He was talking here about pagan people who believed in false gods. They believed in making a spectacle with flashy and demonstrative prayers to get the gods’ notice. Scripture tells us that the true God has no difficulty hearing us, and God is attentive to all needs.

Let’s not to say that public prayers or even long prayers are or were a mistake. There were often prayers in corporate worship, where a leader spoke for the people, who prayed together at the same time. There were many things to give thanks for and to be concerned about, so it might necessitate people to pray for long periods of time. Jesus himself did that.

When we pray, whether alone or in a group, the main thing to focus all of our attention on is the Lord. It is the Lord to whom we are praying. God made the heavens and the earth. God loves us so much that he gave His only Son in rescuing us from sin and death. And in simple, heartfelt, and direct ways, we can share with God our thanks and cares. And Jesus promises that the Father will hear and also answer our prayers. Will you pray today?

Prayer

Spirit of God, speak in us and through us as we pray. For we pray to the One who loves us more than we can imagine. Amen.

“And when you pray, do not keep on babbling. . . .” (Matthew 6: 7)

March 19, 2025

Matthew 15: 21 - 28

21 Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. 22 A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.”

23 Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”

24 He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel."

25 The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

26 He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

27 "Yes it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

28 Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment.

Devotion

A Canaanite woman met Jesus. In many of the encounters we have been reflecting on this month, Jesus was the one who brought a word of expansive love and grace. Jesus was the one who challenged boundaries between insiders and outsiders. Jesus was the one who encouraged religious authorities to show grace to sinners.

But in this encounter with a Canaanite woman, Jesus seemed to affirm some boundaries. He implied that because she was not an Israelite, it wasn't in his job description to heal her daughter. He said, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." But the woman bravely and cleverly challenged these words, saying, "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table."

What Jesus had said about his main mission to Israel was true; he was the Messiah who would fulfill God's promises to the people of Israel (see Matthew 1). And yet, as the woman stated by faith, his mission was to save not only Israel but also the whole world. Jesus, of course, knew his whole mission and also that this woman had great faith—and he was delighted to hear her express it. He even said, "You have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed in the same moment.

Jesus always offers expansive grace. Let us give thanks that we can all receive this amazing grace from him!

Prayer

God of grace, we are thankful for your grace so abundant and surprising. Help us to receive this grace and to offer it to others. Amen.

March 20, 2025

1 Kings 21: 1 – 16

21 Later the following events took place: Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard in Jezreel, beside the palace of King Ahab of Samaria. ² And Ahab said to Naboth, “Give me your vineyard, so that I may have it for a vegetable garden, because it is near my house; I will give you a better vineyard for it; or, if it seems good to you, I will give you its value in money.” ³ But Naboth said to Ahab, “The LORD forbid that I should give you my ancestral inheritance.” ⁴ Ahab went home resentful and sullen because of what Naboth the Jezreelite had said to him; for he had said, “I will not give you my ancestral inheritance.” He lay down on his bed, turned away his face, and would not eat.

⁵ His wife Jezebel came to him and said, “Why are you so depressed that you will not eat?” ⁶ He said to her, “Because I spoke to Naboth the Jezreelite and said to him, ‘Give me your vineyard for money; or else, if you prefer, I will give you another vineyard for it’; but he answered, ‘I will not give you my vineyard.’” ⁷ His wife Jezebel said to him, “Do you now govern Israel? Get up, eat some food, and be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.”

⁸ So she wrote letters in Ahab’s name and sealed them with his seal; she sent the letters to the elders and the nobles who lived with Naboth in his city. ⁹ She wrote in the letters, “Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth at the head of the assembly; ¹⁰ seat two scoundrels opposite him, and have them bring a charge against him, saying, ‘You have cursed God and the king.’ Then take him out, and stone him to death.” ¹¹ The men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them. Just as it was written in the letters that she had sent to them, ¹² they proclaimed a fast and seated Naboth at the head of the assembly. ¹³ The two scoundrels came in and sat opposite him; and the scoundrels brought a charge against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, “Naboth cursed God and the king.” So they took him outside the city, and stoned him to death. ¹⁴ Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, “Naboth has been stoned; he is dead.”

¹⁵ As soon as Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, Jezebel said to Ahab, “Go, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give you for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead.” ¹⁶ As

soon as Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, Ahab set out to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

Devotion

King Ahab wanted his neighbor's land in order to cultivate vegetables, but the owner, Naboth, refused the offer. He would not trade or sell his inheritance; the garden God had given to his ancestors in the promised land. King Ahab pouted, refused sustenance, and withdrew to bed.

Envy is a sin of the eyes: another's house, spouse, or income can become an obsession. Some have killed in order to get the things they wanted. Ahab's envy planted a seed that grew into Jezebel's twisted plan, and he went along with it. Envy aims to destroy, and it harms everyone involved.

Seneca, an ancient Roman philosopher said: *"No one can have all he wants, but a man can refrain from wanting what he has not, and cheerfully make the best of a bird in the hand."*

Jesus' parable of the prodigal son, we read the envious eye of the older brother could not bear to look on the joy of his father at welcoming back a wandering son who had returned (Luke 15: 28 – 32). Resentment gets in the way of the joy our God provides and wants everyone to enjoy.

