

JOURNEY TO THE CROSS

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2019

messages of faith
from the members of
St. John's Evangelical
Lutheran Church



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6

2 Corinthians 5:20b - 6:10

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he is asking them to be reconciled in two relationships – the first one was to be reconciled to God whom they have rejected by ignoring Paul's teachings to carry on God's work. Secondly, Paul asks them to be reconciled to one another, to stop the fighting among themselves and to begin working together as ambassadors, as messengers of God through the reconciling power of Jesus Christ. In The Message, we are asked to "become friends with God" and "to settle our relationships with one another". "Companions as we are in this work with you, we beg you, please don't squander one bit of the marvelous life God has given us." During this Lenten season, let us move forward in our journey as followers of Christ, knowing that whatever hardships or adversities we may face along the way, we will be reconciled to God.

Loving God, we thank you for giving us the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who was sent here to take on our sins so that we might have everlasting life with you. Guide us on our journey as your ambassadors to spread the Good News of saving grace through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jean Machamer

THURSDAY, MARCH 7

Acts 7:30-34

What I hear God saying to me in this passage is that there are going to be hard times, but He will be there to help and save. The people of Egypt were facing pain and hardship but God heard their cries for help and appeared. I am hearing that the burning bush represents the suffering the people go through and the pain they experience. The angel coming out of the burning bush represents that no matter what, God will be there to help. I hear that there is a promised land and no matter what you can put your life into God's hands and he will take care of you.

Dear God, thank you for the life lessons that allow us to grow spiritually and physically. Please stand behind us and keep pushing us to be the better version of ourselves. In any circumstance of doubt or worry, we trust in you to guide us through the whole way. In your name we pray, Amen.

Abbe Grofe

FRIDAY, MARCH 8

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

The psalmist's trust in God is absolute, and he encourages his hearers to share that certainty.

"For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone" (verses 11-12).

There is no doubt that God is ready to help the person in need, and God's power to do so is boundless.

"Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent" (verses 9-10).

We can put our trust in all kinds of persons and things, our first choice generally being ourselves, but the psalmist insists there is only one place where we can be truly safe -- in the shelter of the Most High.

Dear God, thank you for the ever-present shelter you provide. Guide us as we help others seek and find your refuge and lead us as we tend to all persons in need. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Devotional Team

SATURDAY, MARCH 9

John 12:27-36

The Jesus known and experienced by John would never ask for 'this cup' to pass, but rather, He willingly lays down His life in the events that are to come. John 12:28-30 reminds us of both the baptism of Jesus and the Transfiguration. John reminds us that Jesus does not need confirmation of who He is. He is perfectly aware of His origin, His relationship with God the Father, and His identity. The voice from heaven does not confirm Jesus' origin, His relationship to God, or His identity, but rather testifies that in Jesus, God's name has been glorified. That's about as cool as it gets! What does the Lord require of us? How can we 'testify' to our identity in God? How can God's name be blessed through us? Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God.

Dear God, you gave your only Son to die so that we might live. Strengthen us to boldly testify the meaning of the gift of your Son in our own lives so that our testimonies radiate our identities as your beloved children. In the name of Jesus we pray, Amen.

Devotional Team

SUNDAY, MARCH 10

Luke 4:1-13

The Temptation of Jesus

The part of this scripture that I never understood was fasting for 40 days. Jesus, son of God, was human, as proven when he died for us, but he stops eating for 40 days, which in his human form must have weakened him. And with the devil being a bully who preys on the weak, it would seem to be setting Jesus up to fail. But then I read what came right before and right after in Jesus' story, found in Luke. He purposefully left his baptism by John, where God recognizes him as his son, and is led into the wilderness by the spirit. Immediately after, he begins his ministry of performing miracles and teachings. So, this is not a time of weakening, but strengthening himself for what is to come, energized by Luke 3:22 - You are my son, the beloved; with you I am well pleased - recognition by God. So, while the fasting weakened his body, he was strengthened by the Holy Spirit and prayer and God's praise. Thus, the devil was proven to be no match for him.

Lord, help us to empty our hearts and minds of those things that weaken us and help us to make room for the Holy Spirit, which will fill us with the energy and power to have thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Becky Erb

MONDAY, MARCH 11

1 John 2:1-6

"Christ is the sacrifice that takes away our sins and the sins of all the world's people."

A driver's license permits us to drive, but it does not give us permission to drive recklessly! Likewise, Jesus' sacrifice for our sins does not grant us a license to live a sinful life! In fact, it should mean the exact opposite. The sacrifice made for us should inspire us to live a life of gratitude and obedience. We should follow God's commandments and share His goodness and love with the world. Admitting our sins and accepting the precious gift of Jesus enables us to be forgiven and to strive to live the life God desires for us.

Dear Lord, how grateful we are for your son, Jesus! He gave his life for us and showed us how you want us to live. Please walk with us each day and continue to help us remember the way! Thank you for giving us strength when we stumble and fall! Amen.

Bill & Phyllis Rohrbach

TUESDAY, MARCH 12

2 Peter 2:4-21

Peter wrote to the Jewish Christians after they were exiled to the surrounding country after Jerusalem was destroyed. Peter found it necessary to remind the Christians they were living with sinful people who tried to convince the believers it was all right to commit any sins. They told the Christians God did not care if they sinned. They said Jesus was not going to return. After all, years passed since Christ was crucified. Peter told them God does care, God does love them. He has promised them salvation. God sent His only Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit to His faithful believers.

