



A LENTEN JOURNEY  
*... to the cross and to the  
resurrection of Jesus the Christ!*

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God sent Jesus into the world to accomplish redemption for God's people. In Jesus' death and resurrection, the gap between us and God has been bridged forever.

May your Lenten journey be blessed by the devotional offerings included in this booklet. These devotionals were written by the faith community of Holy Spirit Lutheran Church.

Although each writer may reflect on only one or two verses, devotions are based on the entire Scripture passage, which is noted in the top right corner of each page. To gain the most understanding of the context of the writer's comments you are encouraged to read the entire passage (or the entire chapter) during your devotional time. The Bible translation, or paraphrase, used by the writer follows the annotated Scripture verses used for the writing. Abbreviations are listed below.

#### **Bible Translation Abbreviations:**

CEV	Contemporary English Version
ESV	English Standard Version
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible
JB	Jerusalem Bible
KJV	King James Version
NCV	New Century Version
NASV	New American Standard Version
NIV	New International Version
NIRV	New International Reader's Version
NLT	New Living Translation
NKJV	New King James Version
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
TNIV	Today's New International Version
TV	The Voice

#### **Bible Paraphrase Abbreviations:**

GNB	Good News Bible
TLB	Living Bible
MSG	The Message (Eugene Peterson)

# Lent, The Three Days, & Easter Worship Schedule

## Hours of Weekend Worship Services:

Saturday 5:30pm	Traditional Worship
Sunday 9:00am	Contemporary Worship
Sunday 11:30am	Traditional Worship

**Sunday School**                      Sunday 10:15am (ages 4 through adult)

*Childcare is available Sunday from 9am to 12:30pm (infant to 5 years old)*

## Lenten and Holy Week Worship Schedule

**Ash Wednesday**                      March 5                      7:00pm

### Midweek Lenten Service

Wednesday	March 12	6:45pm
	March 19	6:45pm
	March 26	6:45pm
	April 2	6:45pm
	April 9	6:45pm



Children's Lenten Program in the Sunday School area for preschool through 5th grade at 6:45pm.

Come early to share in a Soup and Bread Supper from 5:45pm to 6:15pm.



**Maundy Thursday**                      April 17                      7:00pm

**Good Friday**                              April 18                      7:00pm

**Easter Vigil Service**                      April 19                      Sundown

The Easter Vigil Party follows the Easter Vigil Service. Join the celebration in the Fellowship Hall!

**Easter Celebration**                      April 20                      8:00, 9:30, 11:00am

Youth & Family will serve breakfast from 8:30am to 11am.

Wednesday, March 5

ASH WEDNESDAY



Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

*Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, for then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. But when you do a kindness to someone, do it secretly - don't tell your left hand what your right hand is doing. And your Father who knows all secrets will reward you. (vv. 1, 3-4) TLB*

I read that the Sermon on the Mount is to the New Testament what the Ten Commandments are to the Old Testament. I believe that both teachings are the guidelines of how we must strive to become more Christ-like.

Jesus challenges us as to our motives for giving. Are we looking for accolades from others? Think of the huge charitable donations given here in Las Vegas....why do we hear about them? Truly, these huge donations are also a tax write-off for the givers and major publicity and praise for having given them.

We have so many wonderful opportunities right here at Holy Spirit as well as in Las Vegas to give to those less fortunate than ourselves. What are our intentions of giving? When we give, we should give unselfishly and anonymously so that only God will know our hearts and only he will evaluate our motives.

**Heavenly Father, you reveal the goodness of anonymous giving. Fill my heart with compassion for others and guide my motivations and intentions in all ways that I can serve and give to your glory only. Through your gift to us, your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Lynne Bogner

*Change your life, not just your clothes. Come back to God, your God. And here's why: God is kind and merciful. He takes a deep breath, puts up with a lot, this most patient God, extravagant in love, always ready to cancel catastrophe. (v. 13) MSG*

"I'm sorry." They're easy words to say, but when the same transgression is repeated again and again, I wonder if the speaker is genuinely sorry. In some things I am a repeat transgressor. (Ouch. It hurts to own up to that.) If I'm *really* sorry, I wouldn't repeat the misdeed, would I? I want to do better, but it's so hard! Where does this leave me? Hoping for second chances again and again.

So why is it sometimes hard to offer another try to someone in need of a second (or third or fourth...) chance? At times I make assumptions about a person's level of sincerity based on his past or on my own. I make a judgment. In today's world, it is at times prudent for me to do so.

God doesn't operate like this. He is a God of second chances. In this Scripture, Joel proclaims the grace that is part of God's character. In spite of a long history of turning away from him, God daily offers forgiveness for sin to me and to everyone else.

And there's more; verse 13 makes it clear that I need to change my life to deepen my relationship with God. An outward expression of regret without transformation doesn't bring me closer to God. That's just an empty, "I'm sorry." God is always waiting for me to correct my behavior and live in obedience.

When I do turn back toward God with a new heart, I live with hope and joy. My circumstances may not change, but my perspective does. I'm back in God's welcoming presence. Steeped in God's love, I can be more inclined to offer second chances to others.

**Merciful Father, may I not waste the grace you offer. Let your Word continue to transform me. Amen.**

Janice Demaree

*...and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. (v. 10) NIV*

Initially, these Old Testament verses speak of true fasting and a scolding for the people of Israel, who in one instance seek out the Lord, eager to know his ways, and in another instance, they despise the day of fasting, and they expect retribution from the Lord for their sacrifices.

Secondly, it turns to instructing what a fast is for: to “*loose the chains of injustice,*” to “*share your food with the hungry,*” to “*provide the poor wanderer with shelter,*” to “*clothe the naked.*”

Then, in verses 9-10, the Lord says: “*If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.*” And what was it Jesus says in Matthew 25:40? “*Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters, you did for me.*”

Have you decided to give up anything for Lent? Whether you have or not, look for ways to have your “*light rise in the darkness.*” Often, it takes very little to brighten someone's dark day. Pray for an opportunity to turn darkness into light, and don't let it pass. You'll be glad you did.

Lord, sometimes it is hard for us to do the right thing. We are constantly confronted with people asking for something from us. We know we can't possibly give to all who are in need, so we ask you to guide us, so we can help someone's night to become like the noonday. Amen.

Bryan Petersen

*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain in me a willing spirit.* (vv. 10-12) NRSV

I woke up one day and realized, that despite my usual optimistic view on life, I had slipped into an unhealthy attitude that was consumed and fueled by the anger, resentment, frustration, bitterness—hate that I had allowed to fill my heart. I awoke with a conviction that my thoughts, behavior, and my actions were far from Christ-like. It was as if God was asking me, “How can you say you love me and that you love my people with so much hate in your heart?” Boom! Is it possible for love and hate to live in the same heart?

Something needed to change and I didn’t know where to start. So I started with a prayer. Immediately, one right after another, four thoughts popped into my head and heart:

- 1) verses 9-10 from Psalm 51
- 2) the words found in Isaiah 64:6: *“Yet, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.”*
- 3) the words “repent” and “summit”
- 4) this song by Eddie Espinosa: “Change my heart, oh God. Make it ever true. Change my heart oh God, may I be like you. You are the potter, I am the clay, mold me and make me, this is what I pray.”

I am grateful God revealed the nature of my heart. I am grateful that God is the potter because I can not change my heart by myself. I am grateful for a patient God who reminds me daily to repent and summit—so I pray “Change My Heart, Oh God” almost daily! I am ever grateful for the joy of my salvation—Jesus Christ!

**Gracious God, grant me a willing spirit! Change my heart and make it ever true. In Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.**

*Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple and said, “If you are the Son of God, jump off! For Scriptures say; ‘He will order angels to protect you, and they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.’” (vv. 5-6) NLT*

Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. It is when Jesus is hungry, weak, alone and vulnerable that he is tormented. It is interesting to see the devil try to twist Scripture to convince Jesus to sin. The devil is suggesting that Jesus manipulate God into being a magician to meet Jesus’ needs upon request.

