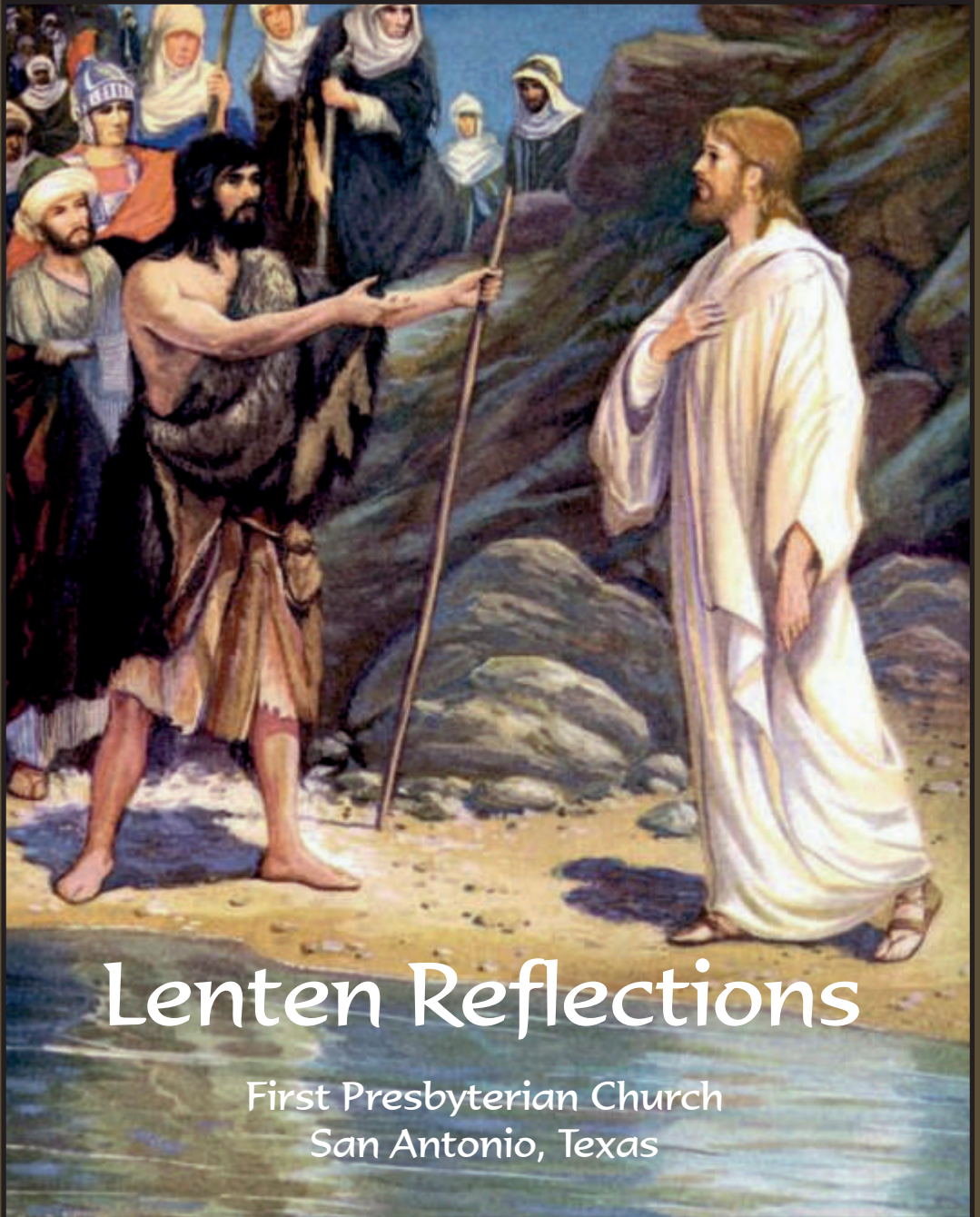


"Look, the Lamb of God,  
who takes away the sins of the world!"

John 1:29



# Lenten Reflections

First Presbyterian Church  
San Antonio, Texas



One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." He said to them, *"When you pray, say: 'Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come.' .... 'So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.'"*

Luke 11:1, 9-10

Funding provided through a most gracious gift from  
**Mrs. Charles (Sissy) Orsinger,**  
a very special prayer warrior throughout her life  
and now in the presence of her risen Lord and Savior.



Lent-Easter 2019

Dear Friends,

The weeks of Lent are given to the church as a time of prayer and a time of reflection and meditation on God's love for us in Jesus Christ. In past years, the Prayer Ministry Committee has compiled a book of daily reflections by church members to inspire and aid all of us in these vital aspects of Christian life. The Lenten Reflections last prepared in 2017 included all new writings, plus new and revised artwork illustrations. This 2019 on-line version reflects changes in dates only.

More importantly, the faith-filled thoughts expressed by each writer were designed to help us reflect on Jesus' sacrifice for our sins, and to lead us—individually and as the body of Christ—into a time of preparation and repentance. Then, as we come together to celebrate Easter Sunday on April 21, may we fully and joyfully acknowledge God's glorious and gracious gift of Jesus as our risen Lord and Savior.

Our hope and prayer is that each reflection, and its associated scriptural passages and illustrations, will lead you closer to Christ who came that we might have life, and have it abundantly. As you read these words of inspiration and scripture, reflect on how God has blessed you personally, and be thankful!

Rev. Dr. Robert Fuller, Jr.  
Senior Pastor

**Jonah 3:1-4, 10; Hebrews 12:1-14 and Luke 18:9-14**

We all know the story of Jonah. In fact, even those who have never read the Bible know the story of Jonah. Stories help us to see ourselves in the story of God and ultimately lead us to the story of God making us in His image and redeeming us.

In the Jonah story, we are not presented with a hero or a strong and mighty man. Instead we are presented with someone like ourselves. God works through Jonah's ineptness, just as He works through ours, to accomplish His purposes. Just as Israel was offered a second chance, Jonah is commanded a second time to go, and he does. Jonah can be seen as God's wrath on the one hand, and God's mercy on the other.

In Hebrews, we are told to strip off the weight that slows us down. That weight is sin. Because God loves us more than we can ever imagine, He yearns for us to be Christ-like. In the first verse we are told to run the race with endurance. To do that, the runner must be disciplined. He must be disciplined in his training, never give up and keep his eyes on Jesus, the perfecter of the faith who suffered on the cross for our salvation. If our earthly fathers love us enough to discipline us, how much more discipline should we welcome from the Father who created us? God's discipline in our lives is always for good because He wants us to share in His holiness. To do this, we must set out a straight path so that our weakness will become strong. Living a holy life takes work and discipline, but the reward is eternal life with our Father.

In our Luke passage, we are told the familiar parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Oftentimes this story strikes a little close to home. How easy it is to think more highly of ourselves than we should. "I don't cheat, I don't sin, I don't commit adultery. I even tithe." But woe to us who don't see ourselves as sinners like the tax collector did. We all sin and fall short. All that God asks of us is to admit it and ask for forgiveness. What father doesn't wrap his arms around his child when the child comes to him asking for forgiveness? Imagine how much more your Father in heaven will wrap His arms around you and tell you that He loves you, no matter what.

During this time of Lent, let us all remember that God uses even the inept to proclaim His Word. We are to discipline ourselves to be in the Word, to run the race with perseverance and to bow down before Him to seek forgiveness.

Lynnda

## **THURSDAY, MARCH 7**

**Week 1**

### **Deuteronomy 7:6–11, Titus 1:1–16 and John 1:29–34**

Our scriptures today focus on God's promises. God keeps His promises throughout generations and we can trust God and lean on Him. He is the source of all truth. This truth was ultimately shown as He sacrificed His Son for our sins.

In our Deuteronomy scripture, the Lord freed the nation of Israel from the Pharaoh because of His promise to their ancestors. God brought them out of slavery in Egypt despite the Israelites' reluctance and continued complaints throughout their journey to the Promised Land. God did not choose them over other nations because they deserved it; they were chosen solely because of His promise. He has chosen us, as believers, because of His grace and love. He keeps His covenants and only asks us to follow His commandments and to have faith in Him, our Lord and Savior.

Paul, in the book of Titus, again shows that God keeps His promises as he makes it clear that God is truth and does not lie. Because God is the source of truth, He cannot lie. Paul sets out to spread the Good News to the Gentiles. He spread the news of faith and living a faith-centered life. He showed others that God's promise of eternal life and forgiveness of sins is available to them through faith in Jesus. To help him, Paul appointed elders who followed God's commandments.

When John the Baptist, a popular preacher, proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, God fulfilled another promise by sending His Son and sacrificing Him for all of us. As the Spirit descended as a dove and remained on Jesus, John received a sign to show him that Jesus was truly sent from God. John was instructed to baptize Jesus, but this was preparatory. Jesus had not sinned but, according to Matthew 3:15, he asked John to baptize Him to wash away the sins of the nation and to "fulfill all righteousness." When Jesus baptizes, it is with the Holy Spirit, washing away our sins and allowing us as believers to share that Holy Spirit and spread the Good News.

As we prepare during this Lenten season, remember the many promises God has fulfilled. Like John the Baptist, get excited about our Savior and Lord! Think of something you can do today to help someone in need. Spread the Good News and work hard to be a faithful servant.

Melinda and Brian



**Deuteronomy 7:12-16, Titus 2:1-15 and John 1:35-42**

This Deuteronomy passage is one of blessing and warning. It reveals that our Lord in heaven wants to love, bless and multiply us! He wants to bring prosperity and take away all sickness! He has an all-encompassing desire for everything good for us! Then, as we read the last of the passage at this time in history, we sense a warning about people who do not believe in the Lord God. Clearly, our Lord asks us (the ordinary believer) to love Him and to obey His commandments. We have a “calling to be obedient.”

In the next scripture Paul guides Titus and us in ways to live out our faith. Forthrightly, he encourages us to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine.” Then Paul challenges everyone to live out godly attitudes and actions. Older men are taught to be mature in their faith, sober, reverent and temperate, and to model self-control, love and patience. Young men are exhorted to be sober minded, showing good works, self-control and, significantly, integrity, reverence and incorruptibility in speech. Older women are to be reverent in behavior and to equip younger women to love their husbands and children. Each group of people receives unique directions to show unbelieving people how our God works in hearts and minds. We have a calling to “live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age.”

In the final scripture of today, we turn to the blessing of obedience. Andrew heard Jesus. His heart and mind were changed forever. Immediately, Andrew sought his brother Simon Peter. The blessing of Andrew taking Simon Peter to Jesus resounds throughout the ages. Peter was the disciple who answered Christ saying, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.” And Christ acknowledged that this revelation came from “My Father who is in heaven.” Then Jesus continued, “And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.” (Matthew 16:18).

Our scriptures reveal the call to obedience ... the blessings of obedience ... the call to warn others of sinful behavior (even as we recognize and strive to change our own sinful behavior) ... and the blessing of sharing Jesus with our fellow man. As members of this congregation, we strive to make Jesus visible through obedience, words and actions—may it always be so!

Louise

**Deuteronomy 7:17–26, Titus 3:1–15 and John 1:43–51**

In today's scripture selections, we see a tapestry of God's love woven from the fabric of both old and new covenants. In both, we see a display of God's exhortations to His people to avoid living in a state of fear and, instead, follow His commands. He encourages us how to live in harmony with other Christians, and to follow the example of Philip and Nathanael in answering Jesus' call.

In Deuteronomy, the Lord has told His chosen people that they will drive out large nations of people even stronger than they, but He understands their timorous nature. He instructs them on how they are to treat their vanquished foes, to not be afraid of what is to come, and to not become ensnared by their idols and beliefs. (Thousands of years later, Christ has told us repeatedly to trust in him, "*Do not be afraid, just believe.*" Mark 5:36). The Lord reminds them of His great power and His mighty acts in bringing them out of Egypt, and promises them a future to proceed with His directed destiny, as long as they destroy all false idols completely.

In Titus, Paul is exhorting the new believers to not only subject themselves to existing civil authorities, but to be ready to do good wherever they find the chance. Paul lays down rules for harmonious living among the followers, reminding them, and now us, how we were once enslaved by all manner of despicable behavior, causing divisiveness and hatred between one another. And yet, the love and mercy of God redeemed us through Jesus our Savior, and renews us through the Holy Spirit.