Peter gave them two examples: God saved Noah and his family after the flood. God saved Lot after destroying Sodom.

Heavenly Father make us never forget your constant care for all faithful believers. Remind us always you are only a prayer away. Your mercies are new every morning. We praise and thank you. Amen.

Bill Smith

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 13

Luke 21:34 - 22:6

Be Careful! Watch and Pray!

Jesus was warning the people to be on watch and pray that they may be able to escape all that is about to happen and be able to stand before the Son of Man.

Judas, called Iscariot, one of the Twelve...did not listen and allowed Satan to convince him to betray Jesus.

Even today, knowing all that happened, we still need to Be Careful, Watch and Pray! Satan attacks us on our weakest days and steals our Joy and can destroy our focus on Jesus.

Dear God, Life is a daily Battle! We will try to be careful and keep watch from falling into the pit, but we pray for your protection, to keep us safe from the enemy! Help us to keep our eyes on You so we don't miss out on all you have to offer us every day! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Bonnie Moatz

THURSDAY, MARCH 14

Philippians 3:2-12

The Best of the Best of the Best.... Or not

This writing comes from Paul and begins with a warning to steer clear of religious busybodies, those interested in appearances, who are always barking and putting others down to build themselves up, putting their faith in themselves rather than in Jesus.

Paul refers to real believers as those who serve God by following the prompting of the Holy Spirit, who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior and put no confidence in themselves or an agenda to compare themselves with others. Instead, he shares his “Best of the Best of the Best” pedigree and tells us that it is insignificant when compared to the high privilege of knowing Jesus as his Master, firsthand.

He dumped it all in the trash so that he could embrace Christ and be embraced by him. Paul didn't want a petty, inferior brand of righteousness. He gave up all that inferior stuff so he could know Christ personally, experience his resurrection power, be a partner in his suffering, and go all the way with him to death itself. If there was any way to get in on the resurrection from the dead, he wanted to do it. He is not saying that he had his stuff all together, that he had made it; however, he is saying that he is well on his way, reaching out for Christ, who had so wondrously reached out for him. Jesus made the same sacrifice for us as he did for Paul and he hopes that we reach out to him as well.

Dear God, we thank you for the plans You have for us, Your children. Help us to give up our self-centered ways and to think differently as Paul did. To accept Jesus, knowing that he obediently endured all things to save each of us from sin and death in order that we would be restored into a relationship with you. Amen.

Brian & Ros Moatz

FRIDAY, MARCH 15

Philippians 3:17-20

Paul appeals to his readers to imitate him. This may seem to be an expression of vanity. However, Paul, in the previous verses, has just used himself as a negative example of putting stock in one's own status and accomplishments before God. He now regards these as rubbish for the sake of knowing Christ. Paul does not want his audience to imitate false teachers who valued external ritual practices. Rather, he wants his audience to imitate him in throwing off all external markers for the single-minded pursuit of sharing in Christ's suffering and knowing the power of his resurrection.

Paul says that he and his audience are not to be earthly minded but are to be heavenly minded. He reminds them that their true citizenship is in heaven and not on this earth. We are to "live as citizens worthy of the gospel." We do this by "standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel." The kind of living to which Paul calls us is not to be exercised in solitude, but rather, in community. There is an old adage: "he is so heavenly minded that he is no earthly good." Paul's point, however, is that we must be heavenly minded if we are to be any earthly good. To enact our heavenly citizenship is to follow the example of Christ as modeled in Paul, acting in humility and self-sacrificial service to others.

Dear God, You call us to join together as one people to serve others. Strengthen our resolve to live Gospel-worthy lives in our own communities so that we may act as your heavenly-minded disciples here on earth. In Jesus' name we pray.

Devotional Team

SATURDAY, MARCH 16

Matthew 23:37-39

Did you ever have a child in crisis who would not allow you to comfort him/her? Or, a child who pushed you away? Can you remember the hurting love you felt for that child? In just three verses you can hear Jesus' loving anguish for Jerusalem. Apparently, Jerusalem was not always golden and was more like the child at the beginning of this writing. Jesus, just like any loving adult, knows Jerusalem's (or the child's) pique will fade. Instead of hateful things, speech will be filled with loving praise.

Lord Jesus, you still loved Jerusalem despite her actions. Please love us when our actions are unlovable. Love us until we can say "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Amen.

Cathy Krause

SUNDAY, MARCH 17

Philippians 3:17-4:1

Stay the track. Paul is reminding us that we shouldn't be focused on earthly pleasures, but to be dwelling on heavenly treasures. Most of us are guilty of thinking about earthly things that we let control our lives. We are obsessed with earthly things like money, power, alcohol, and possessions. We are obsessed with them because we think they will bring us friends, security, happiness or power. One's thinking is not to be on one's rewards on earth, but to do things that please the Father. Jesus was faithful and loving. Even in death, he loved and trusted his Father. We may live on earth, but our eyes are on Jesus, longing for his return. We must live in the knowledge that he is coming again and stand firm in the faith as we await his return.

Heavenly Father help your children to remember to keep our eyes on Heaven where we will get our reward. Amen.