But Jesus knew Scripture and was not misguided. Jesus knew Scripture fully and obeyed it. How often are we tempted or misguided by friends or leaders who may take a Bible verse here or there, but not look at the full context of the meaning? How often are we tempted to want God to answer our prayers, in a manner that is quick and pleasing to us, like a magician?

**Dear Father, forgive us for our lack of knowledge of your Word. Forgive us when those who twist your Word out of context lead us astray. Forgive us when we want quick, easy fixes to our prayer requests. Open our hearts and minds to your wisdom and guidance. Give us passion to learn and obey your Word, so we can stand firm when doubts and trials come our way. Amen.**

Elaine Hansen

*For he says, “At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.” See, now is the acceptable time; see now is the day of salvation! (v. 6:2) NRSV*

Oh my, have the past six months been filled with the kind of trials Paul refers to in this letter to the Corinthians. Since being diagnosed with breast cancer in September, I have experienced every emotional high and low. From the affliction, hardship and calamity of the diagnosis to the highs of hearing positive news after only two chemo treatments and more positive news as those treatments ended. It has been a roller coaster ride.

And yet, from the beginning I have felt and KNOWN God’s hand in everything. I have recognized his salvation and help through so many channels. So many in my Holy Spirit family have lovingly prepared and delivered meals during the chemo weeks. I have felt the love and prayers, not only from Holy Spirit but in many other circles of friends and loved ones as well. I have felt God’s presence during doctor visits and treatments, through scans and results.

No doubt there may be more ups and downs as the healing journey continues. But this I know: God’s salvation and strength are unwavering! His listening is constant. He hears every prayer, and he has helped and will continue to help me. This is true not only for me or anyone experiencing a health challenge, but for you, regardless of what you may be facing.

*See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!*

**Thank you gracious God for your hand in every facet of our lives. Thank you for your healing. Thank you for your salvation. Thank you for giving me eyes to see your help at every turn! Amen.**

Betty Mahalik

*Satan through the serpent said to Eve, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (v. 3:5) NIV*

Satan deceived Eve into thinking that God was withholding knowledge from her. So when Eve ate of the forbidden fruit and shared it with Adam, they became aware of their nakedness, but they started thinking about what they didn't have. And they started blaming each other for not obeying God. God had given them all they needed, yet they began thinking about what was withheld.

We often fall into a similar trap and spend too much time thinking about what we do not have (i.e. what we want) instead of what we have. Many times, we can avoid temptation by learning to be content with what we have and just being who we are, instead of what we want or who we wish we were.

What does this have to do with the season of Lent? We need to become more aware of God's blessings in our lives and not our shortcomings or our wants. And remember the ULTIMATE blessing we have is Christ's suffering and death—a gift from God not only to forgive us but so we can forgive one another.

**Lord God, we come to you with thanksgiving for sending your Son to show your love. You allowed Jesus to release us from our burdens that started when Adam and Eve separated humankind from you. When we believe in Christ, you heal this separation. We are grateful for your love. May we extend this blessing to family, friends, and neighbors. Amen.**

Terry West

**Wednesday, March 12**

**Romans 4:1-5,13-17**

*If Abraham, by what he did for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken credit for it. But the story we're given is a God story, not an Abraham story... He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own. (vv. 1-3) MSG*

In recent years I have acquired a new hobby, assembling jigsaw puzzles. I usually combine this activity with another passion of mine, classic rock from the 1960's and 1970's, to create images of my favorite artists and concerts to frame and display on the wall. After spending hours assembling a thousand pieces, I could never just take it apart and return it to the box.

I know in most cases I could simply buy the poster of the same image and frame that. That certainly would be a lot faster. But I enjoy the challenge of making something and when it is complete I can sit back and say to myself, "I did that."

There is nothing inherently wrong about working toward a goal and basking in the glow of our accomplishments, as long as we don't get ridiculously vain about it. But there are many things we cannot take credit for and at those moments we must give credit where credit is due.

Today's Scripture verses illustrate such a situation. We have a tendency to glorify the great men and women of the Bible and hold them in great esteem for their abilities and accomplishments. Abraham is certainly one of those Biblical Hall-of-Famers we place on such a pedestal. Abraham knew it was God who made it all happen. Not himself. This understanding and humility pleased God.

This Lenten season, are we ready to act as Abraham did? Will we truly recognize that we cannot earn God's favor by the things we do? Can we step back a moment and take a fresh look at what that Easter morning really means? Can we give credit to God through Jesus for conquering death on our behalf?

I'll pat myself on the back for my trivial little accomplishments. The credit for the really big things I will give to God. You'll excuse me now. I just finished my puzzle of Pink Floyd album art. On to the next masterpiece. Elvis? Hendrix? Grateful Dead? KISS? So many choices...

**Dear God, you totally ROCK! Thank you for the life you gave me and for the life of your Son, whom you also gave for me. Amen.**

Barry Clayton

*And the people thirsted there for water, and the people complained against Moses, and said, “Why is it you have brought us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” (v. 3) NKJV*

Complain—Complain—Complain! The people of Israel who had just been brought out of 450 years of oppression, couldn't seem to focus on the positives of their situation. They found every opportunity to denounce Moses and what God had led him to do. In doing so, they were also turning their backs on God; forgetting the miracles he had already performed on their behalf.

I feel for Moses, who didn't want this job in the first place, and had endured many years of grief because the people wanted to make him responsible for everything that befell them. Years ago, I had a pastor who was talking about how much emphasis people in the church were putting on Revelation and predictions of the end times. He suggested that instead of worrying so much about what's going to happen in the future—when is the world going to end—that we focus our energy on what can we do today! We so often neglect to recognize how God works in the little things of our lives, the messages that may not be so obvious, and the positive that can come, even out of negative situations. We need to listen a little more closely, more intently for that still, small voice.

**Dear Heavenly Father, help me to listen with an open mind and heart, and to pay attention to how you are working in not only my life, but in the lives of others, and the world at large. Amen.**

Sandy Hughes

*The LORD said to Abram: “Leave your country, your family, and your relatives and go to the land that I will show you. I will bless you and make your descendants into a great nation. You will become famous and be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you, but I will put a curse on anyone who puts a curse on you. Everyone on earth will be blessed because of you.” (vv. 1-3) ESV*

I always wanted to travel; my bucket list includes a visit to all 50 states. At 35 states I am more than half way there. But never did I imagine I would move from where I was born and raised.

When I decided to move from Iowa to Las Vegas last year, these are the comments and questions I heard: “You’re moving from family and friends, to a place you had never been?” “Not even to visit!” “You have got to be crazy.” “Why would you do such a thing?” “How will you make it?” “What will you do?” “You’re being VERY selfish.”

I had questioned God, “I have given everything for my 4 children. Now they are all grown and on their own, what am I supposed to do with my life now?” He answered me. He led me here. Here to Las Vegas, here to Holy Spirit Lutheran Church. HE LITERALLY LED ME HERE! Every time I had a problem with my move, I took it to God, and somehow, that problem was resolved. God amazed me. God showed me I could trust HIM. He was patient with me, letting me know, that no matter how young or old I am, I could still be led and protected by God.

When Abram told his family and friends that he was leaving, he was probably asked questions as well. Yet, he did not let that stop him. Abram went, not knowing, but trusting God, that he would be blessed with many things and be a blessing to others as well.

**Thank you God, for being patient, for allowing me the time to change. Fill me with the willingness to serve you better. Thank you for loving me! Amen.**

Dana Hackett

*Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the guilt of my sin. ... You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance.*  
(vv. 5, 7) NRSV

It is an awful feeling when we try to hide from others some terrible thing we have done. Our stomach churns, our heart races, and we sweat like crazy at the thought of having to tell the truth. Yes, I did it, I was the one. I forgot to lock the door when I left. My parents had already gotten a "no" from my two sisters and now they turned to me. Is this how Adam and Eve felt as they hid from God? When I finally owned up to the "crime" I was given a quiet talk by my Dad about the dangers of leaving the door unlocked. Luckily, no one had broken in or stolen anything. All I knew was I would never forget to lock the door again. What a relief it was to have the truth out in the open. The tension of worry in the house was gone and peace was once again ruling our house. That feeling and so much more is ours every time we confess our sins to God. God forgives us and offers refuge from all that troubles us. We just need to confess to know that blessed peace of forgiveness.