In John, we read of Jesus' command, "follow me," when He calls Philip and Nathanael to be his disciples. This same Jesus, whose presence is woven throughout the Old Testament, was with God's people when they were about to enter the Promised Land, and with Paul when he gave us rules for Christian living, including caution against useless controversy. Jesus is with us today, asking us to follow him. On this fourth day of lent, are we ready to answer His call?

Ken and Pat

**Jeremiah 9:23–24, 1 Corinthians 1:18–31 and Mark 2:18–22**

Today's Lenten scriptures remind us that we have done nothing worthy of boasting. On our own, we are sinners who are neither wise nor strong nor righteous. It is only through our precious Lord, Jesus the Christ, that we can be any of these things. There will soon come a time to rejoice, but Lent is a time to reflect upon our sinful nature and upon our dependence on a Savior in order to be in a right relationship with our Lord.

Jeremiah's world was much like ours is today, in that our culture, like his, values and rewards strength, cunning, riches and anything that points back to us. Jeremiah was cautioning and rebuking his people to turn away from the world and look to God for wisdom. Likewise, we would be wise to heed his warnings and wisdom.

Jeremiah wanted his people to reflect on their sinful nature, just as we are called to do so during this Lenten season. We are to anticipate the coming Messiah and seek His ways, for only there are we able to find something in which we can boast! This concept is brilliantly summarized in the words of theologian Charles Spurgeon, "God's wisdom is our direction, His knowledge our instruction, His power our protection, His justice our guarantee, His love our comfort, His mercy our solace and His immutability our trust."

Our passage from Corinthians speaks of self-admiration, self-will and self-indulgence. Again, we are reminded of our need to turn to God and away from a culture that says "Bringing attention and glory to myself and satisfying my desires and needs are the most important things which I should seek!" On the contrary, God calls on those who are weak and foolish by human standards to be His chosen people. What joy to know that, even in our weakness, we are saved by the power of God! What joy to never forget this wonderful passage of scripture: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18).

In the second chapter of Mark, Jesus does not deny that there is indeed a time to fast and to focus on our spiritual matters. But, Jesus also points out, we are wise to celebrate with great joy the time we have with Christ. Let us choose to follow His wisdom.

As we approach the Cross and the Power of God revealed in the Resurrection, let us remember that "No one ever leaves the Cross in exactly the same condition as they came to it. You must receive it or reject it. If you receive it, you become a child of God." (Henrietta Mears, renowned Christian educator).

Susan and Dirk



**Deuteronomy 8:1–20, Hebrews 2:11–18 and John 2:1–12**

As we meditate on our relationship with Christ, we can reflect on how Christ loves us and provides for us in ways we would never have imagined. In the Deuteronomy passage, we see God teaching the ancient Israelites to trust in and rely on His promises and power. As we go through trials in our lives, God will humble and discipline us to mold and strengthen our character while providing for our needs. The Israelites struggled in the desert, yet they were fed daily. The purpose of adversity is to keep us focused on God. He will guide us and doesn't want us to lose sight of Him. It seems more difficult to maintain a strong relationship with God in times of prosperity than in times of hardship. God gives us freedom to choose our level of closeness with Him. We can discipline ourselves to have a quiet time with God and to give thanks.

In God's perfect timing, we can glimpse His glory and His power in the verses in John 2 about Jesus performing His first miracle at the wedding feast. When Jesus replenished the wine supply with the very best wine, the first to notice the celebration were the servants. Are we, as followers and servants of Christ, the first to notice His grace and provision or do we focus on what we have and what we want?

The Hebrews 2 verses reveal God's provision for us in the ultimate gift: God manifests His Son as fully human and fully divine. He rescues us from death by interceding for us, taking death onto Himself. He erases our sins, saving those with faith and giving us hope. Christ is compassionate. He understands our temptations and trials; He's experienced them, too. He includes us as "family."

In this season of Lent, appreciate and cling to Christ. Know that we are never alone. Christ restores and keeps us. We can rest under His wings. With faith, we can please God, drawing close to Him for comfort and guidance to face the hard things in life. As the Westminster Shorter Catechism says, we are to "glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." With thanksgiving, we are to allow the Holy Spirit access to all parts of our lives. God will take care of us, restore us, and keep us in His hands throughout life.

Maggie and Tyler

## WORDS OF OUR SAVIOR!

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?" Jesus answered, *"The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."*

John 6:28-29

Then Jesus declared, *"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty. ... For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day."*

John 6:35,40

Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, *"If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him."*

John 7:37b-38

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."*

John 8:12

Jesus said to her, *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?"*

John 11:25

Then Jesus cried out, *"When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."*

John 12:44-46

*"But what about you?"* Jesus asked. *"Who do you say I am?"*

Mark 8:29

**Deuteronomy 9:4-12, Hebrews 3:1-11 and John 2:13-22**

As we read the words of Moses to the Israelites at the time they were coming into their new land, it is easy for our minds to harken back 170 years to the pioneers who traveled years (ok, probably not 40 years) to settle in *San Antonio de Béxar* and found First Presbyterian Church... the “land” on which we now worship. During this year of celebration, we have been filled with pride for all that has grown out of the “Old Adobe”—SAMM, CAM, Morningside Ministries, Mission Road and so much more. The list is almost endless. Yet, lest we linger a bit too long reminiscing about all we have done these past 170 years and begin thinking perhaps just a bit too much about ourselves and our history, Moses slaps us back to reality. *“Understand, then, it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess, for you are a stiff-necked people.”* Ouch!

Just as we start feeling a wee bit guilty about perhaps “making idols for ourselves” out of our church’s glorious past and all that our congregation has accomplished, today’s second reading gives us the answer: *“So, my dear Christian friends, companions in following this call to the heights, take a good hard look at Jesus. He’s the centerpiece of everything we believe, faithful in everything God gave him to do.”* (The Message). Sounds like we are being called to focus on Christ... to “Make Jesus Visible.” Now there is a catchy phrase; seems I have heard it before. This simple lyrical phrase is so easy to say... but how do I do that? How do we do that?

Paul seems to answer these questions, too, in our text. *“But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”* “We are his house,” ... not this beautiful edifice or our wonderful history. No, “we are his house” and Christ promises to be faithful to us if we hold firm in our confidence and follow Him. Where will He take us? How will we “Make Jesus Visible” over the next 170 years? Our prayer is that the congregation in 2186 will look back and say that we took “a good hard look at Jesus” and lived and loved... and served... like *“He’s the centerpiece of everything we believe.”*

Teresa and Ben

**Deuteronomy 9:13-21, Hebrews 3:12-19 and John 2:23-3:15**

It seems appropriate that we begin our Lenten study series with a heavy dose of Deuteronomy, doesn't it? In our previous readings and in today's, we are reminded of the relationship between God and his chosen people. Just as Moses reminded the Israelites, during Lent we need to hear again God's call to remember and obey. But, as we read in Deuteronomy, again and again the Israelites did not obey God. Recognizing their innate weakness and wickedness, God threatened to "destroy them and erase their name under heaven." Moses descended Mount Sinai holding the tablets upon which God had written the covenants on how to live by him and with others. Many of us hold a picture in our minds of that dramatic moment when Moses, upon seeing how his people had broken God's covenants, took the stone tablets and threw them to the ground, smashing them before the eyes of the sinners. But God answered Moses' prayers for forgiveness, took pity on his chosen people, and gave them a new set of tablets.

Thankfully, we know "the rest of the story." The best covenant of all was yet to come—the everlasting gift of eternal life given through the death and resurrection of God's Son Jesus Christ. For Christians today, Lent is a time of turning toward God and preparing to receive anew this precious gift from the Holy Spirit.

We read in the Hebrews passage that this gift of God's promise—that we will have a home with him in heaven—comes with strong cautions and reminders that the Lord is a God of justice. Still today, these warnings ring true for us. Paul, in his letter to the people of Corinth, warns against becoming "people of the world" and tells us that we must "Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God." (Hebrews 3:12). Furthermore, we are admonished to help each other in this effort.

The last of today's scripture readings comes from John as he recounts Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus. Even though Nicodemus was a respected Jewish religious leader, he had trouble with Jesus' statement that being "born again" was a prerequisite for eternal life. Having witnessed miracles performed by Jesus, Nicodemus seems receptive to the concept; but, like many, he also seems to approach it from a worldly, human point of view. Jesus tries to explain to him, and through the scriptures explain to us, that it is through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and belief in him (itself a gift of the Spirit) that we receive the miraculous gift of eternal life. "That anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun." (2 Corinthians 5:17). It is through this same faith that we believe in the assurance that "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it.'" (Isaiah 30:21). This path leads us to life eternal with our Lord.

**Deuteronomy 9:23–10:5, Hebrews 4:1–10 and John 3:16–21**

When the Israelites came out from Egypt, God said “... go up and take possession of the land I have given you” (Deuteronomy 9:23). God had prepared a land flowing with milk and honey called the Promised Land for His children to occupy and enjoy life to the fullest. Moses said “... you have been rebellious against the Lord ever since I have known you.” (Deuteronomy 9:24). When the children of God rebelled, God decided to destroy them but Moses intervened, prayed to God and saved them from the anger of the Lord. Our God is a God of second chances. His love is forever, a love always mindful of His promise not to destroy us.

God said that He will never leave us nor forsake us; I will forever be your God. It doesn't matter who we are: regardless of our social class, racial background, how spiritual we are and the number of times we have sinned or fallen, God still loves us the way we are. Until Jesus Christ comes back, Christ is still sitting on the right hand of God pleading on our behalf. Numbers 23:19 says “God is not a human, that He should lie, ... Does He speak and not act? Does He promise and not fulfill?” If we believe in Him, He will always fulfill His promise in our lives.

Hebrews 4:1-10 reminds us that just as God finished His work and then rested from it, He will cause those who believe in Him to finish their work and then enjoy their rest. Yet, it is evident there is a more spiritual and excellent Sabbath remaining for the people of God, far more than just that of the seventh day. But those who do not believe shall never enter into this spiritual rest, either of grace here or glory hereafter. God has always declared man's rest to be “in Him,” and His love to be the only real happiness of the soul; faith in His promises, through His Son, is the only way of entering that rest.

Apart from the spiritual rest, God wants us to take time off from our busy schedules and rest physically, just as He did on the seventh day. People may feel that when they take a day off from work to rest, they might not make enough money from their pay check that week to pay the bills and sustain their families. But, the fact is that their hard work is not what sustains them; it is God's grace.

What is God's message for us? Even as we prepare for spiritual rest, we should not forget about physical rest. When the challenges of life confront us, arise and call on our God. He will hear and answer us. And trust that God's grace is sufficient for His children.

Martin

**Deuteronomy 10:12-22, Hebrews 4:11-16 and John 3:22-36**

It's a question that humankind has wrestled with since the beginning: What does the Lord your God require of you? (Deuteronomy 10:12a). The wilderness-wandering Israelites were asking this question after their impatience and faithlessness led them to demand a more concrete object to worship—and Aaron made them a golden calf. Moses, though understandably angry, appealed to God on their behalf. This passage from Deuteronomy is part of their recommitment to God and acknowledgement of His undeserved mercy.

But God's instructions to His people went beyond the expected actions: fear, obey, love, and serve God. God also asked them to "circumcise your hearts." (Deuteronomy 10:16a). What does that mean?

Hebrews tells us the role of the Word of God in this: the Word "judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12b). The description of the Word's effect sounds a lot like "circumcision of the heart"—"... it [the Word] penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit. ... Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight." (Hebrews 4:12c-13a).

The idea of relinquishing not only our actions, but even our thoughts and attitudes, to God's rule is daunting. How could anyone hope to please God if that's the standard, if nothing is secret? Hebrews continues by assuring us that we have "a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God." (Hebrews 4:14a). This priest understands us perfectly, as He was tempted in every way.

John goes further. This priest is not only able to empathize with us because He lived among us, but has power given by God. "The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands." (John 3:35). Despite our failings (even worshiping golden calves, or the current equivalent), despite our despair at meeting the standard of a "circumcised heart," with every secret thought laid bare before the eyes of God, we can still rest assured of God's grace, forgiveness and help.

"Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life..." (John 3:36a). "Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need." (Hebrews 4:16). May it be so!