Betty Long

MONDAY, MARCH 18

Romans 4:1-12

The Faith of Abraham

Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. Abraham felt that good deeds would make him favorable in God's eyes, but scripture tells us that we are counted righteous not by our works, but by our faith in God, who forgives all sinners.

Observing religious rites, such as baptism and circumcision will not secure a relationship with God. Being saved by Grace is our only hope.

Dear God, I pray for faith and trust, knowing that you can do the impossible. Please give me guidance and direction as I go through this journey of life.

Dave & Connie Babb

TUESDAY, MARCH 19
1 Corinthians 10:1-13

In Paul's letter, he reminds us that the past is there to teach and guide us on what is pleasing to the Lord. The Israelites in the Old Testament show us what God desires of his people, as well as what he does not. We must be diligent in learning from the past, to ensure that we will not fall into the temptations of the world. God will never allow us to be tempted beyond what we are capable. We are reminded to look to Him for all things and lean on his strength and love to stand firm in our faith every day.

Dear Lord, thank you for your Son, who died so that we might be forgiven. Please help us each and every day in all trials we face. Give us your strength and wisdom to endure these trials and stand firm in our faith. Help us to glorify you in everything we do. In your precious Son's name, Amen.

Emily Cunningham

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

Luke 13:22-31

In this verse, Jesus tells us that there will be struggles and challenges in our life, but we should make every effort to follow his word so we can do his work and be good disciples. He also tells us that God knows if we are being true in our actions and not doing things for show. We will all come together in God's Kingdom - no matter where we are from - the north, the south, the east, the west - the rich - the poor - all of us, as long as we believe in him, confess our sins, and are doing good for the sake of helping others. We need to truly care and do what God wants us to do. We need to ask him for forgiveness for our sins; only then will he have a place for us with him. We need to love one another.

Dear God, help us to follow your path, spread your word, and be true disciples of yours - loving and helping all of your people. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Donnie & Mary Kay Heimbach

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Psalm 63:1-8

When we are lost, where do we look? To whom do we go for guidance and strength? What do we long for? For what or whom do we seek? When I realized, finally realized, that God walks with me every day, it is not a feeling I want to be without. This Psalm sings about losing the feeling of closeness with God and wanting it back, wanting and needing as much as one needs food and water. To trust in God is to feel close to God.

Dear God, we pray that we do not lose sight of you, we pray that we keep you in our hearts, so we no longer feel the hunger or sorrow to walk without you in our lives. And we pray that others who are lost find you. In God's name we pray, Amen.

Ebie Cadwallader

FRIDAY, MARCH 22

Daniel 12:1-4

God is the 'Prince' who fights for us, stands over us, and works for our salvation in ways that we cannot see. What does it mean for you to BE the people of the Most High and to share citizenship in the kingdom of God with the holy angels? Our shared hope is life eternal, with God and the angels. This hope and this circumstance is real! It is not simply a dream for the future. Daniel offers us this hope to sustain, guide, strengthen, and embolden us. Our hope is found in our relationship with God.

During this Lenten season, (in all seasons!) I encourage you to witness to God's Promised hope by your words and by your deeds.

Dear God, we seek guidance to grow our faith so we do not see Daniel's vision of the coming resurrection of the dead as a dream for the future, but our shared hope for life eternal. Help us to boldly proclaim this truth in our words and deeds. In name of the Resurrected Christ we pray, Amen.

Devotional Team

SATURDAY, MARCH 23

Luke 6:43-45

What's in our heart comes out in our words and behaviors. A tree having a fruit of a certain kind shows us that a heart devoted to Jesus will show the fruits of the spirit; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. If in our heart we don't know God, we cannot be expected to show these good fruits. If we keep our hearts focused on God, the fruit that we bear will honor him.

Dear God, I struggle daily with trying to live out what I say I believe. I desire that the fruit of my life would be honorable to you. I pray that my life, words and actions are a fruit that will draw others closer to you. Help me to be submissive to your will and free me from myself. Amen.

Jason Friz

SUNDAY, MARCH 24

Luke 13:1-9

In this passage from Luke, we are “instructed to stop “worrying” over the faults (sins) of others, but instead to focus on our own sins and the need to repent of them, throwing ourselves on God’s love and mercy in Christ! Luke uses the fig tree parable to illustrate God’s love and patience for us to “bear fruit.” Did he not - in Christ - cure the crippled woman of 18 years, “with a spirit”?

Lord, help us to accept your love and forgiveness for our sins, in Christ’s name we pray, and to strive to bear “fruit” in thanksgiving and service to others in our church and community.

Jay Herbert

MONDAY, MARCH 25

Luke 1:26-38

28: And he came to her and said, “Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.”

This is it! This is the Annunciation! A turning point in human history!

The angel Gabriel announces to Mary the Lord is with her. Gabriel doesn't say, “May the Lord be with you.” No, it's the pronouncement and assuredness that “The Lord is with you.” Mary is pregnant with Jesus, the Son of God. Luke writes that Mary was perplexed and pondered all of this. Are you kidding me? Talk about a pregnant pause!