It should be the goal of every journeying believer, as we walk with the Lord, that we lose our own vision so that we might see through the eyes of God's grace.

Is that your goal and destination?

Prayer

Open our eyes, Lord, that we may learn to see with joy the gifts you bestow on our neighbors. May we see through your eyes of grace today. Amen.

March 21, 2025

Matthew 25: 31 – 46

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, ³³ and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. ³⁴ Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; ³⁵ for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ ³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? ³⁸ And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? ³⁹ And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ ⁴⁰ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ ⁴¹ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; ⁴² for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ ⁴⁴ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’ ⁴⁶ And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Devotion

In today’s reading we learn that we need to “see” Jesus in other people in order to live faithfully.

We must learn to see Jesus where we least expect to find him. Jesus explains it in his parable: “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat . . . I was a stranger and you invited me in . . . I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Notice that Jesus did not say: “*There was a stranger who came to your community. . .*” Jesus said: “*I was a stranger and you invited me in.*”

Jesus also foresees confusion that some could have while hearing the story. So he has the people in the story ask: “*Lord, when did we see you hungry . . . or thirsty . . . [or] a stranger . . . [or] sick or in prison . . . ?*” And then Jesus says: “*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.*”

Jesus identifies with people who are deprived and disregarded. The Lord cares for all people in need. So, should we. And we should not be involved in repressing or discriminating against anyone. The personal formation of faith equips us to see Jesus in people who are hungry, sick, imprisoned, strangers in our midst, and more—and he calls us to provide the empathy, love and support needed.

Prayer

Jesus, thank you for showing us how much you care for people we easily overlook. Help us to share your love and care faithfully. Amen.

March 24, 2025

Matthew 12: 15 – 21

¹⁵ When Jesus became aware of this, he departed. Many crowd followed him, and he cured all of them, ¹⁶ and he ordered them not to make him known. ¹⁷ This was to fulfill what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

*¹⁸ “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen,
my beloved, with whom my soul is well pleased.*

*I will put my Spirit upon him,
and he will proclaim justice to the Gentiles.*

*¹⁹ He will not wrangle or cry aloud,
nor will anyone hear his voice in the streets.*

*²⁰ He will not break a bruised reed
or quench a smoldering wick
until he brings justice to victory.*

²¹ And in his name the Gentiles will hope.”

Devotion

Many think today the world has two kinds of people: normal ones and hurting ones—bruised reeds. We have to ask: “What is normal?”

Churches are communities of bruised reeds and smoldering wicks. Often there are people in churches who pretend to “*have it all together*,” but no one’s life is free of trouble and struggle. We all have personal knowledge of that statement.

Yet Jesus, the Servant, gives us hope. “*In this world you will have trouble*,” he says, “*But take heart! I have overcome the world*” (John 16: 33).

Some of my favorite times in church have been celebrations of communion, when I have seen in people’s eyes a longing for the day when Jesus will return and “*wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. . . .*” (Revelation 21: 4). Believe in the Lord and be faithful to his word.

Prayer

Lord, we are bruised reeds, smoldering wicks. Thank you for nurturing us with your care and grace. Amen.

March 25, 2025

Matthew 7: 13 – 14

¹³ “*Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it.* ¹⁴ *For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.*”

Devotion

Jesus is approaching the conclusion of his sermon about life in the kingdom of God. And now he calls his listeners to make a choice.

Jesus tells three brief picture-stories--about two gates, two trees, and two foundations. Our scripture today looks on the two gates.

Jesus pronounces that to be a child of God, a citizen of the kingdom of heaven, you must enter through the narrow gate.

A popular site in modern-day Bethlehem is the Church of the Nativity, built at the place where Jesus was thought to be born. This vast church has one small entrance. Visit there and you almost have to get on your hands and knees to enter the church through this small doorway. There is no room for excess gear as you go through this gate.

The meaning of the one small entrance into that church is distinct. There is only one gate by which you can enter the kingdom of God. In John 10: 7, Jesus makes clear that he is the only gate to the sheepfold--he is the only way to heaven and to the gift of eternal life (John 3: 16; 14: 6).

Jesus calls you, and he desires you to live with him in heaven. Be sure to take way of the narrow gate. Jesus is leading you there.

Prayer

Thank you, Father, for inviting us to enter by the narrow gate--to come into your kingdom through Jesus Christ. Teach us to trust Christ for salvation. In his name we pray, Amen.

March 26, 2025

Mark 9: 1 – 13

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.”

² Six 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, ³ and his clothes became dazzling white, such as no one on earth could bleach them. ⁴ And there appeared to them Elijah with Moses, who were talking with Jesus. ⁵ Then 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.”⁶ He did not know what to say, for they were terrified.⁷ Then a cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!”⁸ Suddenly when they looked around, they saw no one with them any more, but only Jesus.

⁹ As 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.¹⁰ So they kept the matter to themselves, questioning what this rising from the dead could mean.¹¹ Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”¹² He 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?¹³ But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written about him.”

Devotion

Jesus is greater than Moses and Elijah. That’s a quiet topic running from beginning to end in the gospel of Mark.