Nancy



**Deuteronomy 11:18-28, Hebrews 5:1-10 and John 4:1-26**

Obedience is one of the principles the people of “The Way” need to remain on the path of truth as it winds through the unique circumstances of each person’s life. Writing ourselves notes and keeping written reminders help us to do what we need to do in the routines and distractions of life and, more importantly, bring our focus back to the truth in God.

As people who follow God, we are instructed in Deuteronomy to keep His commands ever present in our hearts and minds. The tradition of people placing these words and symbols on them and around them served as visible reminders and tools in teaching, so as to promote their inclusion in every aspect of daily life. That practice dates back to Moses’ instructions, and is with us today. Through these outward words, signs and symbols, we are pointed toward the way we are to follow and thus be blessed in the external and internal dimensions of our being. In this tradition is the paramount instruction in Deuteronomy 11:22, to “Love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him and to hold fast to him.” Our primary command remains to love the Lord and walk in obedience to Him. Jesus proclaims this foundational truth of Moses 1500 years later in the great commandment in Matthew 22:37-38, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”

During Jesus’ brief walk on the path as a man of flesh and blood, He demonstrates for us His obedience to God; we are blessed when we follow in His steps. Jesus brought this all to life in a way we can relate to when He reveals His true character during His meeting with the Samaritan woman at the well. In John 4, Jesus speaks to our thirst for the soul of God when He uses this most common of tasks in the daily life of that time: gathering water. Jesus uses this encounter as an opportunity to bridge over barriers, taboos and customs, and proclaim to an ‘outsider’ that He—the living water of eternal life—is the answer to her thirst. The Messiah she looks forward to seeing is in fact right in front of her, as He is for each of us today.

In Hebrews 5, Paul establishes Jesus’ identity as the eternal High Priest. However, Jesus’ identity is well beyond the traditional requirements: He was made perfect, not in the traditional sense employed by the priests, but in the shared experience of being flesh and suffering for those who obey Him. In place of the priest making sacrifices apart from himself, Jesus is obedient to His ultimate purpose in becoming the eternal High Priest. He will be the “once for all” sacrifice and, in so doing, “He became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:9)—the source of the eternal water of spiritual life. Thus, Jesus personifies and exemplifies the tradition of obedience to the Father and, through His sacrifice, shows us the true path for our souls to follow to the living water of eternal life in Him.

**Jeremiah 1:1–10, 1 Corinthians 3:11–23 and Mark 3:31–4:9**

God's call and gift to Jeremiah was prophetic ministry. The first words spoken were God's, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations. Do not be afraid...." Jeremiah became a faithful prophet as he brought God's Word to Judah and surrounding nations whose leaders faced and often fostered the imbedded evils of that day: deceit, rebellion and idolatry. Whenever Jeremiah spoke God's Word of judgment, it was at great risk. While God's prophets were routinely persecuted, His promise that "I am with you" provided Jeremiah, as it has countless ministers of Christ and everyday Christians over the centuries, with all the assurance needed to overcome discouragement, rejection and apathy encountered in serving God. Lord, as we share God's Word with others, help us to hold fast to Your promises.

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians explore his image of the church as a structure, with the true source of its strength being its foundation. "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid which is Jesus Christ." The structure of the true church is in its people, all the believers in Christ. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was and remains its foundation and the source of its continuing development as a living structure. Its framework consists of believers, worshiping and serving others in ways that build community with one another as they individually develop their personal relationship with God in Christ. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" God's Spirit is within each of us, pulling and holding us together as the "body of Christ." Paul decries all efforts to find church unity in other than Christ. "So no more boasting about human leaders! ... You are of Christ and Christ is God." Together, as God's church, the Spirit helps us know Christ and find our true selves—created in His image.

The verses in Mark offer lessons of life through the stories and parables that Jesus shared with His followers. Jesus proclaimed that "Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother." Sometimes we find ourselves without family in the city where we currently live. Or, we may be divided within our family because of differences of opinions or thoughts. Or, we find ourselves alone because our loved ones have all died. This could be through death or being the only member of a family or community who believes in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. In all these cases, the mighty power of Christ's love as Christian brothers and sisters sustains us by being "in Christ" and serving together. In the parable of the soils, Jesus offered sound guidance on how to be good soil in today's broken world. Trust God and remain true to His Word. "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear."

Carter



Jesus in Prayer

Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, [that] one of His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." So He said to them, "**When you pray, say: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as [it] [is] in heaven. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.**"

Luke 11:1-4 (NKJV)

**Jeremiah 1:11-19, Romans 1:1-15 and John 4:27-42**

We encounter three powerful images in today's scriptures: first, the young priest Jeremiah receiving the challenge of his prophetic mission but also God's promise of support and protection; second, the Apostle Paul introducing himself to the Christian community in Rome and declaring the Gospel; and third, our Lord Jesus Christ breaking down social barriers with the Samaritans and teaching His disciples fundamental Kingdom principles. Our Christian journey is likewise a series of beginnings—whether a new call to service that may seem greater than we can handle, joining into a new community of believers and expressing our unique gifts there, or having our lives transformed by hearing the Good News for the first time. Our lot is not to remain in our comfort zones but to venture forth where service to the Gospel calls us, even if that means letting go of the support systems that sustain and protect us. In our vulnerability we become more reliant on God's faithful power and open to Him doing great works through us.

Jeremiah is overwhelmed by the call to prophesy a disastrous future for the people of Judah due to their continual disobedience to God. In his own strength he lacks the necessary experience and skills. God tells Jeremiah to brace himself for the task and know that he can trust in the Lord's protection, for His grace is sufficient. Paul's heart is set on declaring the Gospel in Rome and devoting his gifts to the Christian community there. Since that door is not yet open to him, he sends the gift of this amazing letter in which he introduces himself as being wholly devoted to preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As his disciples witness Jesus open a new avenue of ministry to the Samaritan community, he teaches them that serving God is a task that offers its own sustenance. While their call is never the entire job of salvation, they are called to those tasks that the season requires.

Like Jeremiah, we are never alone when we step out of our comfort zones in service of the Gospel. God will protect and sustain us. Like Paul, we are able to encourage others by our faith and, in turn, receive encouragement from them. As the disciples learned from Jesus, the burden never falls entirely on us. As we venture forth in service of the Gospel we may reap the harvest that others have sown, or we may be planting and watering seeds of faith that others will one day harvest. We are all working in concert as the Body of Christ, encouraging one another by faith and always being sustained by the Holy Spirit. We are called to service of the Gospel, and we must go forth.

John C.

**Jeremiah 2:1–13, 29-32; Romans 1:16–25 and John 4:43–54**

Today's passages strongly illustrate the necessity of faith and trust in the Lord. They show examples of the consequences of a lack of faith or, in the case of the royal official in the passage from John, total faith and trust in God.

The passages from Jeremiah illustrate the nation of Israel turning from God after following God in the Exodus from Egypt, through the wanderings in the wilderness, and finally arriving in the Promised Land. God brought disaster upon their enemies and blessed Israel, "the firstfruits of his harvest." Jeremiah continues on to describe the anger of God as He sees Israel turning away from Him and committing two sins: forsaking the Lord and trying to stand on their own without God. Both of these are spiritual poison.

In the same manner, the passages from Romans declare that "The righteous will live by faith" and that we are without excuse when we turn from God. When we do (as we inevitably do in our sinful nature) our hearts are darkened and we become fools and worship idols instead of the glory of God.

In contrast to the previous two passages which detail the consequences of losing faith, John tells the story of a royal official with a sick child who traveled to meet Jesus and request His healing. Jesus rebukes the gathered crowds by telling them they do not believe unless they see signs and wonders. He then proceeds to seemingly casually tell the royal official to leave, for his son will live. The official faithfully trusts in Jesus, departs and finds that his son not only is healed, but began his recovery at the very time Jesus spoke to him and said his son would live.

All these passages provide strong evidence for the wonderful gift and promise of God's love, salvation and care for us if only we believe and trust in Him. In the first two scriptures we see examples of God's plan for us. However, as often happens, we turn from Him in times of plenty and believe we are the creator of our good fortune.

As people with broken, sinful natures, we must always remember to turn to God—in good times and in difficult times—for He alone is the source of our salvation and all of our blessings.

Jonathan

**Jeremiah 3:6-18, Romans 1:28-2:11 and John 5:1-18**

In these verses of Jeremiah, the prophet reminds us of how unfaithful Israel had become. Despite these actions, the Lord invites Israel to return to Him. He says “for I am merciful, ... I will not be angry forever.” God knows our shortcomings, but He always invites us back to Him. Return to me, and I will return to you! In response, we need to confess our sins and ask Him for forgiveness. He is a powerful and just God, but He is also a loving God.

In today’s verses from Romans, God spoke through the apostle Paul to point out a litany of reasons why mankind deserves death for our sins. Those reasons make us uncomfortable, for they confront and challenge us personally. Still, we continue to sin even though we are aware of the consequences of sin. The reason is clear: “our hearts are stubborn and unrepentant.” And because we all sin, we too often become judgmental toward others. Doing so is wrong and self-condemning, Paul tells us, for only God has the perfect righteousness necessary to judge us. Yet, the passage reminds us that, despite our unworthiness, God is also loving and merciful. The core message here is also clear: we are to seek Him and open our hearts in obedience to His ways. Let us remember that God created us and loves us for who we are, despite our sin. And, as followers of Jesus Christ, let us always hold fast to God’s promise of eternal life.

In John we hear the familiar story of Jesus healing a man at the pool called Bethesda. This story reminds us that Jesus’ compassion and power have no limits. The Pharisees tried to punish Jesus for healing this man on the Sabbath; but, their attempt only led to more interest and curiosity from others. Unlike the religious leaders, Jesus cared enough about people that he was willing to break the rules to help someone in need. The healed man was also willing to share his story even though it was the Sabbath. Grace has that effect, leading all who receive it to “speak the truth in love.”

This Lenten season let us remember and hold fast to a simple truth: Jesus’ love has no limits, nor should our love toward others. Ask God to give you strength to spread His love despite any obstacles that may get in the way.

Christy



**Jeremiah 4:9-10; Romans 2:12-24 and John 5:19-29**

Today's scriptures focus on complacency, contentment and misplaced trust. In the Jeremiah passage, the prophet Jeremiah warned Israel that they were succumbing to the prophecies of false prophets and leaders. Those false prophets were essentially teaching a prosperity ministry. The times were good, as Israel had been saved by God from the mighty power Assyria one hundred years earlier. With their guard down, the people of Israel were becoming less reliant on God and more reliant on their own successes. True, they knew God's Law and participated in all the religious ceremonies. But, they were not living out the Law. Their focus was not the Lord, but themselves. They were becoming very complacent and content in their ways. For our part, we should always look fervently and expectantly to the Lord.

In the Romans passage, we see similar issues. The Jewish leaders had again become complacent and content in their knowledge of the Law. The Law had been given to the Jews by God. Jewish life was defined by that Law. In fact, the leaders thought they knew it inside and out. However, what they had was knowledge of the Law. They spoke of the Law and taught the Law, but they did not necessarily reflect its inherent values and commands. Inwardly, they knew the words of God's Law. Yet, outwardly their actions conveyed a different message. They did not/could not live out the Law. There is a warning here for us. We all know the 10 Commandments; we all know how to be good. However, we too can become complacent and content in this knowledge. Knowledge of the Law ultimately leads to being judged by the Law. God's Law convicts all. Thank goodness we have Jesus to overcome our shortcomings. If we believe in him, we will be cloaked in his perfect righteousness and not judged in our guilt.

In the John passage, Jesus clearly states this promise: "Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life." Paul also states "And he has given him authority to judge because he is the Son of Man." The Jews knew the Law and knew the words; they just did not believe. The Messiah had been prophesied throughout the Old Testament. The Jews anxiously looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. However, they were so complacent and content in their own knowledge that they were blinded to the many signs of the Messiah. The Messiah brought eternal life. In order to achieve eternal life, we must know God's Word, act on what we know and believe Jesus is the Messiah. We all have sinned and have fallen short, but Jesus as Messiah forgives us. If we refocus our attention on Jesus and accept his grace, we will have eternal life, a life to be enjoyed and shared with him. In this Lenten season, will you refocus on Jesus the Messiah, accept what he has done for us and then willingly share his grace through your life?