Gabriel and Mary continue this otherworldly conversation. Gabriel explains what remains so difficult for so many of us to comprehend but that's okay. Mary gets it. And she responds to the Annunciation with an assertion of her own: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

The Lord is with us, too. God's presence is not conditional, it's not upon request; it just is. And though the presence of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit in our lives remains so difficult for so many of us to comprehend, may we be as assured as Mary when answering God's call to us, that we each might say, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Most gracious and merciful God, you have equipped me with all the tools I need to hear your call and answer it. I ask you to help and guide me through the complexities of daily life to get to the true work of the kingdom on earth. I pray this with the blessed assurance of salvation through Jesus, your Son. Amen.

Jen Schlegel

TUESDAY, MARCH 26
Romans 2:12-16

Truthfully, I'm not sure any little bit of information about Romans 2 will have benefit without reading what Martin Luther wrote as an introduction to the letter to the Romans.

“This letter is truly the most important piece in the New Testament. It is purest Gospel. It is well worth a Christian's while not only to memorize it word for word but also to occupy himself with it daily, as though it were the daily bread of the soul. It is impossible to read or to meditate on this letter too much or too well. The more one deals with it, the more precious it becomes and the better it tastes. Therefore, I want to carry out my service and, with this preface, provide an introduction to the letter, insofar as God gives me the ability, so that everyone can gain the fullest possible understanding of it. Up to now it has been darkened by glosses [comments which accompany a text] and by many a useless comment, but it is in itself a bright light, almost bright enough to illumine the entire Scripture.

Having read his brief introduction– please read Romans 2:12-16 again and see what jumps off the page, what shimmers, or what seems to stand out. What is it that God is asking you to do or share or to reflect on more deeply?

Dear God, we return to your word again and again to feed us anew. When we struggle to understand your Scripture messages to us, gives us the eyes to read and learn from what You have already written on our hearts so we may do Your work in the world. In Your Son's name we pray, Amen.

Devotional Team

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

Luke 13:18-21

In these passages, I hear God saying that we don't have to look far to see where God is. He is all around us – in a tree that has grown from a seed and yeast that is used in making bread. We see these things every day. Not only are they reminders of God's great powers, but they also remind us that they also provide for us like the birds perched in its branches and bread for us to eat that nourishes our whole body just like God's word does.

Dear God, we thank you for the incredible place we live called earth and all of the amazing wonders you have given us so that we never have to doubt in Your loving presence. When we are surrounded by all these incredible gifts You have given us on this earth, let our spirit feel Your calm embrace. Let us ponder these marvels that we see daily. May they give us strength in the knowledge that we are always in Your midst. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Karen Schwartz

THURSDAY, MARCH 28

Luke 13:18-21

I wake up in the morning, thinking ahead of the day to come... and all the associated problems I need to solve. I groan and complain. Sometimes I get so overwhelmed with the “what ifs” that I lose sight of the moment. In these verses, Paul reminds us to be cheerful and let go of our earthly troubles, for they are temporary. Live in the moment and worry not for the future, for through the gift of His son, Jesus Christ, our future is guaranteed. Our home will be in heaven in a house built for us by God. Basically - just LET IT GO! GET OVER YOURSELF! God’s got this!

Dear God, we give you thanks for the gift of everlasting life. Truly, how can we ever thank you for this gift we do not deserve? Please help us today and every day to let go of our small and temporary problems, so we can focus beyond ourselves, freeing us to focus on how to love and serve others.

Karen Pollock

FRIDAY, MARCH 29
2 Corinthians 5:6-15

Grounded in God's love, we can speak truth to one another -- we can risk sincerity -- even when we disagree or might be wrong. God is reconciling the entire world through Christ, in spite of anything we or others have done: God's promises are always a "yes." Rooted in that "yes," our lives can be an open statement of truth -- regardless of where we find ourselves.

Dear God, when we're afraid to share our faith with others give us courage to speak our truth knowing our gift awaits in your everlasting kingdom. Amen.

Devotional Team

SATURDAY, MARCH 30

Luke 15:1-10

I have a friend who is a Veteran of World War II. I am so incredibly grateful for his service and I know I cannot begin to understand what it was like to be involved in service that can require the taking of another life. There are many accounts of people losing – and finding – faith in the foxhole. I hope these words from Luke bring comfort and assurance to those who have faced or will face the worst that life can offer. “No matter what, there will be more joy in heaven over one who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.” We have all been in the foxhole with sin; we all face doubt. But unlike the shepherd searching for the stray sheep or the woman searching for the coin, God doesn’t come searching after us. God is right there in the foxhole with us. Rejoice and be glad!

Dear Lord, when we are lost in the forest of our daily trials and tribulations please show us the direction to find our way to you, so that we may receive your tender loving care and blessings. In appreciation we offer our songs of praise for your abounding love and forgiveness of our sins. Amen.

Leonard Crowdell

SUNDAY, MARCH 31

Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

In His teaching of this truth, Jesus tells of three people – father, younger son and older son. As I read and meditated on His words, thoughts came to my mind of several feelings that each of these men could have had. I will mention only one for each of them. The younger son – eagerness to be free to do his own ‘thing’; Father – concern for his son who has left home; Older son – resentment towards both dad and brother. You may add your own ideas. Another thought that stirs within me – change these individuals to a mother and two daughters. Wow! A whole new scene!

Gracious God, thank you for walking through our journey of life with us. We pray in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.