Remembering to confess our sins daily helps nourish our relationship with God. It may be sin we are aware of, like impatience with another, or it may be a sin of omission, one we aren't even aware of. Did I thank God for this day? Did I thank God for my job, my boss, the guy who cut me off in traffic? It is easy to recognize those big sins but not so easy to remember all the hundreds we commit or omit daily. When we confess, we turn back to a loving relationship with God and we are surrounded with glad cries of deliverance as we go about our day.

**Lord, I ask forgiveness for the sins I know, and the sins I don't know. I pray you will keep me in your safe haven and guide me as I go through this day, safe from any trouble. Amen.**

Alison Rodriguez

*The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. ...I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? ...For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.* (vv. 8,12,16-17) NIV

As I considered John 3:1-17 I realized the verses above really stood out to me because these verses speak to my passion for service. As far back as I can remember I have always had a passion to serve others.

For me, thinking about wind is a powerful metaphor for the Holy Spirit. Like this Scripture says, *“You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.”* Like the wind in this Scripture, the Holy Spirit comes and goes and moves us to places we never expected. I cannot always see the Holy Spirit, but I sure can feel the power of the Holy Spirit. This is how I ended up in New Orleans, where I was able to serve some of the most needy but generous people I have ever met. Through this experience, I learned to be grateful for the blessings in my life. This is also how I came to Las Vegas. When I graduated from college, I knew I was meant to serve in some capacity. I got a calling to teach. I had no idea I would be swept thousands of miles from home to a place I had never visited. I am serving in Las Vegas, because I followed the calling of the Holy Spirit in my life.

For me, my “earthly examples” of service lead me to better understanding Jesus’ “heavenly examples” of salvation. Because of God’s amazing sacrifice, I am able to follow the Holy Spirit where it leads knowing that even if I mess up, I am always forgiven.

God sent his Son into the world to, *“save the world through him.”* As a Christian, I am called to let Christ live through me to serve others as I make my way to the best blessing of all, his eternal kingdom.

**Dear Father, thank you for blessing me with the capacity to love and serve others. Through you all things are possible and through your sacrifice all sins are forgiven. Please continue to inspire humanity with the ability to love and a willingness to serve. Amen.**

*For it is from God alone that you have your life through Christ Jesus...If anyone is going to boast, let him boast only of what the Lord has done. (vv. 30-31) TLB*

In Paul's writing to the people of Corinth, he stresses how "*foolish it sounds to those who are lost when they hear that Jesus died to save them.*" (v. 18). Paul further stresses that the scholars, the debaters of world affairs, the brilliant men would be made to look foolish because God in his wisdom indicated that salvation cannot be found through human brilliance.

Wow! The above paragraph is kind of hard to digest, huh? Let's look at it in today's world: men and women like Albert Einstein, or Bill Gates, or Oprah Winfrey or presidents, or other world leaders, past and present, cannot save themselves. Salvation—Christ's death by hanging on that cross and his resurrection—is what saves them. Salvation is what saves you and me. By believing that Christ was nailed to that cross and rose for you and for me is a lot to comprehend. That, though, is our salvation. That is what we must also share with others.

As we continue through this season of Lent, help us to remember that our brilliance, or intellect, our knowledge, etc. will not save us. We must believe in what the Lord has done.

**Dearest Lord Jesus, thank you for the free gift of salvation. Help each of us to remember: that because of your death on the cross and your resurrection, we are saved. Amen.**

Ruth Ann Isaacs

*For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (vv. 10-11) NIV*

What a wonderful way of looking at the greatness of God's grace toward us. Even when we were enemies, he paid the ultimate price to reconcile with us. While this Scripture is one of my favorites, it is so hard to comprehend that kind of love.

If you don't know this about me, I enjoy a good story of good versus evil, whether it is Spiderman fighting the Green Goblin or any captain on Star Trek fighting a never-ending selection of evil-doers. I am glad to say that I haven't had any personal enemies (that I know of), but there have been times in my life that I had conflicts with others and I did not want reconciliation. I am sorry to say sometimes my conflicts with others were over beliefs about religion or faith. I am grateful that God does bring us through life and teaches us how we should live. Verses 3, 4, and 5 of Romans 5 explains how the trials of life teach us patience, character and hope. I have seen those things in my life and in the lives of others. In looking back, I do count those things that I thought were "suffering" and am grateful for them. I am still amazed though that God does love me, and you, and everyone else on earth enough to give his beloved Son as a sacrifice for us. This is truly a great mystery.

**Thank you so much, loving God, for not writing me or anyone off. Help me be more like you! Amen.**

Karen Harris

*For once you were full of darkness, but now you have light from the Lord. So live as people of light! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Carefully determine what pleases the Lord. (vv. 8-10) NLT*

This passage reminds me of my favorite verse. *If you think you are standing strong, be careful not to fall. The temptations in your life are no different than what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. (1 Corinthians 10:12-13).*

Anyone can experience darkness in life. It might come from a devastating experience, or something as simple as being too comfortable in life or in faith. But it is really not simple, is it? Being too comfortable and standing strong can both lead to darkness for me, because that's when I become lazy in praying, meditating, and reading the Word, and that is when things seem to go wrong. I should live in the light all of the time, and do what pleases the Lord all of the time, not just when I don't feel strong or feel the darkness.

Another thing that came to my mind was the song, "This Little Light of Mine," but it's not such a little light. It is a huge light that can't be blown out or hidden under a bushel because it is a great light that God has given us to light our way through a world, that at times, seems very dark. If we let it, that light will guide us through whatever darkness may come our way and we will endure.

So no matter what happens, whether it is a devastating darkness, or a mild one, God wants us to take his light and use it all the time for what is good and right and true and to guide us in our daily lives so that life will never be more than we can endure.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for shining your light to guide me out of whatever darkness I may be in. Please give me the strength, the wisdom and the courage to continue to follow that light every day and in everything I do and to allow it to shine within me in all things to please you. Amen.**

Debi Butterfield

**Thursday, March 20**

**Isaiah 50:4-9a**

*For the Lord God will help me; therefore I will not be disgraced; therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I will not be ashamed. (v. 7) NKJV*

Recently, Jack Nicklaus, the well-known golfer, in an interview on Golf Channel was asked how he wanted to be remembered. He responded that he did not want to be remembered for being a great golfer but for being a good man and father. As Christians, we want to be remembered as being good people as well. However, we have a more important role and purpose, that of being good and faithful servants of Jesus Christ.

This passage in Isaiah reassures us that our Lord will assist us with our role as he has employed each one of us to share his message. We are in need of divine help in doing God's work here on earth. He, who had no sin, willingly took on every sort of suffering imaginable, and then some, for our salvation. How easy it would have been for him to say no to all the betrayal, pain, suffering and ultimate sacrifice on the cross. He did this for us as children of our risen Christ. We have been called to share the Good News by our witness and actions. We are assured as we go about the business of fulfilling God's purposes here on earth, all we have to do is ask the Lord to help us. He will be with us whatever circumstance, including those times when we feel woefully inadequate, discouraged and seemingly alone.

Asking for God's help and guidance to handle any circumstance or opportunity placed in front of us will strengthen our resolve, and we will be able to push forward with whatever adversities or difficulties we face as we share the good news of Christ. Only with God's help every step of the way can we set our face like "*flint*" and focus on his goal for us to share this good news with others. All we have to do is ask and he will be there for us!

