



The Sanctuary for Lent 2024

Abigail Browka

Ash Wednesday	2	Palm Sunday	41
First Sunday in Lent	6	Maundy Thursday	45
Second Sunday in Lent .	13	Good Friday	46
Third Sunday in Lent . .	20	Holy Saturday	47
Fourth Sunday in Lent .	27	Easter Sunday	48
Fifth Sunday in Lent . .	34		

Copyright © 2023 by Abingdon Press
All rights reserved.

No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying and recording, or by any information storage or retrieval system, except as may be expressly permitted by the 1976 Copyright Act, the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, or in writing from the publisher. Requests for permission can be addressed to Rights and Permissions, The United Methodist Publishing House, 810 12th Avenue South, Nashville, TN 37203-4704 or emailed to permissions@abingdonpress.com.

978-1-7910-3130-5 (Single)
978-1-7910-3012-4 (Pack of 10)
978-1-7910-3011-7 (epub)

Scripture quotations unless otherwise noted are taken from the Common English Bible, copyright 2011. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NRSVue are taken from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition. Copyright © 2021 National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

ASH WEDNESDAY

Wednesday, February 14

*Yet even now, says the LORD,
return to me with all your hearts,
with fasting, with weeping, and with sorrow;
tear your hearts
and not your clothing.
Return to the LORD your God,
for he is merciful and compassionate,
very patient, full of faithful love,
and ready to forgive.*

(Joel 2:12-13)

Today is Ash Wednesday and Valentine's Day. You might not think it, but Ash Wednesday has a lot to do with the heart.

Lent is the season of the Church when we intentionally turn our heart towards God, not just for one hour on Sunday but for forty days.

In Joel 2 God says change your heart, not your clothes. Let's admit it: one is easier than the other. Ashes smudged on our face may be a striking change to our outward appearance, but it means nothing if we are not also open to inward change. Receiving the mark of ashes or giving something up for Lent has value only if it ultimately draws us closer to the heart of God.

But today rest assured that no matter what, God is patient, full of faithful love, and ready to forgive. Even though we are dust and to dust we shall return (Genesis 3:19), life is more than this ash, far deeper than dust. The Spirit wants to breathe new life into us. So God, open our mouths to sing your praise. This Lent, open our hearts.

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | Open OUT | My Heart

Thursday, February 15

Isn't this the fast I choose:

*releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke,
setting free the mistreated,
and breaking every yoke?*

Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry

*and bringing the homeless poor into your house,
covering the naked when you see them,
and not hiding from your own family?*

Then your light will break out like the dawn,

and you will be healed quickly.

(Isaiah 58:6-8a)

During the season of Lent, we are called to reflect, repent, and draw closer to God. In the passage from Isaiah, we read a powerful message about the kind of fast that God desires.

The fast God desires is an unbinding of the yoke of injustice. Through today's scripture, we are reminded of our world's poverty and asked to work towards its full liberation. In faith we share our bread and belongings so that all are provided for. This is how light comes and how healing happens.

What are we meant to let go of this Lent? And how can this letting go break us open to God? By letting go of selfishness and embracing acts of justice and compassion, we create space for God to be at work in our lives. Through the fast of sharing and releasing, we work to surrender our pride, our prejudices, and our attachment to possession.

Today We Pray

*God, unbind the yoke of injustice.
Help me let go and embrace charity
and compassion this Lent, to allow
space for your transformative work.*

Friday, February 16

"Be careful that you don't practice your religion in front of people to draw their attention. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven."

"Whenever you give to the poor, don't blow your trumpet as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets so that they may get praise from people."

(Matthew 6:1-2a)

In today's scripture from Matthew, Jesus cautions us against practicing our faith in a way that seeks attention and praise from others. Jesus warns against grandstanding and the temptation to display our religious acts for public admiration.

Companies today often have what is known as their public-facing image. It is the part of their identity others get to see and that is chiefly on display for the viewers' benefit. Something about today's scripture reminded me of this and another word, grandstanding. Grandstanding is the act of behaving in a showy or pretentious manner to attract favorable attention from others. Jesus is telling his audience, no grandstanding. Don't practice your faith for the attention, admiration, or approval of others.

The root cause of grandstanding is our misdirected appetite for glory. We want praise for our piety. Rather than our own internal appreciation, the "hypocrites" have this appetite for an audience. Today, may we appreciate ourselves for our faith, charity, and conscientiousness. Rather than for show, may these qualities come from within us.

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | From OUT | Within

Saturday, February 17

We were seen as both fake and real, as unknown and well known, as dying—and look, we are alive! We were seen as punished but not killed, as going through pain but always happy, as poor but making many rich, and as having nothing but owning everything.

(2 Corinthians 6:8c-10)

In today's scripture from 2 Corinthians, we encounter a profound paradox. The apostle Paul describes the contrasting experiences of those who follow Christ. It is a collection of seemingly contradictory statements that challenge our conventional understanding of success, happiness, and fulfillment. These paradoxes speak to the transformative power of God's grace and the upside-down nature of the kingdom of God.

In verse 9, Paul highlights the contrast of dying and being alive. As believers, we are called to die to ourselves, to surrender our selfish desires and ambitions. In doing so, we paradoxically find true life and experience the transformative power of Christ's resurrection.

In verse 10, we are described as going through pain but always happy. This doesn't mean that we deny or dismiss the struggles and hardships we encounter in life. Rather, it speaks to the deep joy and peace that surpass circumstances, as we find solace and hope in our relationship with Christ. In him, we can experience a lasting happiness that is not dependent on external factors. I personally can think of many times in my life that my faith has gotten me through.

Today We Pray

God, help me hold the paradox of the world's condition and the power of my faith.

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, February 18

About that time, Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. While he was coming up out of the water, Jesus saw heaven splitting open and the Spirit, like a dove, coming down on him. And there was a voice from heaven: “You are my Son, whom I dearly love; in you I find happiness.”

At once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness. He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan.

(Mark 1:9-13a)

In this passage, Jesus gets that Holy Ghost glow, the heavens burst open, and the Holy Spirit descends on him like a dove. But he doesn't get to bask in the glow for long, for “at once the Spirit forced Jesus out into the wilderness.”

What do we learn in the wilderness? We learn that being God's beloved, God's people, makes us glow. And we learn that immediately the Spirit drives us back into the world, back into what feels like unpleasant circumstances with things that make us think, “something seems broken.” Jesus went from the dove to the desert. Why would the Spirit do this?!

The Spirit does this so we can learn, just as Jesus did, that our glow is not for our glory. Read that again: our glow is not for our glory. Our identity as God's people, as Spirit-led as it might be, isn't for our glory but God's glory.

Today Set This Intention

“My glow is not for my glory.”

Monday, February 19

Baptism is like that. It saves you now—not because it removes dirt from your body but because it is the mark of a good conscience toward God. Your salvation comes through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

(1 Peter 3:21)

As you begin the season of Lent, what intention will you bring to Lent this year? Remember, Lent isn't fundamentally about removing dirt, sin, chocolate, or carbs from our lives, but about turning intentionally toward God and remembering the journey Jesus took to resurrection.