Maefern Houck

MONDAY, APRIL 1

Psalm 53

The meaning of this psalm is to convince us of our sins. The psalmist, David, shows us how atrocious our sin is, and he proves this by his own certain knowledge. He speaks terror to persecutors, the worst of sinners. He speaks encouragement to God's persecuted people. In this psalm, David clearly shows that there is no fear of God before their eyes. Men's bad practices flow from their bad principles; if they profess to know God, yet in works and thoughts, they deny Him. The people David is referring to are blind to knowing God and his good works. Towards the end of this psalm, there is faith in the saints, and their hope and power have the cure to this great evil, and his name will be Jesus, and he will save His people from their sins.

Dear God, even though we live in a dark world, help us to never lose sight of your love and grace that you give unconditionally to us each new morning. Help us to remain strong and confident in our faith, seeking You first and foremost. I pray that you would open my eyes to any sins I commit, allowing me to repent and to continue to live out my life according to Your word. Amen.

Makayla Adam

TUESDAY, APRIL 2

Revelation 19:9-10

Young ladies spend years dreaming of their wedding day and planning every detail of the ceremony. Married couples research tirelessly and talk endlessly about their plans for a European cruise holiday. But Colossians 3:2 tells us to “set your mind on things above, not earthly things”. How much time do we spend dreaming about Heaven and what it will be like, walking with angels, discussing matters with Christ, celebrating with our family and friends, seeing the wonders of the creative mind of God and understanding the deepest wisdom?

Perhaps the trials and tribulations of earth would not be so monumental if we were always dreaming about and preparing for life above. Perhaps we would spend more time preparing ourselves for Christ if we were dreaming of our eternal home and our union with Him as our big brother and Savior and King.

Lord, put Your thoughts in our mind. Let us daily evaluate our thoughts and actions in the light of our future living with YOU. May those thoughts give us so much joy that it flows out of us to others. Amen.

Martha Bentley

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 3

Luke 9:10-17

This passage recounts Jesus feeding the 5,000. It is a Bible story we probably first heard as a child. While we may not have had the understanding of just how many 5,000 men are, it was a BIG number and sounded like a lot of people! Think of it today - where could 5,000 men plus their families (probably 15,000 mouths or more) go and be fed, and how much food would be needed?

Jesus wasn't worried. He took the 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish, held them up to God and gave thanks. Then he broke the loaves and divided the fish for all to eat. All ate and were satisfied, and there were 12 baskets of broken pieces left.

Imagine this. Jesus and his disciples had just finished walking the countryside as they day in and day out, teaching and healing the sick. They too were tired and hungry. Yet, Jesus was given a small amount of food and performed another miracle because He loves us and cares for us. We should thank God for all that he does in our lives every day, even that which we think is bad - because it too is for our good! What an amazing God he is!

Heavenly Father, thank you for your goodness, your kindness and your generosity. You know our needs and feed us every day. May we use this nourishment to strengthen our hearts and hands to better serve you and feed others. In your Son's name we pray. Amen.

Mel Roth

THURSDAY, APRIL 4

Isaiah 43:1-7

Isaiah is teeming with beautiful passages, but this passage is a bright light when it comes to memorable verses. These touching words of affection are strikingly beautiful, yet so soft and full of love. While reading these verses, it is easy to feel the adoration and true, unconditional love that God feels for every one of us. Now, the chapters before address the Jews being led out and released from captivity, and this chapter pertains to God's words to them. He makes precious promises to all of his people; claiming them as His own, committing his everlasting presence to them, and assuring their deliverance through Him. Sometimes I think that the most meaningful passages really are the ones that are the easiest to comprehend. I know that we are challenged to find deeper meaning in a verse, or a story, or a chapter, but sometimes it really is written on the page how it is. There is a clear tone, point, and type of love that is delivered to the people of God through this passage. It is exactly how it is written. We all feel differently, and think differently, but this passage gives us the same hope and the same love. This passage unites us, and links us all, because together, we are one under Christ's love.

Dear Heavenly Father, Your everlasting love inspires us to serve under your glorious name. You have called us to be Yours, and we are claimed in the holiest of ways. Help and guide us to seek out Your presence, and to recognize You every day, in the littlest of things, and in the smallest of ways. May the things that You have revealed and thoughts that we have shared dwell in our hearts and stir us to action. In your beloved name we pray, Amen.

Melissa Geary

FRIDAY, APRIL 5

Philippians 2:25-3:1

In this passage, Paul speaks of the good work that Epaphroditus did, to the point where he fell ill trying to carry out the work of Christ. God took note of all the good things that he did and kept him from dying. Paul notes that Epaphroditus, upon returning to his people should be honored for the work he did from afar, giving his life for the sake of Christ, much like our missionaries do today.

Paul also reminds us that everyone who believes in God should know that the Bible is the 'go to' for answers, both morally and theologically. If we are troubled, the Bible will help us make corrections in our thoughts, attitudes or actions.

Pray for God to open doors where our missionaries can share the Gospel freely in countries where it's allowed. Pray for them to speak God's word, filled with love. Pray for the missionaries to be aware of cultural differences and to embrace them. Pray for ways to bridge the cultural divide and make solid connections with native people. Keep them safe in your arms. Amen.