**Jeremiah 5:1-9, Romans 2:25-3:18 and John 5:30-47**

Paul teaches us in Romans that God desires our heartfelt devotion and obedience to Him. God created each of us in His image, and He loves every one of us. However, just following the law is not enough to stand fully righteous before God. It is all about grace, not works. Scripture shows us the Jews made every effort to follow God's law, including circumcision, and the Jews still fell short of the glory of God. We all do. Paul is right, for "Jew and Gentile alike are all under the power of sin." Yet, God is Hope and He graciously offers us what the law cannot: eternal life through our faith in Jesus Christ.

In the Jeremiah passage, God challenged the people in Jerusalem to find one honest and truthful person. God was willing to spare the city if one person who was honest could be found. Could you imagine if the one person the people in Jerusalem were looking for were you? What an honor it would be to be that example on how to live? Who in your life has taught you how to live in a trustworthy manner? How amazing would it be to be an example to others on how to live as God calls us to live. God sees our true character through all of our disguises. He knows our hearts. God also calls us to be leaders to those who are younger than we are and to teach them. God holds us responsible to set a good example to others.

Being concerned about God's approval of our actions and thoughts is important. Having Jesus in our lives can be life changing. The apostle John shows us that Jesus is fully God, and Jesus is able to reveal God to us clearly and truthfully. We can trust in Jesus because He is God's Son, which allows us to fulfill God's purpose in our lives. We live in a world today that encourages us to "just be a good person" and we will get into heaven. The truth is that God is the unobtainable standard of good. Confessing Jesus is Lord and accepting this truth will allow each of us to be saved.

It is too easy to take God's grace for granted. We are all sinful beings, and understanding this will enable us to receive God's gift of salvation. We will all answer to God for our sins. God, through Jesus Christ, has redeemed us and offers to forgive us if we return to Him in faith.

Anne

**Jeremiah 5:20-31, Romans 3:19-31 and John 7:1-13**

In Jeremiah, we see an angry God. His people had listened to false teaching and prophecy, and refused to take advantage of God's amazing gift—true quality of life that offers abundant blessings of this earth and protection from the perils of our world. Then, as now, man's sinfulness and things of this world that we incorrectly take for granted often lead us astray from God's goodness and mercy. There also seems to be a never ending group that wants us to dwell on the secular values of our time and follow a false God. In all this, God is constantly calling us to depart from our wicked ways; but, we neither hear him nor have a heart to fear [his](#) displeasure.

In Romans, Paul explains what a right relationship with God [looks like and what we should strive for](#). [Getting right with God will help us](#) avoid the predicaments the Jews encountered in Jeremiah's day. Yet, even today, many still believe the way to obtain God's peace and blessing is to follow his laws and thus earn our righteousness. Rather, Paul points out that our right relationship with God is a gift by his grace from faith in him, not through the law. The laws serve two purposes. First, it is simply a great way to live in harmony on the earth with our fellow man. Secondly, and more importantly, it reminds us of our sinfulness and our need of a forgiving and loving savior. Paul makes one thing clear: our relationship with God is paramount. Since we will always fall short of following the law, our failure constantly reminds us of our need of seeking that all important relationship.

Paul insists that nothing we ever do can win for us God's forgiveness; only the immense sacrifice that [Christ](#) has [accomplished](#) for us on the cross can provide that grace. Therefore, the way to a right relationship with God lies not in a hectic, desperate and doomed attempt to win forgiveness by our performance. Ultimately, it lies in a humble, [penitent](#) acceptance of the love and the grace God offers us in Jesus Christ. In Christ, we now are ruled by the law of love and should have no fear as we strive to live in the luxury of God's love. Fear is wiped away by a daily renewing of our faith. Humbleness and desire to keep our eyes on him releases us from fear. By focusing on his teachings, we take attention off ourselves and faith enters and gives us courage.

In John, we encounter Jesus setting his brothers (and us) straight concerning his timing for overcoming the ways of the world within each of us. In all situations, we are called in faith to keep our eyes focused on Jesus and to not only follow and relax in his [timing](#), but also defend him in the eyes of a critical, doubting world. To him be the glory.

Bill

**Jeremiah 6:9-15, 1 Corinthians 6:12-20 and Mark 5:1-20**

Jeremiah is troubled that the people of Israel neither listen to the Word of the Lord nor understand that the Lord's wrath will come down hard on them. The people find no pleasure in the Word of the Lord and they have no shame at all. We all need to have a daily quiet time with the Lord. We need to be close to Him every single day of our lives. The quicker we believe this and do it, the more peace we will have in our lives. Our world is a dark place. If Christians, though, have been reading the Bible, nothing that is happening in this world should shock us. The Lord foretold things in the Bible of what was to come.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul tells us to flee from sexual immorality and be aware that our bodies belong to Christ. We are to honor God with our bodies. Most of us would like to think we own our bodies and can do whatever we want, however we want, and with whomever we want; but, that is really not what God intended for us. We are to take care of them, physically and mentally, and be obedient to God. God sent His Son to DIE for us—a criminal's death when Jesus did absolutely nothing wrong—such a high price for our mortal bodies! “Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, WHO IS IN YOU ... ?” So take care of your body and your mind, and let the people around you see God in you.

In Mark, we read about a man with an impure spirit who lived among the tombs. He was constantly roaming the areas because he had no peace. How many of us are like this? It is a constant battle to stay focused. Who can help us experience peace in our lives? This madman cried out to Jesus, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?” Now even though this man was “mad,” he still knew who Jesus was. This is a great reminder—to cry out to Jesus. Next, we read that Jesus called the impure spirit out of the man's body. Then, get this now, Jesus asked the impure spirit, “What is your name?” And you know that Jesus knew the name of the impure spirit. Our God sees all and knows all. At the end of this passage, Jesus tells the man to “go home to your own people and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how he has had mercy on you.” Jesus is telling us the very same thing.

Sheila

**Jeremiah 7:1-15, Romans 4:1-12 and John 7:14-36**

With his God-given prophetic ministry, we learn from Jeremiah how God was saying to the people of Judah to reform their ways and their actions. They had turned their backs on God with their idol worshiping. How are we any different from the Israelites? Have we really learned to listen to God? Do we often find ourselves so preoccupied with our daily lives that we lose touch with God? In spite of modern technology, we may just find ourselves growing further from our relationships with our families and friends. Let us heed his warning and not be like Shiloh. God is calling us time and time again. “Be still,” he says, “Listen, I am here.”

Abraham’s faith teaches us that when we truly trust God, we have nothing to fear. How would we have responded to God’s test when he called Abraham to take Isaac to that region of Moriah to be sacrificed? We may have already been tested in our lives. How did we do? It takes great faith in our God, knowing that he loves us unconditionally, and he knows and wants what is best for us. From the very beginning with Abraham being the physical and spiritual father of the Jewish race, Paul lets us know that all believers, including the Gentiles, are called to be his spiritual children. It might sound simple to us; but again, during these times in which we are living, we find some lost souls who do not believe. We are being called to spread the gospel to all so that they, too, can experience the wonderful love of Christ.

We have no greater teacher than Christ Jesus, yet he was questioned along with His (God’s) credentials. In John 7:16 Jesus answered, “My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me.” We can only imagine what it must have been like to hear his sermons. As they entered the last day of the festival, Jesus stood and spoke in a loud voice to draw their attention. Scripture says there were many who believed. Jesus is the living water. He is what gets us through the most difficult times in our lives. We thirst for his word. Without it, we are left feeling empty and without hope.

This Lenten season let’s take time to reflect. Jesus is always calling us; with his immense gift of grace, we are saved. I will leave you with my favorite verse in the Bible, John 3:16, “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.” Amen.

Laura



Jesus and the Children

**“Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.”**

Mark 10:14b-15



**Jeremiah 7:21-34, Romans 4:13-25 and John 7:37-52**

We read scripture to know about God. We study scripture to know God—to have a relationship with Him. The three passages we study today offer ways to deepen our relationship with Him in this Lenten season.

In the passage from Jeremiah, we are warned of the danger of failing to listen to God's truth and not obeying His Word. God had promised the Israelites that they would be His people and He would be their God if they would obey His commands. They chose, however, to ignore His commands and not listen to the prophets that He sent to warn them. They did whatever they liked, so God rejected and abandoned them. What can we do differently to draw nearer to God? We can study scripture to know God's truth, and then sincerely repent and obey His commands.

In the passage from Romans, we are reminded of God's love for us. He has promised us salvation through Christ. Our righteousness does not come by our own actions, but by grace. Christ, though sinless, died for our sin. If Abraham had relied only on his own abilities, he would have failed. But Abraham had faith: he looked to God and waited, believing that God would fulfill His promises. There is a saying that if we believe in Christ's death and resurrection, we give Christ our sins and, in return, He gives us righteousness and forgiveness. How do we respond? We study scripture to know God's promises, then we have faith. We trust God to fulfill His promise of salvation and offer Him prayers of praise and gratitude.

In the passage from John, Jesus tells of the gift of the Holy Spirit. He promises that the gift of the Holy Spirit is available to all who believe in Him. This passage offers cautions about our attitudes and about careful interpretation of scripture. The Pharisees were prideful, self-centered and had narrow attitudes in their interpretation of scripture. This led them to incorrect conclusions. Jesus spoke of the Spirit as *streams of living water* flowing through us—channels of love, joy and peace. Our response should be prayers of gratitude for the provision of the Holy Spirit, and prayers that these *streams of living water* in us would be channels through which the blessings of love, joy and peace flow to others. An increasing reliance on the Holy Spirit will deepen our relationship with God.

Bonnie

**Jeremiah 8:4–7, 8:18–9:6; Romans 5:1–11 and John 8:12–20**

In reading today's passages, you will see a very reassuring message in Paul's letters and Jesus' teachings in the Temple. In comparison, we see Jeremiah's disillusionment with the people of Israel. Yet all of these passages have one main theme of salvation.

The people of Israel continued to turn their backs on God and worship idols, but God never let them down. Jeremiah pointed out God's judgments for their sins and was very clear that, by surrendering to God's will, they would escape their calamity. He also proclaimed God's gracious promise of hope and restoration. But, the Israelites would not listen to Jeremiah. He became very distraught and could not understand the perpetual backsliding of the Israelites. It is said that self-reliance is considered a virtue. We bring ourselves to a likeness of the Israelites when we do not place our faith in God.

Paul reminded the Romans that salvation is granted and credited to us by having faith in God. This justification was given in the past with the suffering and death of Jesus. The primary fruit of the death of Christ is our being justified by His blood and reconciled by His death. Salvation cannot be earned with deeds; we are saved by faith alone.

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world." By using the word "world," Jesus removed the distinction between Jews and Gentiles. There are many mentions of God and the Light throughout the Bible. All who follow the Light will have everlasting life. It is our duty to follow the Light of Christ. We walk in this Light by submitting to God and following His guidance and direction. When Jesus shared this message with the Jews in the Temple, the Pharisees questioned His testimony and authority—an act which led Jesus to doubt their faith. There will be many false lights that will approach us and challenge us. Be very cautious and do not let them lead you astray.

Remember to always follow the Light of Christ. If you get off track and need to come back, He will be there for you. He is always just a prayer away. God loved us so much that He lived among us and died for our salvation. If God in Christ died for our greater sins, He also died for our lesser sins. Thus, salvation is all about God's grace, is eternal and is there for you. Yet, it does demand our response. The response God desires is one that brings all of these verses together—faith in Him and in Jesus, the Christ of God.

Mary Louise

**Jeremiah 10:11–24, Romans 5:12–21 and John 8:21–32**

Today's scriptures speak to us about sin. The Greek word for sin, "hamartia," is an archery term meaning to miss the mark. When we sin, we miss out on the intended task of having a relationship with God. So sin is our separation from God, our self-centeredness, and a trait from the original sin of Adam. However, the Good News is that Jesus died on the cross to make us right with God.

Jeremiah speaks in verbs of the Creator as He made, founded, stretched, sent and brings life. Mankind is senseless and without knowledge and likened to a goldsmith who makes worthless objects. There is a warning of the coming of a great commotion that would make the "towns of Judah" desolate. It is a warning of the consequences of being separated from God. The end of this scripture is a prayer in which Jeremiah asks to be disciplined.