What might be a sincere, marked, and conscious effort you make this Lent to turn towards God? In what way could you demonstrate a purposeful effort to turn towards God during Lent, marking an earnest commitment to deepen your relationship?

This may sound strange, but one year for Lent I gave up a certain kind of music. The music had lyrics and imagery that didn't really embody God's kingdom. So, I made a conscious effort to refrain from the language and imagery that felt like it took me further from the transformation God desires for the world. Personally, I think this Lenten practice made me turn more fully toward God.

Today, take 5 minutes to pray and think about what might be a sincere, marked, and conscious practice for you this Lent. What would turn you towards God?

Today We Pray

God, reveal to me how to draw closer to you.

Tuesday, February 20

God said, "This is the symbol of the covenant that I am drawing up between me and you and every living thing with you, on behalf of every future generation. I have placed my bow in the clouds; it will be the symbol of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow appears in the clouds, I will remember the covenant between me and you and every living being among all the creatures. Floodwaters will never again destroy all creatures."

(Genesis 9:12-15)

The bow referenced in our scripture above is often interpreted to be a rainbow. God chose a rainbow to be the symbol of God's covenantal promise that God would never use water to flood the earth again. God wanted a symbol to appear in the clouds so that Noah and future generations would have the reassurance that these clouds were not catastrophic clouds.

Did you know natural rainbows can't be made without water? Rainbows occur when sunlight enters a water droplet. As the light moves from the air through the water, it slows down and bends, displaying its wavelengths of color as it exits the droplet.

How ironic. The very symbol of covenant God chose requires the element of water that first destroyed. I like to think this fact says something about God's desire for restoration.

Today We Pray

God, thank you for being slow to anger and for your eternal desire for restoration.

Wednesday, February 21

I offer my life to you, LORD.

My God, I trust you.

(Psalm 25:1-2a)

Trust takes time to build. In my experience, trust is something you gain over time. It's through talking, spending time together, and being more vulnerable with one another that real, trusting friendship grows.

The same can be said of our relationship with God. It takes time to build. It is through connection, spending time together, and being more vulnerable that trust and friendship with God grows.

Lent can help build our trust in God through devotion, worship, study, and discipline. This is the quality time and vulnerability it takes for our connection with God to grow.

Rather than being a season of wilderness, this is one of the ways Lent can actually lift up your soul. Our soul is precious. Jesus makes his way to the cross for our redemption and resurrection.

As we reflect upon the significance of trust in both human relationships and our connection with God, we recognize that trust is not built overnight. It requires patience, effort, and a genuine investment of time. Just as true friendship blossoms through conversations, shared experiences, and the gradual unveiling of our vulnerabilities, our bond with God also thrives through consistent connection, dedicated time spent in prayer and worship, and the willingness to vulnerably open our hearts. Today, may we embrace the Lenten journey as a time to deepen our trust in God.

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | Build OUT | My Trust

Thursday, February 22

Christ himself suffered on account of sins, once for all, the righteous one on behalf of the unrighteous. He did this in order to bring you into the presence of God. Christ was put to death as a human, but made alive by the Spirit. And it was by the Spirit that he went to preach to the spirits in prison. In the past, these spirits were disobedient—when God patiently waited during the time of Noah.

(1 Peter 3:18-20a)

There is a famous painting by Hieronymus Bosch entitled *Christ's Descent into Hell*. Maybe don't google it right before bed unless you want nightmares.

This is the painting I recalled as I thought about today's scripture. In it, Christ is breaking down the gates of hell to rescue the souls of the just. This painting reflects one theological tradition, "the harrowing of hell," in which Jesus literally went down to hell and preached good news to the those who had been awaiting release en route to his own resurrection.

In the depths of our captivity to sin, Christ himself suffered and made the ultimate sacrifice on our behalf. His death on the cross was not the end of the story, but rather the gateway to redemption and restoration. Jesus, the one who conquered sin and death, is intimately acquainted with our pain and bondage. He willingly entered the darkest depths to bring us into the presence of God and proclaim the good news of salvation.

Today We Pray

*Jesus, thank you for breaking down
all barriers to my redemption.*

Friday, February 23

*The LORD is good and does the right thing;
he teaches sinners which way they should go.
God guides the weak to justice,
teaching them his way.
All the LORD's paths are loving and faithful
for those who keep his covenant and laws.
(Psalm 25:8-10)*

Today's scripture reminds us that God's way leads to justice. The way is loving and faithful. God's leading is not akin to corralling cattle. God's teachings aren't meant to restrict or oppress us, but to lead us to a life of justice and righteousness.

In our world today, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the lack of justice and righteousness that we sometimes witness. We long for individuals who consistently do the right thing, who embody justice, compassion, and integrity. Some days I could use more people in my life who "do the right thing."

The truth is, in our journey through life, we often find ourselves in need of guidance and direction that is good and trustworthy. Psalm 25 reminds us God's paths are loving and faithful, designed to lead us into a life of fulfillment and purpose. In this scripture, God is not a judge but our guide who is worthy of directing our way.

As we navigate through our own journeys, let us not lose sight of the divine guidance available to us. Let us seek God's direction, embracing God's teachings as a roadmap to justice, compassion, and righteousness. Today, reflect: are there areas of your life in which you need justice or direction?

Today We Pray

God, guide me to your justice and purpose.

Saturday, February 24

Make your ways known to me, LORD;

teach me your paths.

Lead me in your truth—teach it to me—

because you are the God who saves me.

I put my hope in you all day long.

LORD, remember your compassion and faithful love—

they are forever!

(Psalm 25:4-6)

My son and I share a deep love for nature and have made it a habit to go for walks in the forest. Despite being four, he always seems eager to accompany me on these outdoor adventures. We often return to our favorite hiking trail, where we typically take the same path. But there are times when my son wants to venture off the beaten path and suggests that we each take different routes. These are the times my son likes to tell me, “You go that way, and I’ll go this way.” I see this as his opportunity for a little independence.

In today’s Psalm, rather than diverging from God, the psalmist is telling God, “Make it clear which way to go. I want to follow you. Teach me your paths.” Rather than independence, the psalmist is seeking reliance, to be able to trust and depend on something. The psalmist asks God for guidance, clarity, and direction in life. Rather than asserting their independence, the psalmist asks God to lead them.

So which is true of you? Do you tell God, “You go that way, and I’ll go this way,” or “Show me the way. I want to follow you.”

Today We Pray

God, show me the way. I want to follow you.

SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, February 25

When Abram was 99 years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am El Shaddai. Walk with me and be trustworthy. I will make a covenant between us and I will give you many, many descendants." Abram fell on his face, and God said to him, "But me, my covenant is with you; you will be the ancestor of many nations. And because I have made you the ancestor of many nations, your name will no longer be Abram but Abraham."

(Genesis 17:1-5)

At age 99, what do you imagine yourself doing? Typically, we imagine ourselves long retired at that age. Our goal for late life may be to collect social security and move to south Florida. One of my dreams is a flower garden and a good book. These twilight years we imagine as a season of relaxation, not reinvention.