Vicky Henry

SATURDAY, APRIL 6

John 11:45-57

I think it is common for us to sometimes feel uneasy when we read this passage about the people plotting to arrest and kill Jesus. It can be difficult to think about how blind some people were - and how blind we can sometimes be - to the righteousness of Jesus and his miracles. The Pharisees were fearful of the miracles that Jesus worked and were worried about people putting their faith in Him. However, I think it is important to focus on the beginning of the passage, which starts off stating that “many of the people... saw the things that Jesus did, and they put their faith in him.” They saw Jesus’ miracles and, rather than experiencing fear, they experienced awe. They put their faith in Him, because they trusted Him. This is what we, as believers in Christ, should do because of His love for us. We should also remember that Jesus died to bring together all people from all nations. He did not just die for those of us who sit in church on Sunday, but for everyone; and therefore, we should strive to do our part to invite everyone to experience Jesus’ love and faithfulness.

Lord, we pray that we will always put our faith in You and believe in Your miracles. We pray that, even if we find ourselves amidst a crowd of people who do not know You or do not share our beliefs, that we can stand firm in our beliefs and spread our faithfulness to others. Help us, Lord, to spread the love of Christ to everyone that we encounter. In Your name we pray, Amen.

Molly Byrne

SUNDAY, APRIL 7

John 12:1-8

As I read the passage, two themes come to mind: values and intentions. Mary valued Jesus. She spent the money to buy nard (perfume). Her intention was to give Jesus a proper burial. On the other hand, Judas valued money. His intention was not to spend the money on the poor as he purported; rather, his intention was to steal the money, which he had access to as he was the keeper of the common purse. In this passage, Jesus confirmed Mary's values and intentions. Let us pray.

Dear God, help me choose values and intentions that are in accordance to your will. Help my innermost thoughts and intentions arise from my desire to love and serve you. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Nan Moyer

MONDAY, APRIL 8
Hebrew 10:19-25

“Let us” – three times in this beautiful passage the scripture writer invites and commands us to join together, telling us how to move forward together. It’s the third “let us” that is one of my favorite verses in the Bible: “And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” I love this imagery of provoking one another, inciting one another, stirring up in one another to love and to do good deeds! At Pentecost, we ask that the Holy Spirit stir up in us our gifts to do the ministry of Jesus Christ out in the world. Here, we are called to stir up the gifts of the Holy Spirit in one another to do what we have been commanded to do. And it’s a beautiful thing to behold! Who hasn’t been inspired by another in our congregation to love and do good deeds? Whether it’s offering our hands in labor or prayer, we stir each other up, indeed, we provoke one another to love and good deeds. Let us continue to do so!

Most gracious and merciful God, stir up in us the Holy Spirit that we might provoke one another to love and good deeds to do the work you have commanded us to do; to love you with all that we have and to love our neighbors. In the community of the Holy Spirit I pray, Amen.

Jen Schlegel

TUESDAY, APRIL 9

1 John 2:18-28

John's warning is ominous – it is the last hour and the antichrists are among us. John is telling us to be prepared to confront that which and those who would keep us from Christ and the cross. This passage does not bring me comfort but causes distress. If I remove these verses from the rest of the New Testament and let them stand alone, I might experience great anxiety. When I put these verses in the context of the New Testament and part of the Good News, I see the full story. John tells us to be prepared and so does Luke: “Be dressed for service and keep your lamps burning” (Luke 12:35). John warns us of those who would separate us from Christ and Paul reassures us “that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate use from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 8:38-39).

Dear God, help us prepare for your Son's return and help us reject all that turns us away from the cross. When we experience doubt or distress, give us the strength to return to you with the assuredness that your love is ever present in our lives. We give our thanks and praise to you. Amen.

Devotional Team

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 10

Luke 18:31-34

It's understandable that the apostles were focused on their beloved friend going through horrendous pain, torture and death. Would we not have this same response if a close friend or family member were about to face a devastating situation? Their faith was not strong enough yet to look past the current situation to the eventual outcome. They could not comprehend the outcome - Jesus' resurrection - until seeing it face-to-face. We can learn from their example to not focus heavily on the negative events that may be occurring in our lives at the present, but to have faith in God's plan and the future outcome.

Heavenly Father, as you walk with us on our journey of faith, help us to see that the hardships we face today are part of Your grand plan and that we should not have fear.

Shannon Omlor

THURSDAY, APRIL 11

Hebrews 2:1-9

Not too long ago I read a story about the British explorer, Admiral William Edward Parry, who led an expedition to the Arctic Ocean in the early 1800's. With the goal of going farther north to continue their chartings, they calculated their location by the stars and started the very difficult and treacherous march. They walked the whole day.

Totally exhausted, they finally stopped for the night. Once again, they took their bearings from the stars. Defeat! Exhaustion! Frustration! They discovered that they had been walking on an ice floe that was moving south far faster than they were moving north! They were drifting in the opposite direction and ended up farther south than when they had started.

The same can be true of us spiritually. If we neglect to regularly read God's Word and listen carefully to what God is saying, we too will increase the likelihood of drifting.

Dear God, when we find ourselves drifting, lovingly nudge us back on Your path. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Pastor Bob Machamer

FRIDAY, APRIL 12
Hebrews 2:10-18

At times it's hard to feel loved, and it can be even harder to accept love. This passage reminds us that Jesus is here FOR us — "...not for angels, but Abraham's descendants." His purpose is to be among us, which allows us to be reminded that his suffering is what allowed us to be forgiven of sin. In times when people feel alone, burdened, upset; Jesus is constantly there beside us. No matter what is being endured in the physical world, there is the blanket of Jesus' love wrapped around us.