Elijah was a great prophet in the Old Testament, and so was Moses. God had led his people out of slavery in Egypt through Moses. Moses was the one through whom God had given his people the law. And now, one greater even than Moses was here (Deuteronomy 34: 12).

In the Old Testament a great honor God gave to a person was to call them “*my servant*.” But here God speaks directly saying: “*This is my Son, whom I love*.” The *Son of God* is far greater than a servant.

But Moses and Elijah were not in competition with Jesus and there was no jealousy on their part. We can imagine they must have been overjoyed to meet Jesus. Jesus was the entire reason for their ministries. The law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah) all pointed to Jesus.

And now Jesus would complete what God had started through them. “*Listen to him!*” said God about his Son. Jesus completed the message of God’s salvation for the world.

Prayer

O Lord, you are not just a great prophet; you are the Son of God. You complete the Scriptures and bring salvation to all of us. Move us Lord to be faithful. Amen.

March 27, 2025

Matthew 18: 1 – 5

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”² He called a child, whom he put among them,³ and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.⁴ Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.⁵ Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

Devotion

Jesus said we need to “change and become like little children.” And what did he mean with his words? A clue we have is that Jesus is responding to the question “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” And Jesus replies: “Whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”

In the gospel writings about Jesus and his disciples (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), we realize the disciples regularly argued over which of them was greatest. Apparently, they seem to have been a competitive group. They give the impression in their thinking that greatness is measured in terms of leadership, knowledge, power, influence, and other things.

In these words, Jesus is telling his disciples that they have to change their attitudes about greatness. Jesus tells them to become lowly and humble like little children. Jesus’ followers must die to selfish ambitions and realize, just as little children depend on parents and caregivers, we are totally dependent on God for our needs and future living. All our needs.

Have you pondered and looked around at God’s world with wide, wondering eyes? That’s something we can all long for when we hear the call to change and become like little children.

Prayer

Lord, please instill in us the humility and wonder of a child as we seek to live for and serve you every day. Amen.

March 28, 2025

Matthew 5: 43 – 48

⁴³ *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,⁴⁵ so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.*

Devotion

Jesus takes a common saying from that day and flips it on its head.

People would commonly unite the Old Testament command to “love your neighbor” (Leviticus 19:18) with a vengeful phrase: “. . . and hate your enemy.” Typically, people believed anyone from another nation as an enemy.

I’m sure they were shocked to hear Jesus say: “I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

What’s radical about Jesus’ demand is he’s commanding proactive, practical love. We are commanded to love our enemies and to strive for the best for them. And not just so they will leave us alone.

An important ingredient of loving our enemies includes praying for them. Jesus said so. Honestly, it’s impossible to hate someone if we’re praying for their well-being and good. And praying for enemies helps us to see them as God views them. It helps us to care about their needs and consider them like a neighbor.

Jesus calls us to love and to pray for them and for their good. Isn't that what he did for us? *"While we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son."* (Romans 5:10)

Prayer

Father, we acknowledge that we were your enemies. And now, in Christ Jesus, we are your children. Help us to pray for and to love our enemies today. Amen.

March 31, 2025

Exodus 4:1-17

Moses answered, "What if they do not believe me or listen to me and say, 'The LORD did not appear to you'?"

² *Then the LORD said to him, "What is that in your hand?"*

"A staff," he replied.

³ *The LORD said, "Throw it on the ground."*

Moses threw it on the ground, and it became a snake, and he ran from it. ⁴ Then the LORD said to him, "Reach out your hand and take it by the tail." So, Moses reached out and took hold of the snake and it turned back into a staff in his hand. ⁵ "This," said the LORD, "is so that they may believe that the LORD, the God of their fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has appeared to you."

⁶ *Then the LORD said, "Put your hand inside your cloak." So, Moses put his hand into his cloak, and when he took it out, the skin was leprous—it had become as white as snow.*

⁷ *"Now put it back into your cloak," he said. So, Moses put his hand back into his cloak, and when he took it out, it was restored, like the rest of his flesh.*

⁸ *Then the LORD said, "If they do not believe you or pay attention to the first sign, they may believe the second. ⁹ But if they do not believe these two signs or listen to you, take some water from the Nile, and pour it on the dry ground. The water you take from the river will become blood on the ground."*

¹⁰ Moses said to the LORD, “Pardon your servant, Lord. I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue.”

¹¹ The LORD said to him, “Who gave human beings their mouths? Who makes them deaf or mute? Who gives them sight or makes them blind? Is it not I, the LORD? ¹² Now go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say.”

¹³ But Moses said, “Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.”

¹⁴ Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses, and he said, “What about your brother, Aaron the Levite? I know he can speak well. He is already on his way to meet you, and he will be glad to see you. ¹⁵ You shall speak to him and put words in his mouth; I will help both of you speak and will teach you what to do. ¹⁶ He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him. ¹⁷ But take this staff in your hand so you can perform the signs with it.”

Devotion

Many of us find it difficult to use our voices for God. Like Moses, we are convinced no one will listen, and we claim that our voices are weak.

Why should we care if we can speak for God?