But in what we would consider our twilight years, God called Abram out of his hometown. Abram followed God to Canaan at age 75. Abram became a father for the first time at age 86. Now, at age 99, God is telling Abram to serve God faithfully and live a blameless life; and it reminds me of the old adage, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." This obviously isn't God's motto. God's bumper sticker would be far more likely to say, "You're never too old, and it's never too late." It's never too late to begin a great work for God.

Today We Pray

God, it's never too late.

Monday, February 26

When it was beyond hope, [Abraham] had faith in the hope that he would become the father of many nations, in keeping with the promise God spoke to him: That's how many descendants you will have. Without losing faith, Abraham, who was nearly 100 years old, took into account his own body, which was as good as dead, and Sarah's womb, which was dead.

(Romans 4:18-19)

I like that Abraham is portrayed as a bit of a realist in this scripture. Abraham “took into account his own body,” his age, and his wife’s age, and mentally knew something didn’t add up. Sarah actually laughed when she heard she would be pregnant. Somehow these people took into account reality without losing faith.

Today’s passage tells us there is something that lies even beyond hope. That far-off place is where faith lies. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the reality of what we hope for, the proof of what we don’t see.” The scripture says when it was beyond hope, Abraham had faith.

When have you experienced deep faith beyond the realities of your situation? Can you recall a moment when you had such a strong belief that went beyond the tangible aspects of your situation? How did that experience of faith that transcended your circumstances impact your outlook on life or your approach to future challenges?

Today We Pray

God, like Abraham let me sense something beyond hope and have faith.

Tuesday, February 27

Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead.”

(Mark 8:31)

The revelation of Jesus’s identity is still fuzzy at this point in the scripture, so Jesus asks his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” They respond, “Some say John the Baptist, others Elijah, and still others one of the prophets.” Listen to that uncertainty.

Then Jesus asks, “Who do you say I am?” To this the disciple Peter says, “You are the Christ.” In response, Jesus makes it clear what it will mean to be the Christ. It will mean suffering, rejection, and death. Rather than a title for honor, Jesus makes clear his journey will not be stately but deadly. Jesus’s disciples don’t respond well to this, understandably.

Historically, humans are more inclined to follow leaders who are seen as strong, powerful, and capable of achieving great things, rather than those who are seen as willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others. A hero is someone who is admired for their courage, bravery, and achievements. On the other hand, a sacrificial shepherd is someone who is willing to put themselves in harm’s way to protect others. They prioritize the safety and well-being of their community or followers above their own needs and desires. They leave the ninety-nine to find the one. In Mark 8:31, Jesus makes it clear he is not the hero but the sacrificial shepherd.

Today

Reflect on how sacrifice can be heroic.

Wednesday, February 28

Six days later Jesus took Peter, James, and John, and brought them to the top of a very high mountain where they were alone. He was transformed in front of them, and his clothes were amazingly bright, brighter than if they had been bleached white.

Then a cloud overshadowed them, and a voice spoke from the cloud, "This is my Son, whom I dearly love. Listen to him!" Suddenly, looking around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus.

As they were coming down the mountain, he ordered them not to tell anyone what they had seen until after the Human One had risen from the dead.

(Mark 9:2-3,7-9)

The Transfiguration brings together two portions of scripture we have read in previous days. First, it recalls Jesus's baptism when the Spirit descends and the heavens open to say, "This is my Son." And second, it reminds us of yesterday's scripture where Jesus tells his disciples he will have to rise from the dead. In both cases, our understanding of Jesus is transformed.

Through the Transfiguration, Jesus's outward appearance is transformed before the disciples to reveal his inner glory. Jesus instructs them not to tell anyone this revelation. It reminds me of the lyrics, "unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see," from Nancy Allen's "Hymn of Promise."

The Transfiguration reveals Jesus's hidden promise. To embrace the notion of the hidden promise, we need to be willing to see beyond the surface level and be transformed ourselves.

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | Transform OUT | Me

Thursday, February 29

Then Jesus began to teach his disciples: “The Human One must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests, and the legal experts, and be killed, and then, after three days, rise from the dead.” He said this plainly. But Peter took hold of Jesus and, scolding him, began to correct him. Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, then sternly corrected Peter: “Get behind me, Satan. You are not thinking God’s thoughts but human thoughts.”

(Mark 8:31-33)

The Apostle Peter becomes known as the Rock of the Church, but he is also often one of the most reactive disciples during Jesus’s ministry on earth. In our scripture today, Peter scolds Jesus.

You can imagine what words Peter might have used to correct Jesus: “You can’t be killed. I will protect you. You can’t leave us!” The human part of Jesus would of course be gripped by Peter’s pleas. That is why it’s necessary for Jesus to stop Peter firmly and say, “Get behind me, Satan.” Jesus, and God’s people, cannot afford for him to be derailed.

Human thoughts do derail us and the Kingdom. In our walk of faith, it’s not uncommon for us to be swayed by our human thoughts and desires. Just as Peter reacted impulsively and tried to correct Jesus, we too can find ourselves succumbing to our own limited understanding and preferences. It would be natural for us to try to avoid suffering and rejection, but every so often it is our difficult human experiences that lead us to new life.

Today We Pray

*God, do not let my human thoughts
derail me or your kingdom.*

Friday, March 1

*All of you who are all Israel's offspring—
stand in awe of him!*

*Because he didn't despise or detest
the suffering of the one who suffered—
he didn't hide his face from me.*

No, he listened when I cried out to him for help.

(Psalm 22:23c-24)

Psalm 22 is categorized as a Psalm of Lament. Lament is no longer a word common in our vocabulary, but lament by definition is a passionate expression of grief and pain. To lament is to be deeply moved to express sorrow.

Today we tend to jump so quickly to “everything’s going to be fine,” we forget that the Bible actually allows us, and in fact encourages and maybe even commands us, to speak the honest truth. “God, this is how I’m feeling. God, this is the pain I’m experiencing.”

The reality is that our lives are not always filled with triumph and victory. Our lives are also filled with suffering and pain. The Bible shows us lament so sorrow is something we can express, rather than hide. Lament gives us permission and opportunity to express our real struggles and suffering.

Don't be afraid to share your pain with God. You would never tell a child, “Be quiet, God doesn't want to hear it,” but we adults often shy away from sharing our own feelings and prayers like God's too busy to listen.

What is the lament you carry with you today? Is it a personal loss? A broken relationship? A death, a lost job, an illness? I invite you to take a moment to be in touch with the grief that lives in you.

Today Reflect

What is the sorrow, little or big, in your heart?

Saturday, March 2

Elijah and Moses appeared and were talking with Jesus. Peter reacted to all of this by saying to Jesus, “Rabbi, it’s good that we’re here. Let’s make three shrines—one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah.” He said this because he didn’t know how to respond, for the three of them were terrified.

(Mark 9:4-6)

In life, there are moments when we encounter the extraordinary, the unexpected, and the divine. We find ourselves standing on the threshold of a holy encounter, feeling a mixture of awe, fear, and confusion. In such moments, like Peter, we may feel the need to respond, to do something tangible to honor the sacred presence.