Above all else, as children of our risen Savior, we will want to be remembered for being our Lord's humble servant during our earthly life. We wait eagerly to hear the resounding greeting "*well done, my good and faithful servant.*"

**Jesus, I know I missed opportunities to share your message with others. I have not been your good or faithful servant with many things I say and do. I want to change. I know that all I have to do is ask for your help and you will be there no matter how difficult my path. Give me the strength I need to be your faithful servant. Amen.**

Marsha Stephenson

*“This cup is the new covenant between God and his people-an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.” (v. 25) NLT*

How many times have I been driving to a familiar destination and passed my exit, I couldn't tell you. But the truth is, the same thing happens to me sometimes during communion. The words spoken for the Lord's Supper are so ingrained in me that if I do not pay close attention to them they pass me by. It is difficult to be in the moment. Yet in that moment is the true presence of God. An open road of intimacy between God and humanity paid for by the blood of Christ. After all, the definition of communion is not only the act of sharing, or holding in common, but having an intimate conversation. This is the time to feed your heart, body, mind, soul with the Holy Spirit. To be filled with the presence of God. Drawing upon his wisdom, strength, peace, and joy. A new covenant or solemn compact, is one in which we too must participate in order that God's plan of redemption can be fulfilled. So when you find your mind wandering next communion ask yourself, "What am I feeding my soul at this moment?" List of things to do? Worries? Minor concerns? Remember, "You are what you eat." And that not only means physically, but spiritually. Also, be thankful for this great opportunity, which if not for Jesus would not be open to us.

**Dear Lord, please help me be mindful of the beautiful gift Christ Jesus has given me. To speak openly and intimately with you and bask in your presence is a true blessing. Remind me to be grateful for this good gift every moment of the day, and not just during communion. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.**

Debbie Metzger

*My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.*  
(v. 2) NRSV

As I read this Scripture I am reminded of one of my favorite aphorisms: If God brings you to it, God will bring you through it. The commentary in my Bible for this chapter confirms this correlation as it states that this is a trust psalm and promises protection for a journey. This brings to mind the last ten years of my life.

My family has been on a journey of unprecedented loss and more change and responsibility than any young couple should endure. There were several times I looked to God for the strength to continue. It was through those prayers I believe I was given the strength to persevere. My faith was never shaken by what was taken away, but was made stronger as I put my faith in God to get me through the journey with as much grace and love as I could. It was not always easy to see the purpose or importance of what we endured. But because of God's protection, I have come out the other side with a sense of pride and some of the most amazing memories our family could never have dreamed up otherwise.

**Heavenly Father, please help me to continue to rely on you for protection in this journey we call life. Amen.**

Amy Trunoske

*When a Samaritan woman came to draw water Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living waters." (vv. 7-10) NIV*

In John's gospel, Jesus (God) announces his message of salvation through personal interaction. Again, Jesus chooses a socially unacceptable scenario to share his message.

Imagine you are a woman living in Samaria in the town of Sychar. Living your life on the edge, you certainly are not a respected member of society so you decide to draw your water, not at sundown with the others but at noon with the unrelenting sun beating down. Maybe, just maybe, you can avoid meeting anyone. Just your luck, there's a Jewish man sitting by Jacob's well. No association allowed! Now he asks for a drink. What a day! Sir, drinking from my vessel will make you ceremonially unclean and you don't have a vessel of your own. What to do, what to do! She accepted the living waters our Savior offered as a gift for eternity, and she believed he was Christ. In the town, she gave this testimony, and many others became believers.

Often our life journeys can cast us outside our faith comfort zones! For the last two months our family traveled a very uncomfortable and uncertain path. Jesus' answers to our prayers and the new directions we found were like the freshness of the beautiful living waters offered from heaven. The journey is not over, but there is no question that Christ is with us, directing our daughter and grandchildren, giving aid and comfort, and most of all holding all in his loving arms every step no matter how difficult the journey. They, in turn, are a bulwark of faith to their community and a testimony to the gifts of Christ through his refreshing heavenly waters. No matter how outlandish the situation, our faith must be strong, constant, and immovable. We must remember that Christ is the "GPS" that we must follow throughout life to redemption and he will guide the path.

**Dear Lord, help us see through life's challenges with faith and love for you. May our actions be acceptable in your sight. Thank you for your Son and his redeeming sacrifice for us on the cross of Calvary. Amen.**

Norma Kesling

*For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man; how much more will those who receive God's abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ. (v. 17) NIV*

“Believe It or Not” was a television show. The program would present a scenario and the audience was to determine whether it was true or not. At the end of this show, the producers revealed the evidence as to truth or fiction. This passage reminds me of this scenario. You either believe the truth of Christ or not.

Growing up it was difficult for me to fully understand salvation. When asked during the confirmation service, “Do you believe you are saved?” I wanted to shout, “What does being saved mean?” Was it true that the free gift of Christ's salvation and forgiveness of my sins was my ticket to heaven? One night after a Youth for Christ meeting, my doubts and concerns about salvation were answered.

Because I believe in Christ and confessed that I am a sinner, I am forgiven and will spend my eternity with God.

As I continue my life journey, I have strayed from the Christian faith. But when returning to Christ, I am joyously forgiven and welcomed back just as the Prodigal Son.

Now I'm in the winter of my life, I really look forward to spending my eternity with God; I cannot earn my salvation - eternal life. It is God's gift to me because I believe!

**Dearest Father, open our hearts and minds to your love and forgiveness. Help us daily to keep our eyes on Jesus and not the things of this world. Cast away our fears and doubts. Amen.**

Jane Wittes

*Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. (v. 1) ESV*

Some scholars have characterized Isaiah as a rather unpopular person. As a prophet, he spoke God's words but the words have been described as confrontational and full of warning. An outline of Isaiah in the Nelson Study Bible labels several chapters with titles such as, "A condemnation of Israel," "A condemnation of the people's pride," "A condemnation of fear of the nations rather than the fear of God," and "Oracles of doom." It is easy to see Isaiah as being unpopular.

However, today's passage is one of several recordings in Isaiah that bring a word of promise and hope. Simply titled, "The Lord's Chosen Servant," the first four verses (which I would recommend reading several times) describe the coming of Jesus and what he will do. They contain a powerful message of hope not only to those who suffer physically by man's law, but encouragement to those that are close to giving up their faith and hope in the Lord. "*A faintly burning wick he will not quench.*" And if that weren't enough, Isaiah goes on for the next five verses noting that Jesus will represent a new covenant between God and his people.

Isaiah may have been unpopular because of his criticism of Israel, but he also reminded everyone that God would never abandon his people and that God would be sending his perfect servant, because God loved them.

**Dear Lord, thank you for sending Jesus, the perfect servant.  
Amen.**

Allen Vaughn

*The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God. For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance--now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (vv. 13-15) NASV*

There is nothing worse than a stain that won't come out. Several years ago our daughter and two-year-old grandson were staying with us. Early one morning, bleary-eyed, cup of coffee in hand, I approached the living room couch to take a seat. Looking down, my eyes widened as I saw what appeared to be a giant, black spiderweb weaving itself all over that portion of the couch. Nearly spilling my coffee, I leaned closer, and to my horror verified the existence of black ink wonderfully expressed far and wide upon the surface of our leather couch! Aghast, I ran to the cleaning supplies and grabbed the 409. "No wait," my mind cautioned, "Cindy will kill me!" Soap and water only! After several minutes of those ingredients, the ink was still there. "Aha! Google will save me!" and off to the computer I ran. The list of recommendations was long, but the consensus was: rubbing alcohol. The first tiny dab of the stuff was nothing less than a miracle! Wherever the alcohol touched the ink, it disappeared! Inch by inch I applied small amounts with a soft rag until the monstrous spiderweb was gone!

The passage above reminded me of this incident and the fact that it also takes a perfect ingredient to really clean a sinful heart. And the perfect ingredient that God supplied, the ONLY ingredient, is the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ, and our faith in him. Those poor folks in the Old Testament, living under the law, were relegated to sacrificing animals over and over, to cover their sin. Praise the Lord, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was the new covenant, the "new ingredient", offered once, to cover our sins. Praise his Holy Name! He is absolutely the right ingredient!

**Lord, thank you so much for sending your Son to wash my sins away forever with his shed blood. Amen.**

Austin Bowles

*The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus. (vv. 10-11) NIV*

Although I grew up in the church, I really didn't know many aspects of the religion. I didn't know what grace was all about, and I didn't even know who Jesus really was. The concept of baptism was a mystery to me. In my early years, I thought baptism was what one did to give a baby a name.

I left the church after high school, feeling no connection to the church. When I started my faith journey again, I learned about grace and what baptism really was. Baptism is getting a new life in Christ - becoming a child of God.