Speech is so important to the Christian faith. Many prophets spoke God's words. Jesus told many parables to help us understand difficulty. God even made it possible for the disciples to speak so that all could understand the Word. Learning to speak to others for God is an important part of what we believe.

God helps if we ask. He provides people with encouragement and wisdom to say what he wants to convey. He will give you the tools to convince people that His way is the correct way. I would say that even some of Moses' audience still did not believe after all the miracles they were shown. Please be encouraged.

You may need to look where God has led and taught you to speak. Moses went in faith to live with the Israelites, and God provided Aaron to help with the

verbal communications. God is always faithful to provide a way for us to speak and communicate His grace.

Prayer

Lord, help us find our voice so we may loudly exclaim your name. Make known to us the way you have given us to speak for you. May we speak to those who need us the most. We have seen that your strength can be our strength and your words our words. Amen.

April 1, 2025

1 Samuel 3:1-18

3 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. And the word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision.

2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim, so that he could not see, was lying down in his own place; 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down within the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was. 4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6 And the LORD called again, "Samuel!" and Samuel arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 And the LORD called Samuel again the third time. And he arose and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for thy servant hears.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 And the LORD came and stood forth, calling as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for thy servant hears." 11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, "Behold, I am about to do a thing in Israel, at which the two ears of every one that hears it will tingle. 12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 And I tell him that I am about to punish his house for ever, for the iniquity which he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them. 14 Therefore I swear to the house of Eli that the iniquity of Eli's house shall not be expiated by sacrifice or offering for ever."

15 Samuel lay until morning; then he opened the doors of the house of the LORD. And Samuel was afraid to tell the vision to Eli. 16 But Eli called Samuel and said, "Samuel, my son." And he said, "Here I am." 17 And Eli said, "What was it that he told you? Do not hide it from me. May God do so to you and more also, if you hide anything from me of all that he told you." 18 So Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him. And he said, "It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him."

Devotion

Now the Lord came and stood there calling as before, "Samuel, Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."

Reading this text, I am amazed at Samuel's response to God's call and his willingness to serve. Readily Samuel heard God each time he called. He jumped from his slumber and ran to serve the Lord. I wish all our responses to God's call was with such attentiveness and willingness to serve.

When God calls us to serve, we sometimes do not hear Him. Others might hear His call to us before we personally hear it. It is easy to think they have gotten the message confused and were talking to the wrong person. We do not mind serving God - we really enjoy it – but we have our own ideas of service, and we think we are better suited to serve in the kitchen washing or drying dishes, or teaching Sunday school or helping in the church office. We pray about this call that God is asking us to serve. We listen to hear. Like Samuel we ask God to speak, for we, as servants, are listening.

We are God's people, and we are here to do God's work. We are changed by God's love, sent out in God's love, to serve others with God's love.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us to hear your call and to answer with a resounding, "Here I am, Lord, send me." Amen.

April 2, 2025

Jeremiah 1:4-10

⁴ *The word of the LORD came to me, saying,*

⁵ *"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born, I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."*

⁶ *"Alas, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young."*

⁷ *But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am too young.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. ⁸ Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD.*

⁹ *Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. ¹⁰ See, today I appoint you over nations and kingdoms to uproot and tear down, to destroy and overthrow, to build and to plant."*

Devotion

For Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiah, it was said: "He was born to be a prophet." Indeed, he was born to serve. When God encountered Jeremiah to create in him his mission, he said he had picked Jeremiah to be a great prophet before Jeremiah was born. God tells Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you."

This passage has been discussed and has been the source of considerable disagreement. Does it mean that God knows everything about us before we draw our first breath? And in these verses God said he knew Jeremiah before he was made and had big plans for him from the start.

God knows all of us before we are born, and he gives us tools - gifts - to help us serve the world on his behalf. Like being set on a path and being given a map - will we follow it? Not all of us are given a wondrous gift like Jeremiah, but the gifts we are given are important to God. Whatever the gift from God you were born with, it would be a disgrace not to use it.

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for seeing us before we were born and giving us unique gifts to use in your world. Whether we are a mighty prophet like Jeremiah or someone who performs a simple act of helping those in need, please help us to use the gifts you give us to our fullest. Amen.

April 3, 2025

John 15: 1-17

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. 2 Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already made clean by the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. 6 If a man does not abide in me, he is cast forth as a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire and burned. 7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. 8 By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples. 9 As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you; abide in my love. 10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my

Father's commandments and abide in his love. 11 These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. 17 This I command you, to love one another.

Devotion

And I appointed you to go bear fruit, fruit that will last ... I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Vintners must be patient; it takes time for grapevine branches to mature and bear good fruit - time, a little food, some sunshine, and some rain. When nature and nurture come together, grapes abound.

"I am the vine," Jesus said, "and you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit."

God is a patient vintner, and the message is clear. We who have been nurtured by the Vine and grown in Love are expected to blossom into fruit. We do not choose whether we want to bloom. We bloom because we must, because that is what well-loved grapes do. It is expected.