And then we hear the Good News of the saving grace of Jesus! In John, we hear that if we do not follow God's commands, as Jesus has been commanded and taught, we will "die from our sins." We would be missing God (our mark), and headed to a dead-end street. Mankind is living by human terms and not by God's path. Yet, the path is right in front of us to follow (hit the mark). Jesus has come to show us the way and truth of that path.

Paul's message tells of the relationship between sin and death. Sin entered the world through one man, Adam, and that has led to death through sin, well documented in history. There are warnings of God's wrath, our separation from His grace. But God has given us a second chance. He sacrificed His Son for our benefit, for "just as one trespass resulted in condemnation of all people, so also one righteous act resulted in justification and life for all people."

The Old Testament documents that God wants a relationship with us. Jesus came and made that relationship very personal. God also gave us the freedom to choose. It is up to us to accept the relationship and, when we fail, to ask for forgiveness through repentance.

As you move through Lent, a season of reflection and preparation, ask God to give you courage in prayer, penance and self-denial. Have God activate your ears to listen, your eyes to study and your mobility to act. Through God's mercy and forgiveness, you can be enlightened by the Holy Spirit to shorten wasted hours, slow down overrun tasking, reduce the fears in your life, and bring excitement to your dull moments. These are the actions that can lead you to a new creation in Jesus, bringing you vision, strength and wisdom in your days.

**Jeremiah 11:1-8, 14-17; Romans 6:1-11 and John 8:33-47**

Growing up on a small dairy farm, we owned a few hogs, sheep, chickens or rabbits and everyone had chores. Simple farmers. Simple Christians. Our family worked hard. Generosity with produce from the five acres of gardens was a way of life. At meal times, neighbors appeared and partook of food and fellowship, including 5 am breakfast! Not having much, we shared what we had. We tried to follow the teachings of the Bible.

At twelve years old, I was mad at God. I shouted at God, "JUST GET OUTTA MY LIFE FOR THREE DAYS!" Those were the worst three days of my life! My brothers were milking cows and I needed to slop the hogs. That involved two five-gallon buckets of soured smelly milk, and an Oregon hillside with earthen steps that were wet, muddy and slick. Of course, I slipped and fell onto my backside; I was covered with 10 gallons of slop. What to do? I wouldn't turn to God. Listen to God? No way! I had closed God out of my life for three days. Pigs don't care that you are covered in soured milk and slop. Grumbling, I hosed myself down with cold Oregon water. The hogs got their slop and I was miserable.

Physically, I was miserable; and spiritually, I was worse. I could not pray. I had thrown God out of my life for three days. I am thankful God did not allow me to throw him out of my life forever. In gratitude, I said that God is gracious and forgave me and, through Christ Jesus' open arms, welcomed me back. Sadly, I still sin. As soon as possible, I seek God's forgiveness and do not throw him out of my life.

My choice was not so different from those that Jeremiah, Paul, and John write about. Jeremiah prophesied to Judah and Israel as they were sinning. They chose to live their lives without God. Judah and Israel decided to ignore God by not listening to his voice and not obeying what he said. Because they were so bad, Jeremiah was told by God not to pray for Judah and Israel! Paul addressed the Roman church so they would know that sinning was not acceptable. Paul said that in uniting our hearts with Christ's heart, we are united with Christ Jesus in his death to sin. John writes of Jesus telling the Jews (scribes and Pharisees) that they did not stand in truth and they continued to sin. It scares me when Jesus says the scribes and Pharisees were following their father, the devil.

Perhaps through today's scriptures and gospel readings you can begin to understand how miserable I was for those three days when I told God to get out of my life. Thank you, Jesus, for dying for my sins.

Ruth

**Jeremiah 13:1-11, Romans 6:12-23 and John 8:47-59**

Jeremiah's story of the lamb cloth and burying it under a rock is an illustration. When he went back to retrieve the lamb cloth, it was damaged and useless. God said He would make Judah and the Israelites good for nothing. God said when His people turned away from Him they no longer honored His name. We need to use our possessions and care for them or they will rot and deteriorate. This story shows what happened to the people of Israel. The Israelites turned away from God; their faith rotted and deteriorated. Their pride had made them useless to God.

In the Roman's passage, Paul said don't let sin dominate you or you will lust. You will follow an evil path and will not be able to follow Jesus' law. You will give in to sin rather than doing good. Without Jesus, we would be slaves to sin. We would be separated from God. We need to obey God "with all our heart, soul and mind." As Christians, we know that Jesus paid our debt. Christ has assured us of eternal life. We need to know and show that our lives belong to God, not to sin. Thanks be to God that we will have a life after death. As we choose to turn from sin, we choose to be servants of God.

The passage from John continues that thought. Jesus said if we believe in God, we have His Word. We must follow His laws if we are to be obedient. If we honor ourselves, it means nothing. We need to honor only God.

Obedience is a Christian's constant process. We must ask God for forgiveness when we sin. As Christians, we know that we will sin. We also know that our belief in Him will give us eternal life. Jesus is the way! Jesus is God!

Jean M.

**Jeremiah 14:1-9, 17-22; Galatians 4:21-5:1 and Mark 8:11-21**

The word of God in these scriptures proclaims God's willingness to continually offer his grace to all who will come to him and believe in his promise of everlasting love. Beginning with God's chosen people in the nation of Israel and continuing through New Testament readings, there is a recurring theme of disbelief in God's covenant. Despite the people's disbelief, God continues to offer his love: first by restoring his people and then by the salvation given through Christ Jesus.

Long ago God made his covenant with the people of Israel and promised he would be their God before all nations and never leave them. (Leviticus 26). With this decree, God placed his name on the people of Israel, entrusting them to be a symbol of the living God for all nations to see. Through their sin, the people of Israel rejected God and by doing so distanced themselves from being a representative people of God. Jeremiah acknowledges that "our sins testify against us" and prays that God would remember the great covenant he made to the people of Israel. But, their sins are too great and God turns away from them, yet not so completely as to forget his covenant.

Like the Israelites, we often fall short. But, the Spirit reminds us of how much God seeks us; he want us to trust in his provision and remember that we belong to him. In Paul's letter to the Galatian churches, he recounts the story of Abraham's two sons and the original promise God made to Abraham—that he and Sarah would have a son. But, they grew impatient and had a son through a slave woman. Paul uses that act of rebellion to illustrate that the people of Israel are in bondage with the old law. The new covenant is illustrated by Sarah's son, born free and part of God's promise. Paul urges the people of Israel to not be burdened by the yoke of slavery. Yet, they remain hesitant to move away from the law and are reluctant to receive the new covenant found in Jesus.

The people's disbelief continues when, in the book of Mark, Jesus is asked to provide a sign from heaven that he is the Christ. Jesus proclaims that no sign will be given; he then tells his disciples to "watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." Jesus is establishing that he is the new way, but there are still doubts by many. Just as small elements of yeast greatly influences the larger piece of bread, so too does a small amount of disbelief influence people trying to hear the words of Jesus.

During this season of Lent we have time to reflect on God's promise and the influence Christ Jesus has in our lives. Throughout the scriptures we see examples of a people who are removed from God by sin but are continually restored through a loving God whom keeps his promises made to his people. Even in times of doubt we can hold strong in our faith, knowing that the greatest promise has been fulfilled in Christ Jesus. For as Paul exclaims, "Christ has set us free."



**Jeremiah 16:10–21, Romans 7:1–12 and John 6:1–15**

The passages for today begin with the prophet Jeremiah foretelling the destruction of the people of Israel as a result of their worshiping and serving false gods. Their memory of the Exodus had long faded and they did not follow what the Lord commanded through Moses when they were brought out of Egypt. Jeremiah was tasked by God to tell the people of Israel that they behaved more wickedly than their ancestors. The Lord declared He would send out many fishermen and hunters so they would be caught and hunted down for their sin and would not be concealed from Him. Though this was a terrible condemnation, the passage ends with hope as God promises to teach them His power and might so they will know that His name is Lord.

In the Romans passage, Paul is telling believers that the law is powerless to save sinners since the followers of the law cannot live up to a written code. Paul emphasizes that without the law we would not know what sin is. He offers an example, “you should not covet.” But sin produced every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. Though the commandment tells us what sin is, Paul says as believers in Christ we have died to the law that we may be raised again to bear fruit for God.

The John passage for today tells how Jesus fed the five thousand (men); the true number must have been much greater. When Jesus looked up and saw the great crowd coming toward Him, He asked Philip “Where shall we buy bread for these people.” Philip, being like most of us, thought first of where could the disciples buy such a quantity of food (he was from nearby Bethsaida) and at what cost? A boy shows up with five small barley loaves and two small fish, and the question among the disciples was “how far will this small amount of food go among so many?” There are three lessons from this act of Jesus: (1) The disciples did not pray about how to feed the five thousand; (2) The boy brought all he had, holding back nothing; and (3) When all were fed an abundant amount was left over.

How often in our own lives are we confronted with a situation when we fail to pray before pressing forward, and how often are we not giving our Lord our all. Christ wants us to live an abundant life and at the same time ensure we have much left over.

During this Lenten season let us all remember God’s commandments and never forget what Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. He desires for us to have an abundant life; we find it when we confess Him as the way, the truth and the life and our advocate with the Father.

**Jeremiah 17:19-27, Romans 7:13-25 and John 6:16-27**

Today's passages highlight several basic truths about our sinful condition but, fortunately, also remind us of the way out God has provided for us in Jesus.

God told Jeremiah to stand at the gates of Jerusalem and tell all the people of Judah and those coming through those gates to keep the Sabbath day holy, just as he had told their ancestors. But those ancestors were "stiff-necked" and would not listen or pay attention. "Stiff-necked" meant that they were a stubborn people and unreceptive to God's guidance, perhaps as oxen might be unreceptive to a plowman's guidance. Certainly we all are also "stiff-necked" and stubbornly resist following God's commandments.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul confesses that even when he wants to follow the law, his sinful nature will not let him do so. In fact, he says that although the law is holy, righteous and good, it allows sin to spring to life inside him, resulting in him not doing the things that he wants to do, but rather doing the very things that he hates. Although he wants to do good, sin is at work within him waging war against the law that his mind wants to follow. Like Paul, we too are not able to follow the law, even when we want to.

John writes that even after the disciples saw firsthand evidence of Jesus' power and miracles, such as the feeding of the 5,000, they became frightened soon after when they encountered a storm on the sea and when Jesus approached them walking on water. The crowd that was looking for Jesus did so not because they saw the signs that Jesus performed but rather because they ate the loaves and had their fill. Like the disciples, we often have difficulty trusting in God and in his strength in our lives; like the crowd we also tend to focus on our own needs rather than trying to align ourselves to God's purposes.

Paul cries out, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?" (Romans 7:24). The answer of course, is Jesus. As Jesus says: "do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval." (John 6:27). We are sinful and unable to follow God's commandments. We also have difficulty trusting in God and in his power. But, fortunately God loves us anyway and through Jesus provides our rescue.

Gordon

**Jeremiah 18:1–11, Romans 8:1–11 and John 6:27–40**

A recurring theme throughout the Bible is God's love and desire to be in relationship with His people. Lent offers us the opportunity to reflect on the magnitude of God's great love, Jesus' sacrifice and the precious gift of grace. Throughout today's passages, I am struck by our relationship with the Triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Jeremiah speaks of God the Father as our maker, ruler of heaven and earth. In John, Jesus explains His purpose as the Son whom the Father sent to do His good work. And in Romans, Paul describes the work of the Spirit of life that is in us as we are in Christ Jesus.

Today's passage in Jeremiah is a stark reminder of the continuing inability of God's people to keep His laws and turn from their sinful ways. Yet, it also is a testament to God's pursuit of relationship with us. He created us in His image for this purpose; yet, through the ages, God's people have continually turned from Him to do their own thing.

In the Jeremiah passage, God addresses the people's blatant disregard for His sovereignty. From our vantage point we may wonder, "With all the ways that God showed His faithfulness and provision for the Israelites, how could they be so thick headed?" The reality is that, in so many ways, we are no different. We, too, attempt to be our own masters. We trust in what's safe, what's culturally appropriate or acceptable; in other words, we lean on our understanding rather than God's will. And just like the people of Judah, we are weak. In fact, Jesus comments to a crowd in Capernaum that although they see Him, they do not believe! Jesus explains that indeed He is the true bread of life sent by the Father to do His work, which is to give life to the world.