Peter’s immediate response to Jesus’s transfiguration was to suggest building shrines for Jesus, Moses, and Elijah. It is a natural inclination to do something, to take action in the face of the extraordinary. Peter didn’t know what to do, but in the midst of their fear, he wanted to do something. To act. Build. Achieve. Honor.

Peter desired to honor and preserve this revelatory moment, wanting to make it permanent. But sometimes, God calls us to simply abide in the presence, to listen, and to let go of our need to control or achieve.

How can you cultivate a posture of abiding in God’s presence, even when faced with the extraordinary or unexpected? What practices or attitudes can help you let go of the need to control or achieve in those moments?

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | Sacred OUT | Presence

THIRD SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, March 3

It was nearly time for the Jewish Passover, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. He found in the temple those who were selling cattle, sheep, and doves, as well as those involved in exchanging currency sitting there. He made a whip from ropes and chased them all out of the temple, including the cattle and the sheep. He scattered the coins and overturned the tables of those who exchanged currency. He said to the dove sellers, "Get these things out of here! Don't make my Father's house a place of business."

(John 2:13-16)

Jesus got angry.

In this scripture, it is believed Jesus's anger stems from the injustice of this house of worship turned business mall. Travelers who could not bring their own sacrificial animals were being preyed upon by merchants, who charged exorbitant prices for pigeons, sheep, or cattle. The money changers worked alongside businessmen to make unwarranted profits for themselves. This put up unjust obstacles to those who wanted to worship, which angered Jesus.

God, this scripture reminds me: When I am angry, you know the feeling.

You know the burning anger that makes you want to flip over a table, and you know the cleansing it takes sometimes to make things right. This scripture reminds me when I feel like screaming in anger, You have the strength to overturn the problem and cleanse what litters my soul.

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | Over OUT | Throw

Monday, March 4

Then God spoke all these words:

You must have no other gods before me.

Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow down to them or worship them, because I, the LORD your God, am a passionate God.

(Exodus 20:1, 3-5a)

In case you didn't notice, little g "gods" found in verse 3 signify deities or objects of worship that were crafted by humans. Big G "God", in Christianity, refers to the One True God who is supreme over all. So, in verse 3 God is commanding, you must not have any other gods before the Great I Am.

When idols are spoken of in the Old Testament, it often sounds like a stand up comedian poking fun at how ridiculous idols are. For example, in Isaiah 44:

Idol-makers are all as nothing;

their playthings do no good....

He fashions a god and worships it;

he makes an idol and bows down to it.

Half of it he burns in the fire;

on that half he roasts and eats meat, and he is satisfied.

He warms himself and says,

"Ah, I'm warm, watching the fire!"

And the rest of it he makes into a god,

into his idol,

and he bows down, worships, and prays to it, saying,

"Save me, for you are my god!"

(Isaiah 44:9a, 15d-17)

Isaiah reminds us how silly it is to place our ultimate trust in anything of our own making.

Today Remember

We do not fashion God.

Tuesday, March 5

Do not use the LORD your God's name as if it were of no significance; the LORD won't forgive anyone who uses his name that way.

Remember the Sabbath day and treat it as holy. Six days you may work and do all your tasks, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. Do not do any work on it—not you, your sons or daughters, your male or female servants, your animals, or the immigrant who is living with you.

(Exodus 20:7-10)

Have you ever heard of someone giving up swearing for Lent? Well, today's passage from the Ten Commandments might be the origin of that intent.

Not using the Lord's name in vain is the third commandment, but the commandment right after it is quite a different one: to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy by doing no work.

What if instead of the foulness of our mouths, we were judged by the fullness of our days? What if we were judged by any misplaced belief that our work had a supreme importance over God's? If it were the case, then I am guilty as charged, God.

I have spent a considerable amount of my life believing that my worth was determined by my work. If that were true, I would always be working. However, God rested on the seventh day, and it wasn't a poor reflection of God's worth. Instead, the Sabbath was an honoring of the work well done.

This Week

Plan a time when you will rest from all your tasks and not do any work.

Wednesday, March 6

It is written in scripture: I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and I will reject the intelligence of the intelligent. Where are the wise? Where are the legal experts? Where are today's debaters? Hasn't God made the wisdom of the world foolish?

(1 Corinthians 1:19-20)

Similar to our scripture today, Proverbs 3:7 says, “Don't consider yourself wise. Fear the LORD...”.

In a world that values intellect and self-assurance, the concept of humility and reverence towards God can often be overlooked. In the twenty-first century, where information is so readily available at our fingertips, we are often tempted to rely solely on our own understanding.

Being wise enough to fear God is not about being terrified of God, but rather about having a deep reverence, awe, and respect for God. It is acknowledging that God is the source of all wisdom. This reverence stems from the realization that God, being the ultimate source of all wisdom, holds immeasurable knowledge and understanding.

As we cultivate this attitude of reverence and awe, we position ourselves to receive the invaluable wisdom and guidance that flows from the very heart of our Creator. So, take a moment today to reflect on your own attitudes and actions. Are you relying solely on the wisdom of the world, or are you open to the deep wisdom of God?

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | Deep OUT | Wisdom

Thursday, March 7

*Heaven is declaring God's glory;
the sky is proclaiming his handiwork.
One day gushes the news to the next,
and one night informs another what needs to be known.
Of course, there's no speech, no words—
their voices can't be heard—
but their sound extends throughout the world.*

(Psalm 19:1-4a)

What's the grandest silence you've ever heard? In the place where I live there are beautiful, vivid sunsets of fiery reds, blossoming pinks, and sky blues. Sometimes the entire sky is taken up by the vast splendor of the sunset, yet there is no sound. No swell of a cinematic soundtrack or angelic voices. There is no speech, no words, yet the beauty of God's masterpiece extends throughout the world. The sky proclaims God's handiwork.

We often think that the most admirable people are those who can speak the loudest, cleverest, and fastest. Our society often glorifies individuals who possess the gift of gab and can talk rapidly with great wit and volume. However, we tend to overlook that which can convey a vivid image even without the use of words.

What of the turning of the heavens that happens naturally rather than laboriously? What about the natural processes of growth, regeneration, and seasonal changes that occur without any human intervention or effort? Certainly, their presence echoes endlessly throughout the earth.

Today

Take two minutes to listen to the earth's grand silence or enjoy a sunset.

Friday, March 8

Do not kill.

Do not commit adultery.

Do not steal.

Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.

Do not desire and try to take your neighbor's house.

(Exodus 20:13-17a)

The Ten Commandments: These are the specific goals given to God's people on Mount Sinai that embodied the health and wholeness God had in mind for them. Through the Ten Commandments we get to learn how God desires us to live. We learn the principles that should shape our way of life, our actions, and attitudes.

If you've ever considered the Ten Commandments before, you know they aren't easy. Rest every week. Don't harm anyone. Respect your marriage and the marriage of others. Tell the truth, all the time. Be happy with what you have, don't dream of what you don't.