The fruit we bear is seen in the love of Christ we share with all we meet on our journey through life. Jesus calls us "friend." To be friends with Jesus is to be in an intimate and blessed relationship with God. Let us share the blessing of God's love with a hug, a meal, a dollar or just a cup of cold water. Let us do it every day.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we see tragedy and despair all around us. Give us the heart to love others as you have loved us. Send your Spirit to encourage us and lead us into fellowship with those who need our love. Amen.

April 4, 2025

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2 You know that when you were heathen, you were led astray to dumb idols, however you may have been moved. 3 Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says “Jesus be cursed!” and no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit.

4 Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5 and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; 6 and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one. 7 To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8 To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9 to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10 to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11 All these are inspired by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.

Devotion

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.

What a blessing it is to be a receiver of God's amazing gifts.

Paul makes clear in our scripture, with salvation in Jesus we also receive the indwelling presence of His Holy Spirit.

Salvation and the Holy Spirit's presence are gifts to be shared. How ridiculous it would be to take Jesus' love and not share it with others.

The gift of the Holy Spirit helps us to share the love of Jesus in the world. All of us have gifts to use for the benefit of others. We benefit others by using our gifts of building up the body of Christ, the church, and by sharing God's love with all the people around us.

Give thanks today for salvation in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. And ask the Spirit today to reveal his gifts in your life so that you can share Jesus and strengthen the church.

Prayer

Dear God, you use my hands and heart in service to those in your kingdom. Open my heart to similarities rather than differences and help me to serve in love, knowing how close I am to the other side of the table. Amen.

April 7, 2025

Luke 9: 18 – 27

¹⁸ Once when Jesus was praying alone, with only the disciples near him, he asked them, “Who do the crowds say that I am?” ¹⁹ They answered, “John the Baptist; but others, Elijah; and still others, that one of the ancient prophets has arisen.” ²⁰ He said to them, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “The Messiah of God.”

²¹ He sternly ordered and commanded them not to tell anyone, ²² saying, “The Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised.”

²³ Then he said to them all, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. ²⁴ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. ²⁵ What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves? ²⁶ Those who are ashamed of me and of my words, of them the Son of Man will be ashamed when he comes in his glory and the glory of the Father and of the holy angels. ²⁷ But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God.”

Devotion

Jesus continued to have a heavenward emphasis throughout his teaching ministry. Looking ahead in his suffering and death, Jesus told his followers of his future glory.

Jesus’ treatment at the hands of sinful people has implications for his followers too. As faithful people, we can expect the powers of evil to attack and try to destroy us. Have you been on the receiving end of others’ sinful behavior: abuse, neglect, harassment, persecution? Jesus assures us that he knows what it is to have these experiences and he points heavenward to the glory that God reveals in his children (Romans 8:18).

Sometimes the temptation to deny Jesus comes not from hardship but from prosperity. Maybe you have attempted to live a life of self-fulfillment. Maybe you have pursued pleasure or tried to ease your loneliness in corrupt ways. Perhaps

having a relationship with Christ humiliates you or doesn't seem essential in your social circles. Jesus' message reminds us that true life comes only from him.

The ascension of Christ reminds us of the glory that Jesus has with the Father. Let's remember the glory of the crucified and ascended Lord. And we are assured and know that even when difficulty or the draw of prosperity seems to fill our experience, we can catch glimpses of God's coming kingdom.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you know our weakness. Help us to glimpse your kingdom and the glory that you call us to share, and direct our vision toward you. In your name, Amen.

April 8, 2025

Mark 6: 7 – 13

⁷ He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. ⁸ He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; ⁹ but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics. ¹⁰ He said to them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. ¹¹ If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them." ¹² So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. ¹³ They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

Devotion

Our goal, as Christians, is to learn how to love people the way Jesus called us to love. In doing so we take every opportunity we can to practice love. This means interacting and sharing God's love with folks in our church and our community. For many, this is something new and unnerving. And we are hesitant at best when we begin. But for us, it is the best way to teach each other about God's love in amazing ways.

When Jesus sent his disciples out into the world, I think he had many of the same thoughts. He sent them out together to do difficult things. He sent them to preach and to heal. I am sure they were uneasy at first. And upon their return, they had remarkable stories about God's power revealed in their world.

A community does that together. A community of faith experiences these revelations together. A community of faith goes and does difficult things together—all the while witnessing the marvelous work of God in our world around us.

Prayer

Lord, send us out into the world together. Send us out in your name, to love people and to witness your power at work through our growing and changing lives. Amen.

April 9, 2025

Mark 12: 28 – 31

²⁸ One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, “Which commandment is the first of all?” ²⁹ Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; ³⁰ you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Devotion

This is a test question. The teacher of the law asked about the most important commandment. It was a test question for Jesus. He could have been trying to trip Jesus up.

Jesus provides the questioner some classic teaching. Jesus pinpoints the power and importance of loving the Lord our God as the most important thing. Ironically, love cannot be commanded. However, loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength is foundational and brings to light the whole reason for all the

commandments. This is God's holy invitation. It is an invitation to have the total of our lives directed toward loving God.

Our *hearts* beat in rhythm with reverence to God. Our hearts are united with His commandments. It's not for the simple sake of keeping the commands. The commitment is to honor God. Our *souls* position God first in life. We can work for ourselves, but we realize it is much better to dedicate our lives and energy to God.