Paul states that the sinful nature is hostile to God; those who live accordingly desire things of the sinful nature. As fallen people, we cannot keep the law. We disobey and stray from His good desires for us. It is only through the sacrifice of Jesus that we are saved from our sin-filled selves and set free from the law of sin. Lent provides a timely opportunity to reflect on this as we repent and seek forgiveness in Christ.

Paul also reassures us that, in Christ, we are new creations controlled by the Spirit of life and peace that lives in us. As believers, we rest in this assurance: in spite of all that appears to be "out of control" in the world, our nation and even our own lives, God IS greater. God has power over ALL of it! He is sovereign, and through His grace we are one with Christ. That's news worth celebrating!

Ellen



### On the way to Jerusalem

They were on their way to Jerusalem, with Jesus leading the way, and the disciples were astonished, while those who followed were afraid. Again he took the Twelve aside and told them what was going to happen to them.

**“We are going up to Jerusalem,” he said, “and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him and spit on him, flog him, and kill him. Three days later he will rise.”**

Mark 10:32-34

**Jeremiah 22:13-23, Romans 8:12-27 and John 6:41-51**

In these three scriptures, you will find three devoted followers—Jeremiah, Paul and John—who minister the Word of God to us and warn us about the repercussion of sin and rebellion. However, they also tell us of the salvation of God and His mercy, and of our need to obey His Word through our faith in Christ.

From the Old Testament scriptures, Jeremiah was God’s spokesman to Judah, a region that had severely deteriorated with many people rejecting God’s Word through rebellion and sinfulness. Jeremiah was rejected by his family, neighbors, friends and practically anyone who listened to him; but, for 40 years, Jeremiah courageously and faithfully proclaimed the Word of God. His message was both a call to action and a warning, “Repent and turn to God, or He will punish.” During his time in Judah, Jeremiah ministered under Judah’s last five kings. In verses 13-23, King Josiah, a great king who was living an obedient life under God, had just died. His evil son, Jehoiakim, who succeeded King Josiah, was hardheaded and hardhearted and had been warned by God. But, Jehoiakim refused to listen since prosperity had a higher priority for him than God. The sinful nature of its people and its rulers ultimately led to the destruction of Judah. From this scripture, we learn that we must have our own personal relationship with God since we cannot inherit, but can clearly benefit from, our parent’s faith and good deeds. In addition, we also learn that we must choose between the comforts of life or a close relationship with God.

In the New Testament scriptures, John provides evidence that Jesus is the Son of God and, if we believe in Him, we shall have eternal life. Paul in Romans provides a view of the sinfulness of all mankind, shows how through Christ our sins are forgiven, and tells how as Christians we are to live our new life. In verses 41-51 of John 6, we learn that the Jewish leaders continue to reject Jesus and His claim that He came down from heaven as the Son of God. Those leaders saw Him as only a simple carpenter from Nazareth. In addition, the Jewish leaders continue to ask Jesus to prove Himself. Jesus responds by telling them, “I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.”

As you go through this Lenten season, reflect on how similar today’s culture is to the time when Jeremiah, Paul and John lived. The people back then were rejecting and rebelling against God’s truth. We must ask ourselves: are we doing the same today through our actions and words? As proclaimed Christians, we must live a life of faith as Christ did and stand firm against such evils while spreading the good news of His salvation.

**Jeremiah 23:1-8, Romans 8:28-39 and John 6:52-59**

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” (Romans 8:28). What a wonderful and familiar verse, and one that many have memorized along the way, maybe even in confirmation class. In this Lenten season, it is a reminder worth hearing often, and is salve to the soul that can get battered easily and often by our culture. Moreover, I long to be conformed to the image of His Son (v. 29), and to walk more and more closely in the footsteps Jesus left behind in this world—His path which guides us in how to live life in a manner pleasing to our Creator. But I find even deeper beauty in the powerful questions that then follow.

“If God is for us, who can be against us?” The answer to this question is simply profound. Our God, who sacrificed His own Son for our benefit, has completely demonstrated that He is for us; nothing else even comes close to be considered in the equation. Who will bring any charge or condemn those whom He has chosen? Simply no one, as the resurrected Christ is at the Father’s right hand actively interceding for us. Even US!

And then another question is posed, which feels even more profound and especially personal to me. Paul doesn’t ask who shall separate us from Christ. Instead he asks, “who shall separate us from the LOVE of Christ?” And the clear answer from one of the most beautiful verses in scripture? It is that assurance which fills our lives with humble gratitude, joy and an abiding faith—literally nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Paul tells us that he is absolutely convinced that neither our living or dying, angels or demons, what happens today or even tomorrow, highest of highs or lowest of lows, or even people with the greatest authority in all the earth have even the slightest chance of separating us from this incredible love—a love demonstrated by God forsaking His Son on the cross just so we can know the fullness of His love.

God is love. And when we align our lives with Jesus Christ as Lord, our deep longing for the Father’s love is not only fulfilled, but it is permanent and irrevocable. What an incredible gift! What unmerited yet incredible favor he demonstrates to us. It is indeed by grace we are saved.

Ed and Trudy

**Jeremiah 23:9-15, Romans 9:1-18 and John 6:60-71**

Our Lenten Reflection begins in Jeremiah. He lived in turbulent times and wrote often of the pain in his heart from the peoples' idol worship and their sinful ways. More importantly, he wailed at their lack of understanding of the gravity of the times in which they lived. Fearlessly, he spoke truth to power (King Zedekiah), causing himself great personal peril. He was threatened, harassed, beaten, thrown in prison, and placed under house arrest for months at a time. Yet, God was in control.

In Romans, Paul opens with the proclamation that he is NOT lying. The Spirit confirms in his heart what he is writing. He acknowledges that Israel enjoys the knowledge of adoption as sons by God. But, he says, "not all of Israel is Israel." We, in contrast, are children of the promise through the line of Isaac. When Abraham and Sarah were very old, God made a promise that they would have a son. Through His will and providence, that came to be. When Isaac and Rebekah were to have twins, it was prophesied that "the older would serve the younger. Jacob God loved and Essau He hated." God demonstrated that His power of election stands and was not dependent upon man. We are all here to work out His purpose. God's election "does not depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy." God was in control.

In John, many disciples were falling away from Jesus as He taught what would become our communion liturgy. Jesus teaches that the only hope of life and eternity with Him in resurrection is through, "the eating of the flesh of the Son of Man and the drinking of his blood." That is "hard teaching," the disciples complain. Jesus says that the Spirit gives life, and the flesh means nothing in comparison. Jesus persists, "... no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." Previously in the chapter, Jesus emphasizes, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." In other words, God is in control.

Dear God, as we seek and yearn for the peace that passes all understanding in this Lenten season, help us to not worry about "what's next," but to find peace in the here and now. Trusting in your love, purpose, and providence, help us to always remember that you, O God, are in control.

Tom



**Jeremiah 23:16-32, 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 and Mark 8:31-9:1**

We Americans love our freedom, and rightly so. However, wherever there is freedom, there is the potential of libertinism. This temptation is not just true for Americans, and it is certainly nothing new. Indeed, the first century church at Corinth struggled with their new-found liberty in Christ and Paul had to use an athletic illustration to remind them to “exercise self-control in all things.” (1 Corinthians 9:25). Yes, you have freedom in Christ, Paul says, but you must be disciplined as well; your freedom is not an excuse for doing whatever you want (libertinism).

As much as we love our freedom, we probably equally despise what Paul says we must have: discipline. Discipline, however, is at the root of being a disciple, as the similarity in the words indicates. Additionally, being a disciple is not an optional extra to being a Christian; it *is* being a Christian. In fact, “disciple” is the most used term in the New Testament to describe a follower of Christ. Jesus told his original disciples that “if anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me” (Mark 8:34). Jesus’ words suggest that at the heart of following Him are discipline and self-control.

Nobody likes to hear these things about sacrifice, discipline and self-control, but we need to hear them lest we become easily enamored with those who will tell us what we want to hear. That is the nature of a false teacher or false prophet: they preach falsehood they know people want to believe. Unfortunately, we often hear the message of Christianity peddled today in such way, promising wealth and blessings with no hint of discipline or sacrifice. Like libertinism, this too is nothing new. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God had much to say about the false prophets of Judah who spouted falsehood even as the nation was on the brink of destruction: “Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord.” (Jeremiah 23:16).

In a nation filled with false prophets, we must be disciplined to cut through the noise and cling to biblical discipleship. The Lenten season is a good time to remind ourselves that, as C.S. Lewis says, “The cross comes before the crown and tomorrow is a Monday morning.”

Rob

**Jeremiah 24:1–10, Romans 9:19–33 and John 9:1–17**

In the season of Lent, we are given the opportunity to reflect on the Lord and what He has done for us. We can prepare our hearts through prayer, repentance of sins and studying the scriptures.

The Jeremiah passage talks about the baskets of figs. A classic contrast between good and bad, the baskets represent two groups of people. The good were the exiles from Judah who were sent to Babylon. The Lord promised to build them up, plant them and give them a heart to know Him. Those left in Judah or seeking refuge in Egypt were the poor figs. The Lord swore to ridicule and banish them, plus send famine, the plague and the sword.

Paul, in Romans, discusses the right of man to question his Creator. Doesn't the potter have power over the clay—to make one vessel for beauty and the other for menial use? He points out God has a perfect right to show His fury and power against those who are fit for destruction. But He also has the right to pour out on others the riches of His glory so that everyone can see. The Gentiles were given by God the chance to be acquitted by faith even though they had not really been seeking God. The Jews on the other hand tried hard to get it right with God by keeping the laws but never succeeded. God had warned of the Rock in the path of the Jews that many will stumble over—Jesus. Still, those who believe in Him will never be disappointed.

In John, Jesus helps a man who was born blind. The disciples asked Him if it was the man or his parents who had sinned? Jesus replied neither, "this happened so that the power of God might be displayed in his life." He also said, "While I am in the world, I am the Light of the world. We must do the work of Him who sent me." Jesus cured the man by spreading mud on his eyes and sending him to the Pool of Siloam to wash. The people couldn't believe he was the same man. And there was a deep division among the Pharisees because Jesus had performed this miracle on the Sabbath.

So this Easter celebrate our risen Lord and the miracles He has performed in your life. Let the riches of His glory shine through you and be visible to others. Hold fast to His love and the gift of His grace.

Linda

**Jeremiah 25:8-17, Romans 10:1-13 and John 9:18-41**

**Lord, help me listen!** As of 605 B.C., Jeremiah had served the Lord God as a faithful prophet for 23 years. He told the people and the king, "I have spoken messages to you from the Lord again and again, but you have not listened." In Jeremiah 25, we hear directly from Almighty God, "You have not listened to My messages." What will befall the nation and their neighbors as a result is daunting. God makes it clear what we deserve. He talks to Jeremiah about taking the "wine of My anger" to the people. How many times have I neglected God? How many times have I pushed aside the Holy Spirit? How many times have I ignored the grace of Jesus Christ? I deserve the just wrath of God.

**Lord, let me learn!** Paul, in Romans 10, speaks to the people of Israel just as he speaks to us today. "What I want most is for all of Israel to be saved." He talks to us about how hard we try, but we don't know or go the right way. We try to make ourselves right with God rather than letting God make us right with Him. In verse 8, Paul offers God's solution, also found in Deuteronomy 30:14, "God's teaching is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart." Verse 10 continues, "Yes, we believe in Jesus deep in our hearts, and so we are made right with God. And we openly say that we believe in Him, and so we are saved." Thanks be to God!

**Lord, I wish to see Jesus!** Romans 10:12-13, echoing Joel 2:32, confirms that "... the same Lord is the Lord of all people. And He richly blesses everyone who looks to Him for help." Yesterday's lesson from John 9 told of Jesus healing a man who was blind since birth. People gossiped and conjectured about whose sin caused his blindness. Jesus simply replied that this was to show what great things God can do. The religious leaders met the man and tried to understand his healing and who Jesus was. But, they could not see nor accept what was before their eyes. The leaders pursued lies to support their flawed vision: "You were born full of sin! Are you trying to teach us?" And they told the man to "get out of the synagogue and to stay out." Jesus responded by offering them a truer view: "I came into this world so that the world could be judged. I came so that people who are blind could see. And I came so that people who think they see would become blind. ... If you were really blind, you would not be guilty of sin. But you say that you see, so you are still guilty." Lord, help others to see Jesus through my witness.