Dear Heavenly Father, let us all know that we are loved. When we are feeling happy, we are loved. When we are feeling angry, we are loved. When we are feeling sad, we are loved. Your Son reminds us that we are never alone, even when we walk through darkness. Amen.

Rachael Geary

SATURDAY, APRIL 13

Luke 22:1-13

The stage is set. Judas Iscariot meets with the High Priests and religious scholars who are trying to do away with Jesus. He agrees to turn Jesus over for a price. I wonder what Judas was thinking. Was he misguided and just trying to help the establishment who were upset by the teachings of this Rabbi, Jesus? After all, Jesus' teachings were not in compliance with Jewish law of the day. Was Judas simply tricked and lured by Satan, swept along by a force beyond his control? I don't know what his motives were. However, he set in motion a series of events that ended with Jesus' death and resurrection. Without betrayal would there have been a crucifixion or would other events have led to the ultimate end? I don't know. It's a mystery to me. I only know that the events did take place and that Jesus was crucified and overcame death to set me free from sin and separation from God.

O merciful God, we give thanks that out of your love, you sent your only beloved son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ to endure Judas' betrayal and ultimately to die and overcome death for our redemption. Guide us as we walk through these days of Lent in order that we may love and serve you with our whole being. Amen.

Ranee Reitz

SUNDAY, APRIL 14
Luke 22:15-23:56

Even in his final days, Jesus broke bread with his followers and shared his final thoughts knowing he would soon face death. Instead of running and hiding in Gethsemane, he remained faithful and vigilant by praying for us. Instead of becoming angry with those who denied him and betrayed him, he showed patience and kindness. When Peter denied him 3 times, he did not mock or shame him but was silent. Jesus remained faithful to his father till his last breath, crucified on the cross. It was then the centurion, seeing the body of Jesus lifeless on the cross, realized what he had done and felt his own remorse. He realized the purity of Jesus' soul and his righteousness.

As Jesus faced his darkest hours, he led us by example, having faith, patience and kindness to those who sinned against him. Even when we are shunned, struck, mocked or shamed, know that God's promise shields us in His light and we are to take a higher road in faith and let those who sin come to the light in their own time. Each of us must answer to God for our own actions, not those of others. Stay true and faithful on His path of righteousness.

Shelly Houser

MONDAY, APRIL 15

John 12:1-11

In Jesus' time, most roads were dirt. Exceptions were some brick roads built by the Romans. Sandals on dirt roads did not prevent feet from getting dirty. Washing visitors' feet was a very common, practical, considerate and kind gesture. Mary washed Jesus' feet and rubbed them with expensive, perfumed herbs. Judas Iscariot criticized the spending and claimed he wanted the money given to the poor instead. Actually, he wanted to steal it for himself.

Jesus said, "Leave her alone." She bought it to use on the day of my burial. "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."

Let us pray. Dear Lord God, please help us to truly love our fellow humans, to recognize our and their faults, and treat them as we want to be treated and loved. We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

Robert Eschelman

TUESDAY, APRIL 16

John 12:20-36

In this passage, Jesus is calmly acknowledging his coming death and the great impact it would have for the future. Jesus knew that the suffering he was about to endure was his mission and purpose. As members of the fallen earth, we are bound to face our share of struggles. As people of God, we should look for comfort in God just as Jesus did. Our hard times are all part of God's plan and can have impacts much larger than ourselves. For his sacrifice, we owe him our lives and love, and we must trust him through the worst of our struggles.

Dear God, your love and sacrifice for us is astounding. I pray that even when life seems dark and difficult, we can find comfort in knowing we are living our lives for you, and you always have a greater purpose for us. Help us to always walk in faith. Amen.

Sarah Eidle

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17

John 13:21-32

In the words of Mark Allen Powell, Advent is a season of waiting, a time to be marked by urgent anticipation, by a longing for the fulfillment of what has been promised. The "second coming" should not be simply a doctrine to which we officially subscribe (mentioning it in the creeds); it should be a defining reality that impacts our faith and lives.

In today's church, many Christians seem to think, "Since the time of Jesus' coming cannot be known, we need not think much about it." Perhaps it should be the other way around. Since the timing is unknown, we should think about it all the time! Of course, Christian theology affirms the presence of Christ through Word and Sacrament, in the fellowship of other believers, and so forth. But even those fortunate enough to have a life filled with joy and blessing should not be satisfied to the point of complacency. There is more! There is better! The season of Advent invites us to wait impatiently for the consummation of hope, longing to know God as fully as we have been known; to see no longer through a dark pane, but face to face; to love as we have been loved; to experience Jesus Christ as he is, and in so doing, to become like him.

Dear God, we thank you for the gift of your Son. We wait and prepare for your Son's arrival during Advent and in Lent we wait and prepare for your Son's resurrection. Help us make daily preparations for the second coming by living lives as you would have us live. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Devotional Team

THURSDAY, APRIL 18
John 13:1-17, 31-35

In this passage we are shown Jesus' unconditional love for His disciples (really for all of humanity) and His mission of service. With the foreknowledge of his impending death on a cross, He clearly demonstrates this by humbling Himself to wash their feet—a slave's task—even while knowing he would be betrayed by one of them.