Our *minds* think united in God's way to provide the world the hope of things to come. Our minds are productive and strong, and preparing them to glorify God, we are called to shape the world to act in the justice and goodness of God's kingdom. Our *strength* guides our every resource for God's purposes. All of our resources: wealth, abilities, associations, encouragements, capabilities are strongest when applied when we love and honor God. Are your hearts, souls, minds and strengths responding to God's holy invitation today?

Prayer

Jesus, help us all to grow in understanding and practicing how to love you with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strengths. We pray all of this in your name today. Amen.

April 10, 2025

Luke 17: 11 – 19

¹¹ On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. ¹² As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, ¹³ they called out, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!" ¹⁴ When he saw them, he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went, they were made clean. ¹⁵ Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. ¹⁶ He prostrated himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. ¹⁷ Then Jesus asked,

“Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? ¹⁸ Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” ¹⁹ Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.”

Devotion

Ten men with leprosy encountered Jesus. They had a skin disease, and they were not allowed to live with healthy people unless they were cured. Jesus provided healing for all ten of the men, and they were able to return to community with others. This is a story about Jesus and his great healing power.

This story includes an uncommon detail. One of the ten men, after realizing his healing, came back to Jesus. He was excited and grateful to be healed and he shouted praise to God and humbled himself before Jesus. Jesus welcomed and commended the healed man as someone who truthfully knew how to praise God. He commended him although the man was a Samaritan, an outsider who wasn't supposed to know much about God and faith. Jesus asked him upon his return, *“Where are the other nine?”* We are left wondering how thankful they were for their healing.

By commending the man who said thank-you, Jesus demonstrates to us that receiving health and healing is best when it flows into life with thanks and praise for God. It is one thing to experience salvation from Jesus, and it's even better to live out our appreciation for our salvation by sharing Jesus' love with the world.

Let gratefulness take root in your heart and life as you worship Jesus for all he has done for you.

Prayer

God, stir us to see how much you have done—and help us Lord to be truly thankful. Thank you especially for salvation and new life you give us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

April 11, 2025

Matthew 27: 62 – 65

The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate ⁶³ and said, “Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ ⁶⁴ Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, ‘He has been raised from the dead,’ and the last deception would be worse than the first.” ⁶⁵ Pilate said to them, “You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can.”

Devotion

I smile when I read these words: “*Make the tomb as secure as you know how.*”
Were the authorities afraid that Jesus might rise from the dead?

History has seen almost every kind of religious and political leader. And all of them have died, and their graves are scattered around the world.

There are four major religions in our world built around a personality: Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity. If you could visit the grave of Abraham, the patriarch of Israel and Judaism, you would find his grave occupied. If you visited the grave of Muhammad, the founder of Islam, in Mecca, you would find his grave occupied. The same would be true of Gautama Buddha. His grave is still occupied.

The grave of Jesus was occupied only briefly. And tomorrow we celebrate Easter.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, how can we ever repay you for what you’ve done? Thank you for paying the debt for our lives. Thank you for erasing our sin and calling us your own. We are no longer slaves to sin or in debt to a holy God. We are children of God. In Jesus’ name we pray today, Amen.

April 13, 2021

Palm Sunday

Ezekiel 39:21-29

I will display my glory among the nations; and all the nations shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid on them. 22 The house of Israel shall know that I am the LORD their God, from that day forward. 23 And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity, because they dealt treacherously with me. So I hid my face from them and gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they all fell by the sword. 24 I dealt with them according to their uncleanness and their transgressions, and hid my face from them. 25 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Now I will restore the fortunes of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for my holy name. 26 They shall forget their shame, and all the treachery they have practiced against me, when they live securely in their land with no one to make them afraid, 27 when I have brought them back from the peoples and gathered them from their enemies' lands, and through them have displayed my holiness in the sight of many nations. 28 Then they shall know that I am the LORD their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind; 29 and I will never again hide my face from them, when I pour out my spirit upon the house of Israel, says the Lord GOD.

Devotion

There is an old Chinese proverb that says: "May you live in interesting times." We certainly live in interesting times. We might even use other words to describe the time we live: difficult, sad, confusing, overwhelming. People of Israel found in Ezekiel also lived in "interesting times" full of sin and exile. It seemed God hid His face from them. And like us they found it hard to get our day started. Perhaps like us, they pondered how to live faithfully in their "interesting times." We discover in our study that God gave them a word of hope in the midst of their times: "I will have compassion, will forgive, gather them back and will show them my face once again." God promises to "pour out my Spirit upon them."

PRAYER

Holy God, on this Lenten journey we feel at times as though your face is hidden from us. Speak love to us. Gather us back. Show us your face. Remind us that your love carries us, no matter how. Amen

April 14, 2025

Mark 14: 32 – 52

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

³² They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” ³³ He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. ³⁴ And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” ³⁵ And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. ³⁶ He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.” ³⁷ He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, “Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? ³⁸ Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” ³⁹ And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. ⁴⁰ And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. ⁴¹ He came a third time and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. ⁴² Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand.”