**Lord, bless my witness!** Heavenly Father who knows all things, sees all things, and loves us without condition, push me to listen to Your Word. Forgive me when I ignore Your teachings. Heal me from spiritual blindness and its arrogance. Remind me of the saving grace of Jesus Christ. Bless my attempts to live out Your Word and to share it truthfully and respectfully with others. Hear my prayers, Lord.

Lynn

**Jeremiah 25:30-38, Romans 10:14-21 and John 10:1-18**

**What does it take to understand?**

**What does it take to believe?**

**What does it take to follow?**

You have to ask yourself, what didn't they understand? In Jeremiah 25:30-38, it was prophesied that the Lord would not spare anyone that did not repent and the land would be laid to waste. For "... he will bring judgment on all mankind and put the wicked to the sword." (v. 31). Great misfortunes were spreading from nation to nation, and the leaders of these people would meet the same fate as those they have led. No one will escape His judgment. This is as relevant today as it was in Old Testament times. You only have to look at the world's current events and ask, do we understand?

What does it take to believe? The apostle Paul's message to the church reminds us in verse 15, "... How beautiful are the feet of those who bring the good news." According to Romans 10:14-21, the Israelites heard the word but they did not follow it. Isaiah said they heard it (vv. 16-18). Moses said they heard it (v. 19). But the Israelites said they did not hear. In verse 21 he said they were a disobedient and obstinate people. Where do we belong, with those that turn a deaf ear or those that bring the good news?

What does it take to follow? So now you have to ask yourself, am I a true follower of Christ? Do I follow the Good Shepherd? Or do I follow those that profess to be the shepherd? John 10:1-18 tells us how we can be saved by following Christ. These verses give us guidance to follow throughout our lives in order to be saved. It shows us what to watch out for, so we are not led down the wrong path. Also, it tells us that Christ went out to bring others to His flock, therefore setting an example for us to follow. The good shepherd lays down his life for his flock. The one and only Good Shepherd is Christ. He gave His life for us that we would be saved.

Ask yourself: Do I understand? Do I believe? And, whom do I follow?

Jean S.

**Jeremiah 26:1–16, Romans 11:1–12 and John 10:19–42**

Today's scriptures reflect recurring accounts of the people's skepticism of God's words and wishes for them. The constant theme in these passages reminds us that as the doubts of the people were dispelled by His messengers, their belief in Him and in Christ became real.

The Lord spoke through Jeremiah as he prophesied to the people that they amend their ways and obey the Lord their God. For their doing so, the Lord will relent of the evil He has pronounced against them. The people doubted Jeremiah's harsh words spoken in the house of the Lord. The priests and the prophets said Jeremiah should die for his prophesy against their city and its people. Only when Jeremiah told the people to go forth with their plans to kill him, did they realize he spoke the true word of God and did not deserve the sentence of death. Are we guilty of not listening to hear the word of God?

Once again, in the book of Romans, there is doubt of God's devotion to his people. Paul reminds the Romans of how Elijah pleaded to God against Israel, stating that they have killed the Lord's prophets and have demolished His altars, leaving Elijah all alone. God replied that he kept seven thousand men who have not bowed to the knee of Baal but had believed His word. This is a powerful example of grace from God. How are our lives affected by the grace of God?

In the passages of John, again there was division among the Jews because of the words God delivered by John. Some called John a demon, while others noted that a demon could not open the eyes of the blind. The Jews later asked Jesus "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ tell us plainly." Jesus answered, "I told you and you do not believe. The works that I do in my Father's name testify about me; but you do not believe, because you are not my sheep. My sheep listen to my voice and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one shall snatch them out of my hand."

This Lenten season, may we be reminded that those who believe in Christ shall never die. Rather they will have eternal life and never perish. Our lives and world are full of challenges and roads that allow us to question our faith in Christ. Our sinful ways lead us down the wrong path all too often. May we remember that each of us is chosen by God. We are His children who have been given life by His grace. We must spread His word, to lead others to Him so they may realize the gift of eternal life.

Tres

**Jeremiah 29:1, 4-14; Romans 11:13-24 and John 11:1-27**

Officers of First Presbyterian Church as well as Confirmands are required to write their faith journeys. The three scripture passages that are part of today's meditation also involve faith journeys—of the Israelites, of the Gentiles, and of Mary and Martha, sisters of Lazarus.

The passage from Jeremiah is a letter that he wrote from Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon. The year is 597 BC and the exiles include surviving elders, the priests, the prophets and all the other people that King Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile. Jeremiah shares a message from the Lord Almighty to the Jews. Be faithful! God instructs the Jews to settle in Babylon and to seek peace and prosperity. The Lord says that in 70 years, he will fulfill his promise and return Israel to Jerusalem for he knows the plans he has for Israel, plans to prosper the nation and not to harm them, plans filled with hope and a future. This will happen because Israel will pray and listen to God; she will seek God with heart, soul and mind, and she will again find God.

In Chapter 11 of Romans, Paul addresses the Gentiles. He tells them that they are grafted into God's chosen people through faith in Christ's life, death and resurrection. Paul knows that some of the Jews have rejected Jesus. He discusses both the kindness and sternness of God. He reminds the Gentiles to be faithful in their belief. In the words of John Calvin, "God is God and they are not!"

The Gospel of John, Chapter 11, focuses on Lazarus who is critically ill in Bethany. His sisters send word to Jesus who responds immediately. "This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory." After two more days, Jesus leaves Perea (east of the Jordan River) and travels to Bethany, ignoring previous attempts by Jews in the area to stone him. Jesus tells the apostles and the sisters that even though Lazarus has been in a tomb four days, he will rise again. Martha delivers an unequivocal statement of faith. "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is come into the world."

Lent is a time of preparation. We are called to examine our own lives in light of all that God has done for his people throughout history. Do we feel like exiles: in a foreign land, weak in faith, bereft of hope and weary of waiting? Are we like the Gentiles in Rome, new Christians struggling to understand that Jesus is the Redeemer of all who believe? Are we like Martha in Bethany, knowing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and anticipating a miracle? ***Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here's my heart, oh, take and seal it. Seal it for Thy courts above.***

Barbara Ann

**Jeremiah 31:27-34, Romans 11:25-36 and John 11:28-44**

During Lent, we prepare to receive a message of hope and restoration and the promise of forgiveness. In this passage from Jeremiah, we get a glimpse of that. Following a time of great devastation, Jeremiah tells of a new day, when God will *“make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.”* He promises to make this new covenant very personal by writing it on our hearts and minds. It becomes engraved, permanent, everlasting.

As we walk in this new covenant, this new promise, we see God’s power. It is now a new day and we have a new relationship and a new perspective. Jeremiah reminds us of the basis of the new covenant. It is God’s promise, *“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”* God loves us abundantly—no matter what. Therefore, we should believe in him—no matter what.

In Romans, Paul also writes of God’s promise to take away our sins. We’re reminded that God’s ultimate intent is to show mercy to us all and, for that, we are indebted to him. We’re assured of this when we read, *“For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen.”*

While John’s account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is certainly familiar, reading it in the context of the new covenant helps highlight what seems to be the less spectacular aspects of the story. As Jesus prepares for this miracle, he calls on Lazarus’ friends and family to roll away the stone covering the tomb. Once Lazarus comes out, Jesus asks them to *“take off the grave clothes and let him go.”* They rid Lazarus of the stench and trappings of death and help free him to live. As Jesus had done in the past, he gave those around him the chance to participate in a miracle.

In this new covenant, we get to work with Jesus. He calls us to work together to serve others. He loves us and forgives us—no matter what. Therefore, we are called to love and forgive one another—no matter what.

Lady





**Jesus' Triumphant Entry into Jerusalem**

As they approached Jerusalem ... Jesus sent two disciples, saying to them, **“Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away.”** This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: “Say to the Daughter of Zion, ‘See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.’” ... A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, while others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Hosanna in the highest heaven!”... Jesus entered Jerusalem and went to the temple.

Matthew 21:1-5, 8-9; Mark 11:11a

## **PALM SUNDAY, APRIL 14**

### **Zechariah 9:9–12, 1 Timothy 6:12–16 and Matthew 21:1-11**

Think of a time when you were part of a very large crowd. Perhaps you attended a big college football game, or maybe you joined an enthusiastic crowd at a rousing concert. Do you remember the excitement of the crowd? Can you recall the anticipation in the air of what you and those around you were about to watch?

Jesus' ride into Jerusalem the last week of his earthly life must have been an electric moment. Great crowds following Jesus from Galilee were now meeting crowds from Jerusalem who had heard about him and were going out to meet Him. Jesus "steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). In doing so, He intended to fulfill Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah. Our gospel passage from Matthew tells us that the disciples, acting upon Jesus' instructions, obtained a donkey and laid their cloaks on the animal to prepare Jesus' ride into the city. This was in fulfillment of Zechariah 9:9, which points to a humble king riding on a donkey to bring salvation.

As crowds went ahead of Jesus, they laid their cloaks on the road along with cut branches (symbols of honor, submission and joy). They shouted, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!" The original meaning of this exclamation— "Hosanna!"—was "God save us!" This is worth pondering. What did the people want to be saved from? Perhaps there were some in the crowd who had not yet had an opportunity to be healed from a physical ailment. Perhaps others needed to be saved from spiritual demons that plagued them. Probably most were looking for a conquering king who would throw off the shackles of the Romans.

Our gospel passage has a curious ending. Despite the obvious Messianic symbols of Jesus' ride into Jerusalem, people were asking, "Who is this?" And the crowds answered, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee." Really? This Jesus is *just a prophet* from an unlikely backwater region? Had the people completely misunderstood who Jesus was?

As we celebrate this year, waving our palm branches, let us remember that there may be people around us, in our daily walk, who don't really know who this Jesus is. Let us, in all that we do and say, make the good confession of Jesus as Messiah, King of kings and Lord of lords. It is He who came to bring salvation and peace to those who cry, "God save us!"

Mike M.

**Jeremiah 11:18–20, 12:1–16; Philippians 3:1–14 and John 12:9–19**

If you wonder how these distinct messages from God relate to our lives today, the Lord tells us in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that “All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, exposing our rebellion, correcting, training us to live God’s way, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

God inspired Jeremiah to share his humanity with us, to teach us. When Jeremiah learned about death threats against him, he turned to God for help but he also attempted to manipulate God with flattery. “But you, Lord Almighty, who judge righteously ... You are always righteous, Lord.”

Next, Jeremiah asks God the same question we hear today. Why do bad people have it so good? Finally, he rests his case against God’s timing on justice with “Let me see your vengeance on them!” We also question God’s purposes and timing by demanding answers rather than quietly trusting Him. God reminds Jeremiah of man’s inability to figure out His infinite mind and sovereign control. God is loving and just and remembers His covenants, yet implements judgment. God’s mercy redirects our hearts to change, and His Spirit gives us the desire to live obediently.

In John, we learn how Jesus, with intention, presented Himself as the Messiah and the Son of God, knowing that it would lead to His death—a death preordained by God from eternity, where God would present Himself in the form of a man and be led “like a docile lamb brought to slaughter” in payment for our sins. Just as people came to know Jesus through the power evidenced by raising Lazarus from the dead, so should they be drawn to Jesus by His power in our lives.

Philippians raises the question of what qualifies you to live eternally with God. Do you have a list that resembles Paul’s? Will your infant baptism, church membership, good deeds and charitable giving be good enough? Yet when Paul, with his resume, says all of his efforts were worthless, where does that leave us? Our only option to obtain righteousness acceptable to God is through faith in Christ. Finally, because of our new life in Christ, we are encouraged to quit dwelling on our past and, instead, focus on living Christ-like lives with hope toward our eternity with God.

John W.