Have you ever been in shape? If you've been fit and healthy, you know how good it feels to have a daily routine, to eat food that is good for you and see your body changing in positive ways. If you've been healthy, you also know how easy it is to fall out of the routine. And when you get out of the daily practice of caring for your health, it's harder to get back on track. The same is true of our faith. The Ten Commandments help us get to the health and wholeness God wants for us.

Today Reflect

What commandment needs your focus so you can increase your stamina and strength as a person of God?

Saturday, March 9

Then the Jewish leaders asked him, “By what authority are you doing these things? What miraculous sign will you show us?”

Jesus answered, “Destroy this temple and in three days I’ll raise it up.”

The Jewish leaders replied, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise it up in three days?” But the temple Jesus was talking about was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered what he had said, and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

(John 2:18-22)

The definition of a mic drop is a statement or action that displays bold confidence. It is literally or figuratively dropping the microphone after a particularly effective line, indicating complete confidence in your opponent’s inability to come back with anything worthy of a response.

Jesus encountered questioning and skepticism from the Jewish leaders who challenged his authority. In response, Jesus delivered a powerful statement: “Destroy this temple and in three days I’ll raise it up.” Mic drop.

Jesus was confident. He didn’t need the authority or endorsement of the Jewish leaders. Their history wasn’t His Story.

Jesus’s words left the Jewish leaders astounded, questioning how such a feat could be possible in a mere three days when the physical temple had taken forty-six years to construct. Little did they know, Jesus was not referring to the physical temple but to his own body. He spoke with unwavering confidence, knowing that his resurrection would be the ultimate sign of his authority and divinity.

Today We Pray

Jesus, instill in me the confidence to see your Story.

FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, March 10

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life.

(John 3:16)

John 3:16 is arguably the best-known verse in the Bible. Why?

John 3:16 gained prominence in the 1970s when Christians began displaying signs bearing the verse at stadiums and sporting events, utilizing this platform to spread the Good News. We may never know who was the first person to bring a “John 3:16” sign to a sporting event, but the verse was never about just one person—and it was certainly never about sports. It has always been about Jesus and God’s love for the world.

John 3:16 has been called “the Gospel in a nutshell” because it provides a stunningly succinct summary of the doctrine of the Christian faith. John 3:16 conveys the incredible depth and magnitude of God’s love in a simple and accessible way. It reveals the core of God’s character and redemptive plan for humanity.

God’s intention for us begins in love and sweeps across the universe eternally. God gave at great cost for us to receive. Those are the words I hope reverberate through you today, not just a black and white sign at a sporting event but a sweeping aurora borealis of God’s love. Today, breathe in eternal life and God’s eternal love.

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | Eternal Life OUT | Eternal Love

Monday, March 11

The light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions are evil. All who do wicked things hate the light and don't come to the light for fear that their actions will be exposed to the light. Whoever does the truth comes to the light so that it can be seen that their actions were done in God."

(John 3:19b-21)

Why do we sometimes like darkness more than light?

We are at our most authentic when we are around people who are open and accepting, not judging. Dr. Marisa G. Franco writes that "authenticity flourishes in safety."¹ Authenticity is a state of internal honesty.

When we feel as though we have to hide portions of our authentic self, darkness and our inner world begin to feel safer than sunlight. When we do things we regret, we may explain away and blame rather than bringing the truth to light.

Authenticity is a crucial aspect of our relationship with God and others. It brings honesty, reconciliation, and light to our lives and relationships. Authenticity is not being brutally honest or oversharing; authenticity begins with an internal honesty with yourself and God.

Today, may we be willing to bring our actions, intentions, and vulnerabilities to the light. May we know that it is in the light of Christ that we find healing, growth, and transformation.

Today We Pray

God, I want an authentic relationship with you.

1 Marisa G. Franco, *Platonic: How the Science of Attachment Can Help You Make—and Keep—Friends* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 2022), 138.

Tuesday, March 12

[The Israelites] marched from Mount Hor on the Reed Sea road around the land of Edom. The people became impatient on the road. The people spoke against God and Moses: "Why did you bring us up from Egypt to kill us in the desert, where there is no food or water. And we detest this miserable bread!"

(Numbers 21:4-5)

The people in the wilderness during the Exodus are impatient, miserable, and speak against God.

Jesus in the wilderness fasts, resists Satan, and worships God. The contrast is laughable.

I wonder, did you notice that the people in this scripture never turn to God? They never pray, or cry out, or ask politely: please. They quarrel and grumble. They speak against God. Throughout their Exodus, the Israelites complain and grumble and seek after other things that lead to all kinds of hardships for them. In fact, it led to a longer time in the wilderness.

For both Jesus and the Israelites, what was the purpose behind their wilderness time? Why might having a season of wilderness actually teach us something?

You know, we all have legitimate needs. I believe Israel's need for water was legitimate. But they never asked God, they grumbled to Moses.

Today We Pray

Instead of grumblers, may we be ambassadors of grace. Instead of continual complaining, may we carry compassion to a hurting world. Amen.

—adapted from Revised Common Lectionary Prayers copyright © 2002

Wednesday, March 13

*Some of the redeemed were fools because of their sinful ways.
They suffered because of their wickedness.
They had absolutely no appetite for food;
they had arrived at death's gates.
So they cried out to the LORD in their distress,
and God saved them from their desperate circumstances.
God gave the order and healed them;
he rescued them from their pit.*

(Psalm 107:17-20)

In other translations of Psalm 107, the word *fools* is translated as “sick.” “Some were sick through their sinful ways” (NRSVue). Certainly, having no appetite and being near death reminds me more of physical sickness than foolishness, but the Hebrew word translated “sick” in the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible actually means “foolish ones.”

Sometimes foolish actions cause physical consequences. I remember the first day I got my driver's license, I was joyriding through town with my best friend. Making a left-hand turn, I nearly got into a car accident on my first day as a driver!

Psalm 107 is paired with the Israelites grumbling in the wilderness in Numbers 21 in the lectionary because there the people are “shaking their fist at God” for not having the food and resources they had back in Egypt during their captivity, and their dissatisfaction ends up causing them further pain. Grumbling can really become a mental loop in our lives. That is why I think the practice of gratitude is so important. Today, practice moving from grumbling to gratitude.

Today

Write down five things you are grateful for this week.

Thursday, March 14

We are God's accomplishment, created in Christ Jesus to do good things. God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives.

(Ephesians 2:10)

We've had some rough years with the number *twenty* in their name (starting with a pandemic to open the year 2020). I've had a rough year and I have to remind myself I was made for good. God's intention for me is good. "God planned for these good things to be the way that we live our lives."

When I feel abused, discounted, under attack—God, please heal my wounds. Remind me that although I am run over, I am not overrun. I was made for good. Amidst the pain and turmoil, God, I seek solace in the knowledge that even though I have been knocked down, I am not destined to be overrun by the challenges and change I face.

This year I plan to move into a new home. When I arrive, I plan to bless the home using incense. Historically, fire has been a religious symbol of refining and releasing. Incense has been used since the ancient times of Israel's Temple to lift the prayers of the people to God. My prayer is that this blessing is healing and invites goodness into this new life. I pray today's prayer below can be healing for you.