Jesus paid for our sins with his life. In baptism, our sins are washed away from our old self. The old self, shackled to sin, is powerless. A new self emerges. We're not enslaved to sin anymore –how wonderful is that!!

Jesus was raised from the dead and now lives to glorify God. After baptism, we also must be like Jesus and live to the glory of God. Although I am no longer a slave to sin, I continue to struggle daily. But I am comforted knowing I have a new life in Christ.

**Loving and gracious God, thank you for Jesus, and thank you for the gift of baptism. Help me daily as I struggle to glorify your name. Amen.**

**Faye Bastarache**

**Friday, March 28**

**Jeremiah 31:1-6**

*I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you. (v. 3) NRSV*

Has there ever been a time when you didn't give up on something because you knew that God had things planned for you from the beginning? My mom, Ann, has experienced a few things in her life, and one thing I admire her for is how she doesn't give up. She's a woman who's taking care of seven children and a grandchild; she's doing it all on her own too. She is a very strong woman.

We moved to Las Vegas in the summer of 2010. My mom was promised a job if we moved here. A few weeks after we arrived my mom found out that the job wasn't hers anymore. We had to start over. Our housing situation was handled before we moved here. So we had our house, but not much in it. For the first few weeks or so, we were all sleeping on air mattresses. It was cool for a while, but then it just got old and frustrating. A year had passed before we got our house furnished. That was less stress on my mom, and she still had to worry about the bills. There had been times where our lights, water, and gas had been off (not all at the same time). If it wasn't one thing it was another. Times were hard, especially when she was the only one working. The job she had wasn't paying her enough, so she started to look for a new one. She found a new one; she was there for a while but then left because she couldn't settle for what they were paying her. So she left that one, and now she's working for Clark County School District as a second grade teacher.

My mom wouldn't give up even when times were hard; things were stressful, or overwhelming. She knew that everything was temporary because she knew God had a plan for her from the moment we moved here.

**Dear Father, thank you for loving me so much. Please fill me with a willingness to change, becoming more like Christ, so I can better serve you. Amen.**

K'Lyra Bell

*Yes, the world is established; it shall never be moved. Your throne is established from of old; you are from everlasting. (vv. 1b-2) ESV*

God's words have been established since the beginning of time. There are testimonies before and after Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord. Living as a good Christian is no easy task because of how we were born. No matter what we do and how we live, God is mighty and the supreme; God knows all and sees all.

Storms may come into our lives like a whirlwind and we may find ourselves lost and confused, but God is still in control, no matter how hard the storm blows or how loud the wind roars. Weeping may come through the night but joy will come in the morning.

My life has seen many storms and there were some loud roars. Even though I found myself in situations I didn't understand, the knowledge I gained through the storm was a blessing. My truest blessing was finding Holy Spirit Lutheran Church as a worship home. God led me here and here is where I will stay. Life has changing moments and with changes come new things.

God's Word shall never be moved and with the testimonies his promises have been foretold. I will testify of a dark time and God shined a light. A storm blew in my life and I was deeply hurt by it. The light would never work in the room where I was, but on this dark day the light came on without me touching it. I looked up smiled and just prayed for guidance. Again I received a message from my Father letting me know he was with me. I am rich with God's love and presence and happy to share this with any and all.

**God bless all my brothers and sisters in Christ. I pray God makes his presence known in your life as he has done in mine. Amen.**

LaShone Manning

*He was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.*  
(v. 3b) NRSV

This is an interesting story of one man's interaction with Jesus. A man who was born blind experienced a miracle in receiving his sight, and then had lots of explaining to do to the powers that be. I asked myself, "What does this story tell us today?" Here's what I uncovered. Jesus doesn't ask permission to heal, or wait for the blind man to beg for help, or wait until after the Sabbath. Jesus does what is right, whether we can ask for his help or not.

The man's interaction with Jesus has three aspects I found noteworthy: it was personal, transformational, and controversial. Personal, because the man actually engaged in a few conversations with Jesus, both before and after the healing. Personal, because the disciples assumed his blindness was caused by someone's sin. Personal, because he had a part in the healing—he had to wash that mud off himself.

Unquestionably, his interaction with Jesus was also transformational. The man was irreversibly changed after meeting Jesus, and could not go back to the way he was before. Just about everything he had known and done previously, was now changed. "Is it really the same man?" they asked each other repeatedly. Yes, and no. He is a new creation.

Finally, the man's encounter was controversial. The healing takes only seven verses, while the remaining thirty-six verses deal with the aftermath. The Pharisees get involved. His parents get dragged in to verify his identity. He is interrogated twice. His retort is precious—"I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you also want to become his [Jesus'] disciples?" Boom! That's some insight!

This is a story of people who had difficulty "seeing" Jesus.

**Dear Jesus, we pray that our encounters with you will change us, just as you changed the man who was born blind. Give us vision to see you! Amen.**

Jen Anderson

*The Lord said to Samuel, “How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.” Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me.” And the Lord said, “Take a heifer with you, and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.’” (vv. 1-2) NRSV*

Have you ever perceived that the Lord guided you in some way? Have you ever said to yourself, “I can’t do this,” or asked “How can I do this?”

The Lord came to his servant Samuel with a command. Fearing for his life, Samuel was concerned how he could carry out God’s command. Samuel asked God (prayed) for guidance and God showed him his plan to make David the anointed one over Israel without Samuel being killed by King Saul. Many times I have asked for God’s help and guidance through prayer and happily, there were times when God was with me even when I (sadly) did not ask for God’s help. I found that the best thing to do is pray and ask for guidance and help. When I was asked to pray about giving a talk on a Walk to Emmaus spiritual growth weekend, I could not even fathom talking in front of thirty or more people. I’m incredibly shy and I just knew I would faint from fright, or worse, I would just stand there stuttering and stammering, although the written words would be in front of me. This was beyond butterflies! But in prayer I received peace and the assurance that the Holy Spirit was always with me.

When I was preparing for my knee surgery, the prayer blanket I received reminded me that God was with me. I was grateful for all the prayers prayed over me. It was meaningful to me that others would pray out loud and ask God for God’s blessing and a good outcome of the surgery and that God would be with me.

**Lord God, thank you for answering when I ask for help. Forgive me for the time I do not trust you and I do not turn to you in prayer. Most of all, thank you for always being with me! Amen.**

Ray Betts

*These have come so that your faith, of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire, may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (v. 7) NIV*

Peter is addressing scattered believers in the rapidly expanding Church, many of whom are suffering due to persecution for their faith. The book of 1 Peter is filled with encouragement and advice for these Christians to persevere in their beliefs. There certainly is still quite a bit of suffering throughout God's world, but the part of the verse that speaks to me this spring is the phrase describing faith as *'of greater worth than gold.'*

Faith opens the door and frees us to let the Holy Spirit work in our lives. It seems to me that our society spends so much time and effort searching for and accumulating things that satisfy only temporarily: more possessions, more gadgets, more forms of entertainment, even more chemicals to provide an "escape". I recently came across a quotation from a Roman philosopher, Lucius Seneca, who lived at the same time as Jesus and Peter: "It is not the man who has too little, but the man who craves more, who is poor." We cannot forget the many among us who have real needs that are difficult to meet, but I think the words of both Lucius and Peter can encourage us to also look at the more meaningful things that really are worthy and fulfilling to our spirits. God doesn't promise us an easy and worry-free time during our earthly time, and there are countless examples of people of wealth and power who are deeply unhappy as testimony to this. However, God does assure us that the Holy Spirit will show us the path to peace and joy if we build our faith and put our trust in him.

**Dear heavenly Father, thank you for all the gifts you give us, and for showing us the path to peace and fulfillment through your Son. Help me to strengthen my faith so I can put more trust in you and find everlasting comfort in serving you. Amen.**

Jim Clark

*How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. (v.38) RSV*

I was raised in an unchurched home in rural Ohio. My family lived by the golden rule (Do unto others, etc.). Growing up I was taught what was right and what was wrong. Living on a rural farm it was difficult to get into a lot of trouble, however, my mother would have been able to give many examples. I certainly knew right from wrong but that didn't stop me from getting into trouble. I knew I felt good when I did right and guilty when I did wrong. The guilt always bothered me and many times it was never resolved, rather ,I kept it inside me.