The Betrayal and Arrest of Jesus

⁴³ Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. ⁴⁴ Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” ⁴⁵ So

when he came, he went up to him at once and said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him.⁴⁶ Then they laid hands on him and arrested him.⁴⁷ But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear.⁴⁸ Then Jesus said to them, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit?⁴⁹ Day after day I was with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.”⁵⁰ All of them deserted him and fled.

⁵¹ A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him,⁵² but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

Devotion

Jesus doesn't put up a fight, and his disciples flee. This makes for an interesting scenario. The disciples were willing to fight for Jesus against an armed crowd, but they were too afraid to stand by peacefully while Jesus was arrested.

This is particularly interesting as we recount the earlier part of the story, when three of the disciples kept falling asleep while they were supposed to be supporting Jesus as he prayed. The disciples did not do well either time.

Maybe if the disciples had been more supportive of Jesus in his prayers, they would have known better how to support him in his arrest and trial. They weren't able to assist Jesus on either occasion. They were not able to assist him because they didn't understand God's battle.

God's Son did not come to start a rebellion and neither his enemies nor his disciples understood. Jesus came to conquer the world spiritually. His enemies could not stand up to his teaching, and his disciples didn't know how to support his spiritual battle.

Jesus won the spiritual war by willingly dying for our sins and then rising from the dead. Jesus proved that violence and war will not save the world. Jesus had the spiritual power to do good in the face of evil. And through His actions and sacrifice, Jesus saved the world.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, you battled evil using your goodness. Help us to follow you. Teach us what is good and guide us to do good when we face evil in our world. Amen.

April 15, 2025

John 13: 31 – 38

³¹ When he had gone out, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³² If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³ Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now, I say to you, ‘Where I am going, you cannot come.’ ³⁴ I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.”

³⁶ Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, where are you going?” Jesus answered, “Where I am going, you cannot follow me now; but you will follow afterward.” ³⁷ Peter said to him, “Lord, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you.” ³⁸ Jesus answered, “Will you lay down your life for me? Very truly, I tell you, before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times.

Devotion

When Jesus said these words, it was the day before he was crucified. Judas had gone into the shadows to betray the Master. Jesus turned to his disciples, and he called them his children. He said: “*My dear little children, I will be with you only a little longer*” (John 13: 33).

Jesus told his followers how they would need to relate to each other after he was gone. “*Love one another,*” he commanded them. In his command to those listening, Jesus did not focus on the “feeling” of love, but on the “decision” to love. Jesus understood that his followers would not always want to love each other, so he gave the command to love. Love is first a decision, not an emotion.

A command to love is not easy to obey. And it is good news to hear this “*new command.*” What is new is Jesus has given us a model for this love through his ministry. We are to love, Jesus says, “*as I have loved you.*” He loved us so much; Jesus was willing to die for us. And in community with Christ, we discover the power to love sacrificially too.

Jesus says that when we love as he has loved, we will become a powerful witness for people who do not know him. By our love, people will know that we are his disciples, “*if [we] love one another.*” They will know we are the children of God.

Prayer

Lord Jesus may our love for others attract them to you. And may our church be a loving community to those who seek you. May we all be faithful in our love. Amen.

April 16, 2025

1 Corinthians 15:50-58

50 I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

51 Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. 54 When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

***55 “O death, where is thy victory?
O death, where is thy sting?”***

56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

58 Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

Devotion

“Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet.”

Life after death is a mystery. The Apostle Paul gives an inspired glimpse of our resurrection transformation. The mortal becomes immortal. The limits of life today will be no more.

"In the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet." There is a sense of instantaneous transition. A trumpet plays "Taps" at a soldier's burial, and I think, "God's time is now!" Wonder. Mystery.

Paul says "changed." What change? What age? What features? Maybe it doesn't matter. We will be recognizable; the fullness of the person God is creating us to be.

I know that as I live in Christ, I am being changed now - by God's love and the loving presence of others. In this very moment, God is loving us into newness of life. We already live as resurrection people, with Jesus even now.

Prayer

Gracious God, take my life to shine with faith in you, that I may dance the steps that follow Christ, bringing hope, love and peace to life, now and forever. Amen.

April 17, 2025

John 13:1-25

Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 And during supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, 4 rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. 5 Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. 6 He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no part in me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "You are not all clean."

12 When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. 18 I am not speaking of you all; I know whom I have chosen; it is that the scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.' 19 I tell you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, he who receives any one whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me."

Jesus Foretells His Betrayal

21 When Jesus had thus spoken, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, "Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." 22 The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. 23 One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was lying close to the breast of Jesus; 24 so Simon Peter beckoned to him and said, "Tell us who it is of whom he speaks." 25 So lying thus, close to the breast of Jesus, he said to him, "Lord, who is it?"

Devotion

"I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you should also love one another."

Jesus gave this new commandment to his disciples shortly before his crucifixion. On the surface it seems simple enough and should not be hard to follow. So why is this commandment violated so often by people who claim to be followers of Jesus? How can this commandment be practiced?