Today We Pray

*God, please heal my wounds.
Remind me when I am run over, help me
not to be overrun. I was made for good.*

Friday, March 15

You are saved by God's grace because of your faith. This salvation is God's gift. It's not something you possessed. It's not something you did that you can be proud of.

(Ephesians 2:8-9)

What is a gift we cannot give ourselves? That we cannot earn or buy?

If you are in your prime of life, it is natural to desire independence, self-sufficiency, and personal achievements. Society often tells us that our success and fulfillment depend on our own efforts.

But salvation is not something you control, and it can't be taken by force. It is a gift.

In some ways, I bet this makes you uncomfortable. Maybe you were told to be a provider or self-sufficient. Maybe you were told it is your hard-earned success that would bring you joy in life and you don't want to rely on anyone else for your success. But faith in only ourselves is so limiting. Faith only in yourself means you have to do life alone.

The idea of relying solely on ourselves is both daunting and limiting. However, God's salvation reminds us of a different reality—a reality in which we acknowledge our limitations and live into our need for something beyond ourselves. This is why our connection with God is a relationship, which includes giving and receiving.

Have you ever struggled with the idea of relying solely on yourself? Today, reflect on how this has impacted your perspective on life and your relationship with God.

Today We Pray

God, help me receive the gift.

Saturday, March 16

*“Give thanks to the LORD because he is good,
because his faithful love lasts forever!”*

*That’s what those who are redeemed by the LORD say,
the ones God redeemed from the power of their enemies,
the ones God gathered from various countries,
from east and west, north and south.*

(Psalm 107:1-3)

Psalm 107 is a communal hymn of praise, most likely sung in praise and worship of God. Four groups of people appear throughout Psalm 107, bringing to mind the four points of a compass mentioned in verse 3 of our scripture today.

Each of the people described is in distress and in need of redemption: some wandered in desert wastelands, some sat in darkness, some became fools through their rebellious ways, and some were sailors out in the seas.

The last group, the sailors, may seem an odd addition, but Israel was not a seafaring people. In the Hebrew scriptures, the sea is often personified as chaotic and full of sea monsters.

The inclusion of the sailors also reminds us how far God’s redemption stretches, in all directions to all people. In a sense, Psalm 107 can be seen as an ode to salvation, encompassing all people who cry out to the Lord God in their distress.

The beauty of Psalm 107 lies in its universality. It reminds us that no matter where we find ourselves—whether lost in a metaphorical wasteland, trapped in darkness, entangled in our own foolishness, or tossed about by the storms of life—God’s redeeming power is available to us all.

Deep Breath Prayer

*Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your
inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.*

IN | To All OUT | For All

FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

Sunday, March 17

Jesus replied, "The time has come for the Human One to be glorified. I assure you that unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it can only be a single seed. But if it dies, it bears much fruit.

(John 12:23-24)

A seed, when buried in the earth, undergoes a process of death and transformation. From that one seed of wheat, over twenty new kernels of wheat can grow. From that single seed, a harvest of abundance emerges.

Interestingly, there are some seeds that require exposure to cool temperatures, often during winter, in order to flower and bear fruit. This phenomenon is known as vernalization. Seeds like garlic and winter wheat need to be laid low, experiencing the chill of winter, in order to be transformed and reach their full potential.

We can only be a single seed, a singular hyper-independent life, until we are willing to share our lives with others. We often have a tendency to live in isolation, seeking independence and self-sufficiency. However, Jesus invites us to let go of our hyper-independence and embrace a life of community and multiplication.

Burying a single seed is a risk, but if we never plant it, it will never grow. We were not meant to live as isolated individuals but to share our lives with others. When we open ourselves up to relationships, when we sow the seed of love, grace, and kindness, we create an environment for growth and multiplication.

Today We Pray

God, help me recognize the areas of my life where I need to let go and embrace the risk of multiplication.

Monday, March 18

I will be their God, and they will be my people. They will no longer need to teach each other to say, “Know the LORD!” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD; for I will forgive their wrongdoing and never again remember their sins.

(Jeremiah 31:33c-34)

This passage from Jeremiah reveals the relentless pursuit of God. God tried a lot, in many different ways, to build the kind of covenant relationship God envisioned for God’s people. Earlier in this scripture, the Lord declares, “The time is coming, when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. It won’t be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant.”

Many covenants were broken, yet God remained faithful. So, God foretold of a covenant in which all will know God, from the least to the greatest, and the veil between God and man is removed in the birth of Jesus.

Through his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus provided the ultimate expression of God’s forgiveness and redemption. In him, the brokenness of humanity is reconciled and the barrier of sin is overcome. In this new covenant, God’s forgiveness is complete and everlasting.

I am so thankful God has architected a world where everyone can know God. No matter your access, understanding, or status—God desires you.

Deep Breath Prayer

Breathe deep using the IN phrase for your inhale and the OUT phrase for your exhale.

IN | Faithful OUT | Love

Tuesday, March 19

*Create a clean heart for me, God;
put a new, faithful spirit deep inside me!
(Psalm 51:10)*

Today is the first day of spring! Thank the Lord! As the first day of spring dawns upon us, we enter a season of new beginnings and fresh possibilities. It is a time of year that invites us to join in the process of renewal, not only in nature but also in our hearts and spirits.

I love a spring refresh. Today's verse from Psalm 51 is one of the focus verses I use in the spring season to renew and refresh my heart.

What in your life feels like a burden that is keeping you from newness of life this spring? What is holding you back from embracing the freshness that spring brings? It could be unresolved conflicts, lingering grief, fear, or a sense of being closed off from others.

After the heartbreak I have experienced in my life, I am someone who has to actively heal and intentionally open my heart to be in healthy relationship with the world. I wouldn't say this is my strength. Often, my first instinct is to think with my head versus feel with my heart. But ultimately, I want to feel I am sharing a radiant, Spirit-filled heart with the world.

Today

Identify the areas of your heart that need healing and renewal, and pray, "God, heal the wounds within me, and help me release the burdens that weigh me down."

Wednesday, March 20

I have sought you with all my heart.

Don't let me stray from any of your commandments!

I keep your word close, in my heart.

(Psalm 119:10-11a)

Our hearts hold the deepest and most intimate aspects of our being. It is within our heart's sacred space that we cherish our closest relationships, our hopes, and our dreams. Yet, opening our hearts to others, and even to God, can sometimes be challenging. Past experiences may have left wounds, making us hesitant to trust fully. At one time this past year, I imagined my heart was encased in a protective sphere of ice that would slowly need to melt and heal over time.

Does your heart ever feel closed off to God? If so, God can handle it and desires healing for you. Opening our hearts may not always feel safe or easy. Closeness and intimacy can sometimes push uncomfortably into a personal bubble. But God is trustworthy and faithful. Psalm 145:13b reiterates, "The LORD is trustworthy in all that he says, faithful in all that he does."

When we encounter moments of resistance or find our hearts closed off to God, it's essential to remember that God understands our struggles and desires to bring healing to our hearts. Despite the challenges we may face, God is capable of handling our doubts, fears, and uncertainties.