Why does He perform this service – Out of duty, tradition or ordinance? No, it's because of love, unconditional love. Jesus gives us a clear example that no matter who you are or what position in society you might hold, you are to serve, humbly.

Jesus commands “Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you must also love one another.” Surely, Jesus shows us that love is action – Doing things unselfishly for the benefit of another person by truly seeking the best for another.

Heavenly Father thank you for your example of servant leadership. Give us the grace to count others more important than ourselves. Give us a servant heart and teach us to be more like you. Amen.

Scott & Becky Scheiry

FRIDAY, APRIL 19
John 18:1-19:42

Throughout these verses we hear how the truth was used to benefit individuals, but also how it was denied in order to justify their desired outcome. These words made me ask myself how many times I've done this with myself, my family, friends and co-workers. Surely in my younger years, this most likely happened, though I hope not too frequently. I am reminded of how I must always be true to myself and be proud of my knowledge and belief that Jesus is my Lord and Savior. He will forgive my sins.

Perhaps I am like Joseph and Nicodemus in that Jesus' death changed me. I was raised in the Lutheran church and always went to Sunday School and church. But the reason for Jesus' death really changed me when my brother passed away when he was only 36 years old. At first, I couldn't stand the thought of living a life without him being a part of it. But then it all clicked for me and I had my 'ah-ha moment'. He would have eternal life because of Jesus' death. My heart was still broken because of my brother's death, but I had peace.

Dear God, we thank you for the many gifts you have given us, most importantly, the gift of eternal life. Please continue to teach us to know the truth. Give us the courage to speak the truth and behave in ways that benefit humanity and most importantly, you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Sue Grofe

SATURDAY, APRIL 20

John 20:1-18

Mary, go and do! After Mary saw that the rock was rolled away, she went and told the disciples what she had seen and went back to the tomb. After the disciples saw what she said was true they left her crying at the tomb. Mary looked in and saw two angels where Jesus had laid. They asked her what she was looking for. She exclaimed that someone had taken away her Lord. Then Jesus stood in front of her, but she did not recognize him. The author does not tell us why she does not recognize him. Is it that Jesus was in disguise or was Jesus himself keeping her from knowing the truth? Jesus must not have looked too mystical, like the angels in the tomb, since she thought he was the gardener. Could it have been that she was blind, because her life was in complete chaos? First her teacher was crucified and now someone took the body. Then Jesus said, 'Mary' and she instantly recognized him. Jesus said go, tell the disciples that he is ascending to the Father, and Mary did as Jesus commanded.

Jesus said to the disciples go and baptize all people, but what are the disciples doing, hiding or fishing. God says to Moses, "Go into Egypt and free my people," but Moses first gave excuses. When the Lord called the prophet Jeremiah, he resisted. He said he was too young, and people would not listen to him. Another excuse. All throughout the centuries we find people being called and they have excuses. Mary, go and do. Tom, go and do. (Insert your name her), go and do!

Do we see and hear the Lord, or are we blinded, made deaf by our own chaos? When we hear the Lord, do we resist and make excuses (my health is failing, I am too old, I am too young, I lost my job, money is tight)? Jesus is calling: Go and Do!

Father, You gave us eyes, teach us to see that path you have laid before us. You gave us ears, teach us to hear Your voice when You are calling us. You have given us a heart, teach us to love like Jesus loved us and to go and do. Amen.

Tom Engle

SUNDAY, APRIL 21

Romans 6:3-11

Close your eyes. Visualize a water-immersion baptism. Being fully immersed, under the water – buried. Your sins being washed away. Symbolic of Christ's death and burial – and ultimately the death of the power of sin. Now envision your body being lifted from the water – bathed in the gift of new life. Just as Christ's resurrection brings this promise of a new start - a new life. Become alive in Christ!

Heavenly Father, thank you for the ultimate sacrifice and gift in your Son. Help us to live more fully in Your image and by Your word. Amen.

Mike & Shannon Omlor



*He is not here:
for he is **Risen,**
as he said.*

—MATTHEW 28:6

GATHERING SCHEDULE

MARCH 13, 20, 27 & APRIL 3, 10

7:00 pm | Holden Evening Prayer
*preceded by Soup & Sandwich,
serving 5:30 - 6:45 pm in the Lower Level*

APRIL 13

6:00 pm | Worship Celebration

APRIL 14 - PALM SUNDAY

8:00 & 9:30 am | Worship Celebration
service begins in the Lower Level

APRIL 18 - MAUNDY THURSDAY

7:00 pm | Worship Celebration
Prayer Vigil begins at 8:00 pm

APRIL 19 - GOOD FRIDAY

12:00 pm | Community Service
*held at Trinity Church, 250 Sweinhart Rd,
Boyertown*

Prayer Vigil ends at 7:00 pm

7:00 pm | Good Friday Liturgy

APRIL 20 - VIGIL OF EASTER

7:00 pm | Worship Celebration
service begins in the Lower Level

APRIL 21 - EASTER

8:00 & 10:00 am | Worship Celebration

St. John's Evangelical Lutheran Church
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Boyertown, PA 19512
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