Here is a story to illustrate: A man lost his wife. They had been married for more than 55 years and had children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren. They were a devoted couple and did everything together. The husband was devastated, even though her death was expected. There had been falls and fractures, followed by hospitalizations, but in the end her heart simply gave out.

The husband was unprepared for the outpouring of love from others in the congregation. There were the words of encouragement, the cards and, most important of all, the prayers.

Let us all be like that. And now, in keeping with Jesus' commandment, let us resolve to offer support to other members who are in need.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we thank you for all the good years of life and now ask that you give us the wisdom to see opportunities to obey this loving commandment given to us by your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

April 18, 2025

Isaiah 53

Who has believed what we have heard?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

**2 For he grew up before him like a young plant,
and like a root out of dry ground;**

**he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.**

**3 He was despised and rejected by men;
a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.**

**4 Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.**

**5 But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed.**

**6 All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned every one to his own way;
and the LORD has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.**

**7 He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb,
so he opened not his mouth.**

**8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?**

**9 And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.**

**10 Yet it was the will of the LORD to bruise him;
he has put him to grief;
when he makes himself an offering for sin,
he shall see his offspring, he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand;
11 he shall see the fruit of the travail of his soul and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant,
make many to be accounted righteous;
and he shall bear their iniquities.**

**12 Therefore I will divide him a portion with the great,
and he shall divide the spoil with the strong;
because he poured out his soul to death,
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.**

Devotion

*All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way,
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Can any of us really say that we have not gone astray? Haven't all Christians given in to their own march toward sin and disobedience? Of course we have. Could we collectively bear the burden that Christ bore for us on the cross today? Of course we couldn't. Had Christ not been God as well as man, he surely could not have endured the burden of our sins on the cross.

So today we share Good Friday. A solemn and contemplative service this evening is our tradition. And this is the point: " 'Do this in remembrance of me.' ... For whenever you eat this bread, and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again (1 Corinthians 11:24-26)."

All of us believers are forever changed by Jesus' sacrifice. We are reminded of those words from 1 Corinthians in the observance of the Lord's Supper. We are changed forever into forgiven followers. We are reminded that not even death can overcome God's love and grace for His children. We are reminded of Christ's sacrifice and His being made alive in the Holy Spirit.

That is a lot of reminding, but we really are like sheep. We need to be reminded, persuaded, and led down the paths God chooses for us, not the paths that will lead us astray.

Prayer

O Father, we ask humbly for reminders and encouragement not to go astray. We thank you for your love for us and for the sacrifice you have made to save us, your undeserving children. Amen.

April 19, 2025

Romans 6:3-11

3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into

death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. 6 We know that our old self was crucified with him so that the sinful body might be destroyed, and we might no longer be enslaved to sin. 7 For he who has died is freed from sin. 8 But if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him. 9 For we know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. 10 The death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. 11 So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Devotion

“The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So, you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Christians proclaim a mystery of faith. We realize that Christ died, Christ rose, and Christ promised to come again. On that faithful Saturday we find ourselves in the silence and emptiness between Christ has died and Christ is risen. Christ has died, and His resurrection is still to come.

We know the silence of that Saturday. The silence that once was filled with their voices. The emptiness where once there was a living presence - this is the silence and the emptiness of Saturday. And silence and emptiness are more severe when someone dies by violence, untimely. The disciples knew this silence and void when Jesus was crucified. In silence, they wondered if their broken lives could ever be mended.

Our lives are not without these Saturday moments. When we mourn, when we grieve, when precious ones of our community and family die, we are left in the silence of Saturday. We realize death is all too real and our hope for resurrection is still to come.

God's promise of resurrection is real, even amid suffering and death. Now is that Saturday of our ordinary life, but there will also be Easter, our true and eternal life.

Prayer

Gracious God, be with us in times of mourning and silence, and fill the Saturdays of ordinary life with the promise of the joyous resurrection that is to come. Amen.

April 20, 2025

EASTER SUNDAY

Matthew 28:18-20

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.

Devotion

What an amazing season and journey this has been as we have read the stories of those changed by love and sent out in love to serve the living God:

Abram set out on his journey, and Jacob wrestled with God. Moses hoped, while Jonah's anger raged at God's unbelievable mercy. Mary shared in an extravagant gift, and the widow offered all she had. Faithful stewards were invited to believe and serve, while others were asked to demonstrate love that is patient and kind. Jesus, the son of the living God, came and lived among people to give them a glimpse of One who is "merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

God's love changes everything. We read about this transformative love in our

devotions and reflections. All of us in some ways have been changed by God's love and sent to serve in love people in the world. It continues in our Easter observances today: The first Easter morning saw faithful people coming to the tomb only to find it empty. God's resurrection love transformed them, and they returned to their homes, then out to proclaim the story to others and out into all the world, baptizing, making disciples, and teaching.

That is also our invitation from Matthew 28. Lent, this year, may be over, but our life journey is just beginning. We are changed as we encounter Jesus Christ and then are sent out to the world to provide and serve – and we do not go alone. We are sent by God, in the name of God, with the promise that God will be with us forever.

Prayer

God of the empty tomb, through the power of your Holy Spirit, continue to change us by your love and send us into the world to disciple, teach, and serve. Amen.