Today, reflect on ways you find it challenging to be vulnerable with God. What past hurts or disappointments have made you hesitant to fully trust God?

Today We Pray

God, you are worthy of my heart.

Help me heal the wounds of my heart.

Thursday, March 21

Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!

Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!

Wash me completely clean of my guilt;

purify me from my sin!

Because I know my wrongdoings,

my sin is always right in front of me.

(Psalm 51:1-3)

In my experience, snapshots of guilt live with us. For me they feel like brief video recordings that play back in my mind. “My sin is always right in front of me.” Yet, in the midst of our brokenness, we find hope and solace in the compassionate love of God.

I am imperfect and I can't change the wrong things I've done. But through God's forgiveness and superior love, I can realize those mistakes don't define me in God's eyes.

Our scripture today from Psalm 51 is often read during Ash Wednesday, and in 2016, I and another Pastor sang these words we wrote: “Is that all that there is, ashes and dust? Ground down from creation, Eden it was. Life is more than this ash, Love far deeper than dust! Spirit you breathe new life into us.”

There is far more than the ashes and dust of our less-than-best choices. In the Book of Genesis, new life was actually created from the dust. God breathed life into us. God's love extends so far beyond our dusty origin story.

Today, let us remember that our story does not end with ashes and dust. The ashes and dust of our mistakes do not have the final say. God's love transcends our origin story, offering us a path of redemption and restoration.

Today Pray

God, forgive me.

Friday, March 22

In the same way Christ also didn't promote himself to become high priest. Instead, it was the one who said to him,

You are my Son.

Today I have become your Father.

Although he was a Son, he learned obedience from what he suffered. After he had been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for everyone who obeys him.

(Hebrews 5:5, 8-9)

Although Jesus was the son of God and God Incarnate, he learned to use his power not for self-importance but for salvation. Jesus did not promote himself to become a high priest or use his divine status for personal gain. Instead, he embraced a path of selflessness and servitude, fulfilling the purpose for which he was sent.

The word obedience in this scripture rubs me the wrong way. Contemplating obedience in our own lives can evoke a range of emotions and experiences. The very word “obedience” can elicit discomfort, especially in a world where power dynamics and abusive situations exist. It is essential to recognize that Jesus’s understanding of obedience was different.

In Jesus, we find the example of obedience as an expression of love. His obedience was not about control or power but about bringing forth salvation and eternal life for all.

What was a time in your life when obedience was needed? It could be a moment when you had to make a difficult choice, surrender a personal desire, or follow a path that challenged you.

Today

Take a moment to reflect on the motives behind your obedience. Was it driven by fear, societal expectations, or a genuine desire to align with God's will?

Saturday, March 23

Jesus replied, “The time has come for the Human One to be glorified.

Now I am deeply troubled. What should I say? ‘Father, save me from this time?’ No, for this is the reason I have come to this time.”

(John 12:23, 27)

I have been deeply troubled before. I think tears and anguish are important to feel and externalize our inward pain. Tears are not a sign of weakness, but rather a testament to the depth of our humanity. They are an acknowledgement that something within us is deeply troubled, that we are grappling with the complexities of life.

Anguish, too, has its place in our journey. Jesus is honest; he is deeply troubled by what he knows will happen—the betrayal, arrest, beating, and crucifixion that will come before he is glorified.

Many times, after our deep sadness, nothing specific has changed. I remember once I threw a tissue box across a room because I was mad at God for how a loved one had passed away. My deep emotion didn't change what had happened. This is what I see Jesus acknowledging in this scripture. He is deeply troubled by what he knows will happen, and yet he also had the foreknowledge to know “this is the reason I have come.”

Jesus came for this time, for this reason. And he knew it. Tomorrow begins Holy Week, the journey Jesus took to the cross and beyond.

Today We Pray

Jesus, you knew deep human emotion. It is safe to share my anger and sadness with you.

PALM SUNDAY

Sunday, March 24

*Open the gates of righteousness for me
so I can come in and give thanks to the LORD!
This is the LORD's gate.*

(Psalm 118:19-20a)

Many people spread out their clothes on the road while others spread branches cut from the fields. Those in front of him and those following were shouting, "Hosanna! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessings on the coming kingdom of our ancestor David! Hosanna in the highest!" Jesus entered Jerusalem and went into the temple.

(Mark 11:8-11a)

Throughout Israel's history, city gates were centers of activity. Gates were where important business was conducted, courts were convened, and PSAs were heralded. Gates weren't just doors into a city but places of public affairs and prophecy, and on Palm Sunday, Jesus prophetically enters Jerusalem through the Golden Gate.

Jesus's entry through the Golden Gate would have been symbolic because this gate was said to be the point through which the Messiah would enter the city of Jerusalem. There was already a Jewish ritual related to Psalm 118 in which, in memorial to their deliverance from Egypt and in hopes for the Messiah, people carried branches of palm, myrtle, and willow in procession through the Golden Gate, up to the temple, while singing Psalm 118: "This is the LORD's gate."

Palm Sunday fulfilled prophecy, and some people knew it. So go to the gate of your home today and speak this prayer: "I greet you at the gate, Lord. Hosanna!"

Today We Pray

I greet you at the gate, Lord. Hosanna!

Monday, March 25

Jesus and his disciples came to a place called Gethsemane. Jesus said to them, “Sit here while I pray.” He took Peter, James, and John along with him. He began to feel despair and was anxious. He said to them, “I’m very sad. It’s as if I’m dying. Stay here and keep alert.” Then he went a short distance farther and fell to the ground. He prayed that, if possible, he might be spared the time of suffering. He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible. Take this cup of suffering away from me. However—not what I want but what you want.”

(Mark 14:32-36)

In case you weren't aware, pastors often must find a way to meld Palm with Passion—Palm Sunday with Jesus's Passion leading to the cross. This is because often people come to church only on Sunday, so they celebrate Palm Sunday and Easter Sunday with none of the difficult Passion in between.

At the very end of Palm Sunday, you may hear a scripture like this from Mark, a scripture on the threshold of Jesus's journey to crucifixion. Yesterday was Palm Sunday, but today starts our Holy Week, a week that is the bitter journey before triumph.

Jesus knew what was coming. That evening, Jesus in the garden knows what is going to happen to him: his arrest, trial, beating, crucifixion, death—even that he will be resurrected. So, a sense of the weight he felt this week is appropriate.

Today We Pray

Jesus, I will sit with your story.

Tuesday March 26

They shouted,

“Hosanna!

*Blessings on the one who comes in the name of
the Lord!*

Blessings on the king of Israel!”

Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, just as it is written,

Don't be afraid, Daughter Zion.

*Look! Your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey's colt.*

(John 12:13b-16)

Through today's scripture passage, we witness the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. The people hailed him with shouts of “Hosanna!” and proclaimed “Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord,” acknowledging him as the King of Israel. However, what stands out in this passage is Jesus's deliberate choice to ride on a young donkey. He could have entered the city on a majestic horse, a symbol of power and authority. Instead, he humbly selected a donkey. Throughout Holy Week, we will witness Jesus's humility and sacrifice for the purpose of salvation.