As I grew up, met my wife, got married and started going to church, I realized the wrongs in my life were usually the works of the devil and his demons. The biggest revelation in my life was coming to know Jesus and what he did for me. Because of Jesus' death and resurrection my sins are forgiven.

As I study and learn about God and Jesus I know the devil works all the harder to distract me. The devil tempts me daily and being human I fail daily. However, I believe in Jesus and know that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sin.

**Dear Lord, help me break free of sin in my life that blocks me from your presence. Amen.**

Don Wittes

*When Christ who is your life revealed, then also you will be revealed with him in glory. (v. 4) NRS*

I was a student of philosophy when younger, and to some extent I still am. A persistent question to which the answer was always elusive or entirely subjective was, “What is the meaning of life?” The reason why this question remains without a satisfying answer is that it is the wrong question. Life is not an equation which can be solved. It is a tapestry which you weave each strand of significance into, a pattern revealed only when complete. So the question is never what does it mean but what can I do?

Luckily, we have been given a pattern. That pattern is Christ’s sacrifice and abundant love. We need to act without hesitation for love of our neighbor and be a beacon of hope for those without any hope. I’ve learned that if you behave this way, you never need ask, “What does it mean?” You’re too busy asking “What can I do?”

**Lord, thank you for the opportunity to let me show your unending love for us. Amen.**

Michael Harris

*I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy... I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. ...I will sacrifice a thank offering to you and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people. (vv. 1,13,17-18) NIV*

This is a song of praise and giving thanks to our God for listening and answering our prayers.

Have you ever been at a crossroads? Have you not known what to do, who to turn to or where to go? I certainly have been too many times to count. God is my guide, support and counselor. I speak with him through prayer. Nothing is too big or too small to ask. All things are within his knowledge, his understanding and his unlimited and infinite love. God graciously listens and astutely guides me and in return, and as his daughter, I thank and praise him.

It is important to celebrate God, to honor him, to show him how much I love him. According to CS Heinz there are seven important reasons to praise God:

- Spiritual - it is joyful
- Fulfills a purpose - innately we want to praise a creator
- Empowerment—we are given power to do great things through him
- Reestablishes our understanding—God is first
- Reminds us of God's presence—he is with us
- Humbles us—the sacrifice of praise
- Praise attracts God's presence. He is drawn to where he is welcomed.

7 Benefits of Praising God, CS Heinz — January 2, 2013

Daily prayer and praise to God is my reality check. Communion with God, my hope, and my love for him, declared and shared in the company of my brothers and sisters, affirms my salvation by grace through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ.

**My God, I offer a simple prayer of praise for your guidance and eternal love. Thank you for showing me the way. Thank you for a community of saints who share my beliefs. Thank you for giving the world your only Son so we may be saved. Amen.**

*Let all who seek you rejoice and be glad in you. Let those who love your salvation say evermore, "God is great!" (v. 4) NRSV*

Today is the 55<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my baptism. Most people don't know the date of their baptism. Society tells us it is not as important as our birthday. But it is. The anniversary of our baptism is our "Spiritual Birthday." Think about it - if you were baptized as a baby, you don't remember the event, but those who brought us into our Christian family asked God to give us new life in Christ Jesus. Isn't that a birthday? And those of us who participated in a believer's baptism, knowingly gave up a life in sin to be reborn in Christ. And what a birthday that is!

Psalm 70 asks for deliverance from enemies. Again - isn't that what baptism is? As a baby, those who bring us to the font are asking God to deliver us from The Enemy. And those who participate in a believer's baptism are able to directly ask God to deliver them from the thralls of the Evil One.

So, I say rejoice and be glad in the Lord. Know that God loves us with all of his heart. Bask in God's salvation as he stretches his loving arms around you. God will protect you, no matter what. Rejoice and be glad in it.

**Dear Father in heaven, thank you for holding us and guiding us. Thank you for saving us from harm. We rejoice in your glory and are glad as you continue to deliver us from our enemies. Amen.**

Linda M. Middleton

*When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.” (v. 32) NIV*

Whenever I read this passage, I have always wondered why Jesus did not leave immediately upon hearing that his beloved friend, Lazarus was very ill.

I’ve read this passage several times, and I have found that depending on what I’m going through, I may get a different understanding. But one fact remains...this scripture deals solely with our faith. *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.”*

Mary was a little upset and frustrated with Jesus, because she wanted and expected him to show up immediately for his good friend Lazarus. She was discouraged when it took him two days to appear on the scene, but he was taking care of his father’s business. Jesus was certainly aware of Lazarus’ situation, but he wanted to take this opportunity to let God’s glory shine and also teach a lesson of FAITH.

My life has been filled with many ‘whys’ or ‘where was God’ when I really needed him.

Many times as a child I would ask Jesus why I had to live in a place that was filled with abuse. I wanted to leave my joyless environment. In retrospect, it was a matter of faith. I knew that God was with me and when the time was right I wouldn’t have to continue to endure the pain any longer. I may not get what I want when I want it but I know that Jesus will always be there to give me what I need. All I need do is call on him. God’s timing does not always match with ours!!!

**Gracious God, thank you for always being there in my times of need. May your light shine within me forever. Through Jesus’ name I pray. Amen.**

Terri Veach-Geiger

*This observance shall be called the Lord's Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt tonight and kill all the oldest sons and firstborn male animals in all the land of Egypt, and execute judgment upon all the gods of Egypt - For I Am Jehovah. The blood you have placed on the doorposts will be proof that you obey me, and when I see the blood I will pass over you and I will not destroy your firstborn children when I smite the land of Egypt. You shall celebrate this event each year (this is a permanent law) to remind you of this fatal night. (vv. 11a-14) TLB*

The Lord has one request, "Obey me!" Simple, yes? Not always. We get caught up in our everyday lives and become lax. We tell ourselves that we have an excuse: our jobs, the children, it's the Christmas season, it's tax time. I continually have to remind myself that I would not have any of these things to occupy my time or worry about, if it were not for God.

If we do what the Lord commands us, he will spare us and take care of us. Holy Communion is much like the Passover observance, only on a weekly basis. It helps me constantly remember just how much the Lord loved us by making the ultimate sacrifice of the blood of his own Son, so that our lives would be spared. And, he just simply asks that we obey him.

Attending church every week is one way of keeping myself on track to remember just how much God loves me and wants to take care of me, if I just obey him. It really is very simple.

**Lord, you are truly a loving and gracious God. Forgive me for sometimes becoming lax and not giving you more time in my life. Help me to always remember how much you love me. Grant me the wisdom and strength to always obey you in all things. Amen.**

Merna Mobley

*I looked, and I saw a windstorm coming out of the north—an immense cloud with flashing lightning and surrounded by brilliant light. The center of the fire looked like glowing metal, and in the fire was what looked like four living creatures. In appearance their form was human, (vv. 4-5) NIV*

So much of the Bible is so confusing to me.

I try to read the Bible every day. But we live such busy lives. I am often thinking about the next thing I need/want to do even when I am reading the Bible.

Ezekiel has always been especially tough. I love these devotionals because I am compelled to slow down and relax.

I have never seen such a crazy vision as this one described in Ezekiel. The translations seem to vary more for this than other books of the Bible. The Revised Standard Version uses the word: “*likeness*.” I mostly read the New International Version, which uses the words: “*looked like*” and “*appeared to be*.” The one thing we can all agree on is that it was an amazing vision. Everyone knows that it was from God.

I’ve never seen anything that crazy, and don’t ever think I will. Well, maybe if I just slowed down. When mountain climbing, I am consumed with getting to the top. If I slow down, I can see the glory of God along the way. There is a tree right there that has been alive since before Ezekiel saw his glory of God - 2,000 years before Jesus walked the earth. I’m told the reason these bristlecone pines live so long is because they grow so slowly and because of the wind and other harsh conditions. I guess I have seen—and touched—the glory of God.