In this scripture, Jesus seems to purposefully deflect power and prestige. By choosing a donkey, Jesus seems to choose the least prepared steed to process into Jerusalem. In the gospels of Mark and Luke, it is stated that the colt had never been ridden or even sat upon. Something about this brings to mind a kind of symbiotic relationship between the colt and Jesus. Jesus wanted the most unlikely of animals to parade and process to Jerusalem to convey the message that his kingdom was inclusive, embracing even the least prepared and the most unexpected.

Today Reflect

Consider how you can embrace humility in your own life. Reflect on the areas where you may be seeking worldly power or recognition and surrender them to God.

Wednesday March 27

*I didn't rebel; I didn't turn my back.
Instead, I gave my body to attackers,
and my cheeks to beard pluckers.
I didn't hide my face
from insults and spitting.
(Isaiah 50:5b-6)*

The book of Isaiah often has prophecies that are inferred to be about Jesus. This is one of the reasons you will hear readings from Isaiah during Holy Week.

In the Old Testament, also known as the Hebrew Bible, there are over three hundred messianic prophecies. God's people were expecting a Messiah, and Isaiah's messianic prophecies exceed any other Old Testament book in their clarity and explicitness. This is evident in our scripture today.

Isaiah taught that the Savior would be despised, attacked, and afflicted. But what strength do you see in our scripture today? Often, we see those in power, those who have the upper hand, those with the physical force as strong. Instead, imagine the inner fortitude it took for Jesus to not fight or flee.

Today, we often equate strength with physical dominance or the ability to fight back, but Jesus defied expectations by choosing a different path. His strength was not measured by the force he wielded, but by his unwavering commitment to love, forgive, and endure the suffering placed upon him. It takes immense courage and resilience to face opposition without retaliating, to stay rooted in love amidst hatred, and to embrace the path of sacrifice rather than self-preservation.

Today We Pray

Jesus, you did not fight or flee. You chose resilience over retaliation. May I do the same.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Thursday March 28

Adopt the attitude that was in Christ Jesus:

*Though he was in the form of God,
he did not consider being equal with God
something to exploit.
But he emptied himself
by taking the form of a slave
and by becoming like human beings.
When he found himself in the form of a human,
he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the
point of death,
even death on a cross.*

(Philippians 2:5-8)

On Maundy Thursday, we remember Jesus's Last Supper with his disciples, and in the gospel of John, Jesus's washing the very feet of his disciples. John 13:12-15 says,

After he washed the disciples' feet, he put on his robes and returned to his place at the table. He said to them, "Do you know what I've done for you? You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and you speak correctly, because I am. If I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you too must wash each other's feet. I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do."

Jesus chose not to use his power in God to make people his servants. As God's Son, Jesus wasn't equal to us mere mortals, but he refused to have an attitude of exploitation despite that. Jesus tells his disciples that if I, your Lord, can humble myself to serve you, remember you too were created to serve one another.

Jesus relinquished all, his life and relationships he had experienced on earth, to serve and complete his Father's plan. He emptied himself.

Today

Relinquish something you "have to do," and attend Maundy Thursday worship or read John 13:1-15.

GOOD FRIDAY

Friday, March 29

It was now about noon, and darkness covered the whole earth until about three o'clock, while the sun stopped shining. Then the curtain in the sanctuary tore down the middle. Crying out in a loud voice, Jesus said, "Father, into your hands I entrust my life." After he said this, he breathed for the last time.

When the centurion saw what happened, he praised God, saying, "It's really true: this man was righteous." All the crowds who had come together to see this event returned to their homes beating their chests after seeing what had happened.

(Luke 23:44-48)

On Good Friday, we stand as witnesses to what Christ suffered for our salvation. We pause to worship a Savior who was both human and divine, both earthly and godly. We worship to witness to the inhumane, ungodly death Jesus endured before rising to new life.

Good Friday isn't a holiday... it is a holy day. It is a hallowed day of sacred suffering.

In the passage from Luke 23:44-48, we are transported to the scene of Jesus's crucifixion. Darkness covered the earth, and the sun stopped shining, signifying the weight of the moment. The crowd that came to see the crucifixion left beating their chests, which is to say they felt sadness, anger, and guilt for what they had seen and allowed to happen.

Today as you observe Good Friday, enter into the hallowed moments of sacred suffering, carrying the weight of this day in your heart.

Today

Pause at Noon or 3 pm to read today's scripture passage or attend a Good Friday service.

HOLY SATURDAY

Saturday, March 30

Have mercy on me, LORD, because I'm depressed.

*My vision fails because of my grief,
as do my spirit and my body.*

*My life is consumed with sadness;
my years are consumed with groaning.*

*Strength fails me because of my suffering;
my bones dry up. . . .*

But me? I trust you, LORD!

I affirm, "You are my God."

My future is in your hands. . . .

*All you who wait for the LORD,
be strong and let your heart take courage.*

(Psalm 31:9-10, 14-15a, 24)

Holy Saturday is a day of reflection and waiting between Jesus's death and new life. It is a day of preparation.

In the depths of despair and sorrow, we often find ourselves overwhelmed by grief. Grief can consume our thoughts, drain our strength, and cloud our vision. The Psalmist today says, my body and spirit are dried up.

What accompanies our grief? A loss of power. A loss of control. Often, we feel adrift in all the unknowns. That is what I imagine the disciples felt like, deeply grieving amidst pain and frustration.

Grief has a way of depleting us. Maybe that is why Psalm 31 says, God, my future is in your hands because I can't see it. The disciples could not see the future of what God had planned on Holy Saturday. This was the liminal space of in-between. After death, before new life.

Today We Pray

God, in the unknowing, remain our constant.

All who wait for the Lord, take courage.

EASTER SUNDAY

Sunday, March 31

Mary stood outside near the tomb, crying. As she cried, she bent down to look into the tomb.

Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you crying? Who are you looking for?"

Thinking he was the gardener, she replied, "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him and I will get him."

Jesus said to her, "Mary."

She turned and said to him in Aramaic, "Rabbouni" (which means Teacher).

Mary Magdalene left and announced to the disciples, "I've seen the Lord."

(John 20:11, 15-16, 18a)

Here, grief is transformed into joy.

For us today, the symbol of the empty tomb on Easter means resurrection and Jesus overcoming death. But Mary is at first perplexed and worried as she sees the empty tomb. She cannot imagine what has happened. In her grief and shock, she doesn't even recognize Jesus.

Yet, in a beautiful moment, Jesus called out to Mary, addressing her by name. With just a word, Jesus shattered the grip that grief had on her. Jesus calls Mary out of that grave and out of her grief. And her grief is turned to joy. Mary begins announcing, "I have seen the Lord!"

Mary's experience serves as a reminder that Jesus calls each of us out of our own metaphorical graves of sorrow, grief, and despair. He longs to turn our mourning into dancing, our despair into hope, and our sorrow into joy. This Easter, may we be transformed through Jesus's resurrection.

Today We Pray and Announce

Christ Is Risen! Christ Is Risen Indeed!