**Oh heavenly Father, thank you for showing me your glory. I pray that I slow down enough to continue to see your glory as I try to walk with Jesus and share the Good News. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Kevin Cannon

*Be my rock of refuge to which I can always go; give the command to save me, for you are my rock and my fortress. (v. 3) NIV*

In this passage of Scripture, David prays that he may not be ashamed of his dependence upon God.

As adults we like to be self-sufficient—or think we are. There are times when do not really like to ask help from others. I remember our children when they were little. If they encountered a problem, for instance, tying their shoes, they would say, “I can do it myself.”

God wants us to ask for his help and assures us that he will answer our prayers. God may not answer the way we expect, or right away, but God will answer in his time. Let us come boldly to the throne of God. God promises to be our help from the time we are born, into our youth and when we are old and when our strength fails. God will be there.

Let us reflect on God’s lifetime of blessings, and God’s never failing grace. Trust God for the future, and share with those around you the blessings of following him.

**Lord, help me to be willing to ask for your help and to give you thanks and praise when you answer. In Jesus’ name. Amen.**

Mary West

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses... (v. 1) NRSV*

As Lutherans, we strongly value our Reformation heritage, and draw strength and inspiration from those that have gone before us in the faith. As Americans, we remember great battles and leaders that made possible the freedom we enjoy in our country today. Each of us could probably point to a member of the family who modeled a faithful life for us. The author of Hebrews writes here to build up the community, likely in light of hard times and changing expectations for the future.

Each of the saints of the Church, each hero in American history, and each family member who led us to the waters of baptism become for us part of the great cloud of witnesses that share their strength with us. They were the ones that paved the way for us, that made our struggles a little shorter, our burdens a bit lighter, and our paths a bit clearer. We call them saints, but they weren't perfect people. They sinned and made mistakes. Yet, their lives and their faith gave witness to God's love for the world, and to Christ, who through the cross took our broken lives, our fears, and failures, and made us whole.

For me, the collection of saints will include my grandmother, who has been a faithful and founding member of her church for over fifty years; a third grade Sunday school teacher who cared for me and told me about Jesus' love; and all at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church who have supported my family and me through four years of seminary, encouraged us, and gave affirmation as we've discerned a call to ordained ministry.

**Lord of Life, we give you thanks for each one of your saints that has been a part of our faith journey, and for your Son, who endured the cross for the life of the world. Guide us by your Holy Spirit not to lose heart, but to speak out boldly as witnesses for others. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Jason Adams

*And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. (v. 8) NRSV*

Like Advent, Lent is a time of reflection and preparation. During Advent we are preparing for the coming of our Lord, while during Lent, we reflect on our lives, his life and how we can be more like him, in preparation for his resurrection. Bet you thought I was going to say death! No - his resurrection. His return to the Father.

You see, that's why he humbled himself to being human. One of our fellow "Faith Walkers" likes to constantly say: "Because we are a *stiff necked and stubborn people.*" If there wasn't the need for Good Friday (yes, the Crucifixion) there would not have been a need for Christmas. That is why the two seasons go hand in hand. We need to prepare for Christ's coming because he needed to come to save us from ourselves. Somebody had to come and cover us up so that God could not see the stains we add daily.

I don't know about you, but I surely am glad that "... *God so loved the world that he gave his only Son....*" (John 3:16) We'd be in a heap of trouble without him.

**Thank you Jesus, for humbling yourself to our life and becoming obedient, even to death. You showed us the way to please God. Thank you for teaching us. But mostly, thank you for saving us from sin. Amen.**

Jennie Zweifel

*He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, "I am God's Son." (v. 43) NIV*

We do what we can; God does what he wants: he says "Be!" and it is.

I had my first child at the age of 16. By the time I was 22 I was the mother of four; I was unwed, had not finished high school and was unemployed or under-employed. I lived in a two bedroom apartment and was responsible for heat, hot water, cooking gas and electricity not to mention food, clothing and diapers. Having a house phone was a luxury. To make ends meet at times I found myself selling food stamps to pay a bill. Child support was a joke. "You will receive up to fifty dollars per month from the child support paid to you" said the Welfare case worker. The judge ordered a payment of three hundred per month "Why will I only get fifty?" I asked. "Ms. Bell, you can have the three hundred per month, but if you do that, you forfeit your benefits—cash, food and medical." What choice did I have?

During this period in my life I was not going to church much but I always prayed and kept a relationship with God. Even if it wasn't viewed by "Christians" as the best or most ideal, it was my personal relationship. I always knew without a shadow of a doubt that God would take care of me because he loves me no matter what. I knew God had a plan for my life even if I was taking the long road. I knew nothing was impossible for God, and I believed that through all of my fears and tears.

As I reflect on those years of my life, I am able to see where the hand of God was. I am here today still a single parent. I now have seven children who each have a personal relationship with God. I have a home with enough space to accommodate each of us. I have a master's degree in early childhood education. I am seeking a second degree in special education. I am gainfully employed in my career field. My teenaged children love each other genuinely. Although we face challenges and struggles from time to time, we trust God to get us through and he always does.

**Lord I thank you for giving me the gift of enough; enough of hard times and enough of trust in you to see me through. Amen.**

Ann Bell

**Sunday, April 13**

**PALM/PASSION Matthew 26:14-27:66**

*"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "this very night, before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." But Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the other disciples said the same. ...Then he began to call curses on himself and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" Immediately the rooster crowed. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken: "Before the rooster crows, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. (vv. 26:34-35, 74-75) NIV*

When I pray, I ask God to help me be a good person and to do what is right. I want to follow God's rules and I do not want to betray him. However, when I ask for forgiveness and think about the things I have done, I realize that I have broken his rules and have betrayed him. I feel awful and guilty about that. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not a sinner who murders or steals from his neighbor, but I am impatient and do have a tendency to think unkindly thoughts (especially when I am driving). There are times I could have helped someone; yet I kept going, thinking about myself and how I didn't want to be late. I feel bad when I pray to God, and I promise him that I will do better and change my ways. So why do I have to keep asking for forgiveness if I am changing my ways? Let's just say I'm human and far from perfect. My intentions are good, but I make mistakes and poor choices.

Peter's and the disciples' intentions were good. They loved Jesus and God and wanted to be the very best they could be, but put under pressure they failed the test. Reading through the remaining verses, I was moved by Jesus' response. He knew they would betray him, yet he loved them, and gave his life so they, you and I could have forgiveness and eternal life. We get all this in return for simply believing in God and Jesus and trusting in them and their plan. We can let the guilt go; we can move forward continuing to try to be good people and do what is right. We can trust that God knows us, believes in us, and cares for us so much that he gave his only Son so that we may not only have a beautiful life in this world, but an even more beautiful life in the next.

**Dear God, I confess that I am in bondage to sin and cannot free myself. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me. Forgive me, renew me, and lead me so that I may delight in your will and walk in your ways to the glory of your holy name. Amen.**

Jenny Klimek

*Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. (v. 3) NRSV*

Wouldn't it be great to be able to do something special for Jesus, I mean face-to-face, one-on-one. We do things daily to please Jesus: we help others and we are kind to others, not just people we know, but strangers, people different from us. We give donations and gifts to those who are in need. These are things that should come easy to us as Christians and are pleasing to God.

But, what would it be like to be with Jesus, in his presence? Would you want to do something special for him? I believe that is what Mary was doing. As Jesus said later in verse 7, "*She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial.*" She bought this specially for Jesus. She bought this perfume and saved it for the day she could use it on him.

Jesus said, "*You always have the poor with you but you do not always have me*" (v. 8). Light a fire, spray some perfume, sit quietly alone and think about what you would do for Jesus if he were there with you.

**Good and gracious Jesus, I thank you for being with me at all times, guiding me to do as you please and helping me to make good decisions. Amen.**

Loretta Block

*Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. Whoever walks in the dark does not know where they are going. Believe in the light while you have the light, so that you may become children of light."* (vv. 35-36) NIV

I love the movie Forrest Gump. When Forrest decided he just wanted to start running one day, he just ran and ran. Nothing distracted him from running. I think he crossed the United States a couple of times before he was finished.

Jesus, in this passage of Holy Scripture, had decided to tell the crowd that, "*the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.*" There were a lot of distractions. Greeks were wanting to meet him and Jews were quoting the law and asking misguided questions like, "*Who is this Son of Man?*" There was the other mental burden that he carried in the fact that he knew that he would have to bear the sin of the world. Jesus with his usual compassion, however, continued teaching them. Jesus' desire was for all to be children of light.

Forrest, on the other hand, got tired one day and went home.

I'm so glad that Jesus was determined to carry out the Father's will. I am a "*child of light*" because he died, was buried, and rose again the third day.

**Dear Father in heaven, thank you so much for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Please help me to stay determined to follow him. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Cindy Bowles

*Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "I tell you the truth, one of you is going to betray me." ...John (whom Jesus loved) asked him, "Lord, who is it?" ... As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. "What you are about to do, do quickly," Jesus told him, but no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him... As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night. When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified and God is glorified in him ..." (vv. 13:21, 25, 27-29, 30) NIV*

Some one has to do it, right? If not Judas, then who would betray Jesus so that Jesus' ultimate mission can be fulfilled: die on the cross and be raised from death. Philosophically speaking, Judas' betrayal is a part of Jesus' redemptive work. Judas has great faith in Jesus, he presumed Jesus was the Son of God and had mighty power to overcome his enemies. Indeed, Jesus has the power to overcome all adversities and save himself from death. But, unfortunately, contrary to Judas' presumption, Jesus didn't resist his enemies and was nailed on the cross, and ultimately was resurrected.

Do you know what? Judas killed himself before he could see his resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ, his Savior. I wonder, if Judas had lived to see the resurrected Jesus, he might have been the most powerful witness of the Lord. I believe Jesus would have forgiven Judas, who committed the greatest sin of all sins, if he had a chance to come before his risen Lord and ask for forgiveness.

Indeed, if not Judas, who will be the one? I must confess, it is me, a little Judas in me. This is why I come before the risen Lord every Sunday to ask for forgiveness, to hear his forgiving words, and to be sanctified by partaking in the Sacraments. It is in this way, God is glorified in me.

**Almighty heavenly Father, I am so grateful you give me faith in your Son, Jesus Christ, as my Lord and Savior. It is through faith in him that I and my brothers and sisters at Holy Spirit Lutheran Church are purified. Lord, be present in all aspects of our lives here on earth. In your Son's name. Amen.**

Peter Lai

*Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." (v. 7) NIV*

Getting old(er) can be, as often predicted, a bit rough. My parents used to joke that at least the aches and pains they felt every morning when they woke up told them they were still alive. When I was in my teens or twenties and thought ahead to the turn of the century I remember thinking "I'm going to be so OLD!"

But I'm also finding lots of blessings to maturing, especially concerning my faith in God's Word. Looking back on some tough times in my life, times when I couldn't understand why some things were happening, I can now understand what God was teaching me, what his plan was. It is such a comfort and assurance to know that God was and continues to be intimately involved in every moment of every day of my life.

I may still ask, "Why me?", but it's usually because I feel so blessed. I don't have to question God's plans for me or even try to understand because I know that whatever comes is my place in God's great plan. All I have to do is trust because God has shown me over the years that he keeps his promises.

**My Creator, there is such comfort and peace to see your presence in my life and to know that just as in my past, the years ahead are in your hands and all I need to do is submit myself to your care. Thank you for your love. In Jesus' name. Amen.**

Barbara Butler



*But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs. Instead, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear and at once blood and water came out. (He who saw this has testified so that you also may believe. His testimony is true, and he knows that he tells the truth.) These things occurred so that the scripture might be fulfilled, "None of his bones shall be broken." And again another passage scripture says, "They will look upon the one whom they have pierced." (vv. 19:33-37)*  
NRSV

The soldiers would sometimes break the legs of those they crucified to hasten the death. Broken legs meant the crucified one could not push up from his feet to position the lungs to take in breath; and so death occurred by suffocation. The Jewish leadership wanted the bodies removed from the crosses because of a command from Deuteronomy 21:22-23 which said that bodies of executed people should not be left hanging there overnight because that would pollute the land, and because the next day was not only a Sabbath (when no work should be done), but the Sabbath of the Passover.

But the soldiers found that Jesus was already dead. Probably to either prove it or make sure, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water.

In the prophet Zechariah, we find this prophecy: *"When they look on the one they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn."* (Zech. 12:10)

And now, getting back to Passover. The ancient commands said of the Passover lamb: *"You shall not break any of its bones."* (Ex. 12:46 and Num. 9:12) And we remember from the first chapter of John, the Baptizer's testimony, *"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Finally, from Zechariah once again, shortly after the reference to the mourning over the one they have pierced, comes this from Zech. 13:1: *"On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity."*

**Lamb of God and Fountain of Life, we see ourselves in the gruesome story as those who betray, abandon and deny you, and even as those who accuse and crucify you. And yet, all this you have done so that we may be cleansed and have life. Complete the work you began in us in our baptism, taking us from death to life; in Jesus' name. Amen.**

**Saturday, April 19**

**John 20:1-18**

*Jesus said to her, "Mary." She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic "Rabboni!" (which means teacher). Jesus said " Do not hold on to me , for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them I am returning to my Father and your Father, my God and your God." Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: "I have seen the Lord!" And she told them that he had said these things to her. (vv. 16-20) NIV*

I remember when I was young I was always so happy to see my grandmother and grandfather when we went to see them or they came to visit us. The joy in my heart was just bursting. Since I only had one set of grandparents they were very special to me. I also remember when my oldest brother came back from the Korean War not only alive but healthy as well. I was so happy and so proud of him, I still have pictures of me wearing his army helmet and holding his bayonet. I thought he was the coolest (modern day term) and I wanted to be around him all the time.

Just remembering those feelings, I can't imagine how Mary Magdalene felt when she discovered she was talking to Jesus, knowing the feelings she had for him before his death and the emotion of watching him be crucified on that cross. She had seen and heard about all the miracles and all his teaching, then watched him die, and yet here he was talking to her. I probably would have passed out from shock or been so excited I would have started to run and tell everyone. But instead she did as Jesus asked and went and told the disciples. Put yourself in her place, how her heart must have been racing and the blood pumping from the excitement. When I close my eyes and put myself in her place I get a tingling, warm feeling knowing that he is alive again which means he was resurrected, taking our sins upon himself and giving us eternal life.

**Lord, although it is hard for me to put my feelings about your resurrection into words, I think of the day when I will be like Mary and see you face to face. Only then will I truly know how she felt. Thank you for carrying the burden of our sinfulness and loving us so much that those sins would be forgiven and we would have eternal life. AMEN and AMEN.**

Dean Chapman



*... at dawn on the first day of the week...The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."... So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy and ran to tell the disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. ... Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid."* (vv. 1a, 5-6a, 8-9a, 10) NIV

*"Do not be afraid."* This phrase is used by the angel and later in verse 10, Jesus said to the women, *"Do not be afraid."* That first Easter morning must have been a time of anxiety for the followers of Jesus. But, their fear turned to joy when they heard the good news that Jesus had risen as he had said. The NIV Bible uses the word *ran*, but I wonder if these women didn't dance as they hurried away to tell the disciples. Then, suddenly Jesus met them and they fell down and worshipped him.

I've heard this story nearly all my life, the women meeting Jesus jumped out at me this time. Often we combine the story from all the gospels and so I'd forgotten this important part. I've always admired Mary Magdalene and her meeting of Jesus in the garden, but here we have all the women clasping his feet and worshipping him. Wow!

I've always been a little nervous about sharing my faith beyond the safety of a church group, but the February issue of The Lutheran magazine has given me a few tips on ways to use words beyond the environs of the church. The author suggests that most people will not become offended if you say "I'll pray for you," when a stranger in the grocery line mentions an illness or injury. It's just our fear that keeps us from speaking out.

**Heavenly Father, help me to be not afraid to speak up about your love and the joy we find in following your will. Amen.**

Judi Hempel