### Jesus in the Temple

Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. “By what authority are you doing these things?” they asked. “And who gave you this authority?” Jesus replied, **“I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things. John's baptism—where did it come from? Was it from heaven, or from men?”**

They discussed it among themselves and said, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will ask, ‘Then why didn't you believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From men’—we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet.” So they answered Jesus, “We don't know.” Then he said, **“Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things.”**

Matthew 21:23-27



**Jeremiah 15:10-21, Philippians 3:15-21 and John 12:20-26**

Around 600 BC, the prophet Jeremiah had a devastating message to deliver to his beloved nation of Judah: Jerusalem, the capital, will be utterly destroyed and the people taken captive to Babylon. In spite of many prior divine warnings, Judah had for some time been an idolatrous, rebellious, and apostate nation. For preaching this message, Jeremiah was charged by national leaders as a traitor and bitter enemy, imprisoned repeatedly, and targeted with death threats.

However, in the face of such harsh opposition, Jeremiah found his courage and hope in the precious Word of God: "... thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart ... ." (v.16). Ever faithful, God comforts the harassed and heartbroken prophet and eventually grants him a glimpse of the glorious future God has in store for the people of Israel—redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Jeremiah 31; Hebrews 8 and 9).

In today's Philippians passage, the apostle Paul encourages the Philippian believers to be "followers together of me." (v.17). Again, he writes, "Let us ... as many as be perfect, be thus minded." (v.15). "Followers of me?" How bold! How could Paul even say such a thing? He can, because he has faithfully endured incredible persecution during his apostolic ministry—time after time, and for Christ's sake. He then encourages his readers (and us), asserting that "our conversion (or citizenship) is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ." (v. 20). Paul joyfully anticipates the sure return of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is his source of joy and strength. As he states elsewhere, "... the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20).

The passage from John 12 brings us back to that fateful week in Jerusalem. In verse 23, we see Jesus announcing His impending death to the inquiring Greeks, as well as to His disciples. He then explains, using the analogy of a grain of wheat, how His death will bring forth much fruit. (v.24). His death on the cross and His resurrection in the power of God will bring eternal life to all who believe in Him.

Today, as it was in Jeremiah's time, in the days of our Lord's earthly ministry, or in the period of Paul's missionary journeys, the message to the unsaved is the same: God's judgment is near, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and He will save you. (Acts 16:31). Indeed, it is incumbent on us who are believers to get this message out to a world that is fast on its way to destruction, including America where so many are so far from God. Fill us with Your Spirit, Lord Jesus, and use us to serve Your purposes!

Reiko



### Testing Jesus

One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" **"The most important one,"** answered Jesus, **"is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no greater commandment than these."**

Mark 12:28-31

**Jeremiah 17:5-10, 14-17; Philippians 4:1-13 and John 12:27-36**

Whom do you trust and whom do you depend on to provide for you? The verses today paint a crystal clear picture about whom we do trust and whom we should trust. As human beings, we are born into sin and our hearts are unable to turn away from sin under our own power. It is through Jesus Christ and His love for us that we are able to be delivered from sin.

The people of Judah trusted in false gods, which we can translate into terms that may be more relevant today: is there anything you are putting above Jesus? There are periods of time where we all have put focus on something above our love for Jesus, whether that be money, fame, pride, etc. Jesus tells us in Jeremiah 17 that those who trust in the Lord are blessed.

We are incapable of living a life without sin, and Jesus came to earth to offer the only way for our salvation. In John 12, the verses illustrate how Jesus understood the insurmountable challenges we on earth experience, and He felt that weight on His shoulders. However, He also knew the eternal benefits and the unending love God has for His people. We must stand firm in the Lord, together arm in arm, knowing that He will provide. When we are anxious, we must remind ourselves that we are concerned about earthly needs and should turn to the Lord and be content with the provisions He will provide. Jesus died for the world, to glorify God and save us from sin.

We should rejoice in this and look to see how, through Jesus, we can lead others to “hear and see” the truth of God’s love in Christ. We are to be the beacons of light to help shine a path for others to be drawn to Jesus. We must lead by example and rejoice in the fact that Jesus came to earth to save us from Satan’s grip and death. Jesus is the Light and we must abide in Him.

Mike W.



**Isaiah 53:3-6; John 13:1-16, 34-35; Luke 22:14-20 and Matthew 26:36-46**

Maundy Thursday, also known as Holy Thursday, commemorates three major events in Jesus' life: His washing of the disciples' feet, the Last Supper, and His prayer in Gethsemane. Each setting is an example for His followers, as well as for us.

The word "Maundy" is derived from the Latin word for "command." Following the washing of His disciples' feet (John 13:1-16) which was an act of humility and service—the most menial of everyday tasks—Jesus gave them His new command, *"Love one another, as I have loved you. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples."* (John 13:34-35).

The institutions of the Passover and deliverance out of Egypt were symbolic and prophetic signs of a Christ to come who would, through dying, deliver us from sin and death. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is commemorative of Christ who has already come and fulfilled this prophecy. After telling His disciples that this would be His last Passover with them, He took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, *"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."* In the same way He took the cup, saying, *"This is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."* (Luke 22:14-20). When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Matthew 26:30).

We could never, nor could the disciples, comprehend the agony Christ suffered in Gethsemane. It was not His anticipation of His death on the cross, for Jesus already knew His purpose for coming was to die for our salvation. (Isaiah 53:3-6). Rather, as the Son of Man, it was the enormous physical weight of the sins of the world He would carry on that cross. He fell with His face to the ground and prayed, *"My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* (Matthew 26:39).

The disciples loved Jesus to the limit of their ability, even when they did not understand His purpose. In the Garden of Gethsemane, they slept as a result of their own sorrow and fatigue. At the end of three years spent in the closest relationship of their lives, they *"all ... forsook him and fled."* (Matthew 26:56). Because of what the Son of God suffered, every human being has been provided with a way of access into the presence of God. The knowledge that Jesus, through His life and death, has loved us beyond all limits should compel us to go into the world and love others in the same way.

Edwyna



## *Do This In Remembrance of Me!*

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, *"Take and eat; this is my body."*

Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, *"Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

Matthew 26:26-28



### The Upper Room

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ...

When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. **"Do you understand what I have done for you?"** he asked them. **"You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set an example that you should do as I have done for you. I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them."**

John 13:3-5, 12-17

# JESUS' COMMAND AND PRAYERS FOR HIS FOLLOWERS

*"A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

John 13:34-35

*"My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified."*

John 17:15-19

*"My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. "*

John 17:20-26



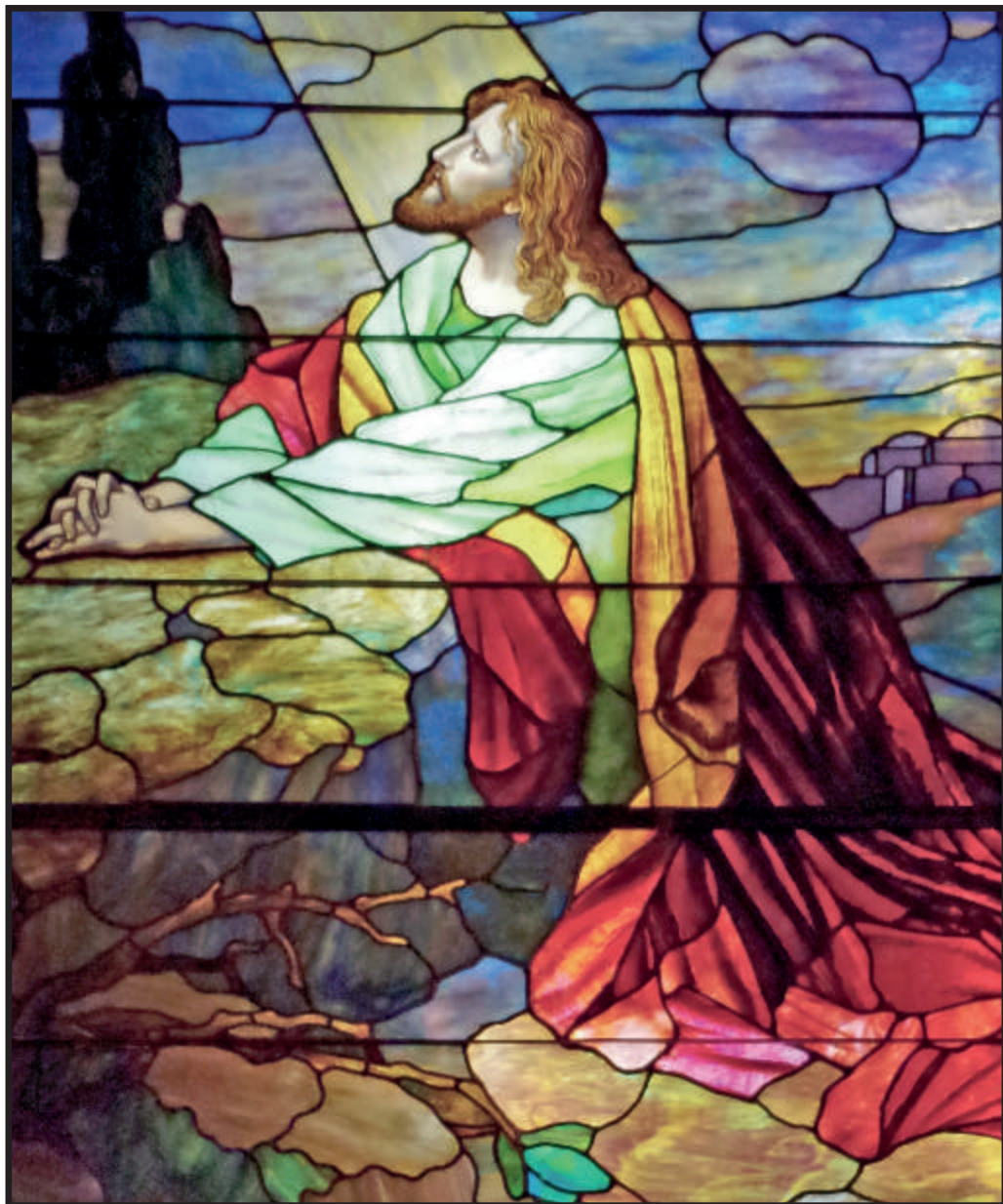
### Jesus at Gethsemane

They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, **“Sit here while I pray.”** He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. **“My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,”** he said to them. **“Stay here and keep watch.”**

Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. **“Abba, Father,”** he said, **“everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”**

Mark 14:32-36





**"Yet not what I will, but what you will."**

Mark 14:36



### **Betrayal**

Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: "The one I kiss is the man, arrest him and lead him away under guard." Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him.

Mark 14:43-46



**Genesis 22:1-14, 1 Peter 1:10-21 and John 13:36-38**

The Lord Will Provide—The Horror and the Hope of Christianity: *“Then God said, ‘Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you.’”* (Genesis 22:1-14). What kind of God would command a man to murder his only son? What kind of man would follow through on such a command? God’s command to Abraham is even more horrifying from a theological perspective. God is not asking Abraham just to kill his son. He is giving a command which is contrary to His promise to Abraham that *“through Isaac your offspring will be reckoned.”* (Hebrews 11:17-19).

How could a just God give such a command? In ancient cultures, the family, not the individual, was paramount. The property of the family passed to the oldest son, who had the responsibility of taking care of the family. Ancient cultures understood that there is a debt of sin that every family owes to God. That debt was to be paid by the first son. It was to be paid from the firstfruits. It was paid through a sacrifice. In later times, when the angel passed over Egypt, it was the first son that died unless the blood of the lamb was placed above the door. God’s justice required an offering, a sacrifice for the sin.

God’s command to Abraham was not to murder his son, but to sacrifice him as an offering. When the boy, Isaac, asks his father *“where is the lamb for a burnt offering,”* Abraham answers, *“God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”* This was more than an evasive response. It reveals Abraham’s ultimate faith that God would somehow, in some mysterious way, yet fulfill His promise. The word “provide” in Hebrew means “see for himself.” Abraham could not “see for himself” where God’s command would lead; but, by faith, he left his home with Isaac and two servants and traveled sixty miles to Mount Moriah to offer his son as a sacrifice to God.

It was Mount Moriah where God appeared to David. It was Mount Moriah where Solomon built his temple to God. It was on a part of Mount Moriah where God provided His own Son—His only Son, Jesus Christ—as the ultimate lamb for the sacrifice of all sins. God did not allow Abraham to carry through His command to kill Isaac. He fulfilled His promise to Abraham. But on Good Friday, God did allow His own Son to be sacrificed—an act as horrific as God’s command to Abraham. On Good Friday, no one could “see for himself” God’s justice or how He would fulfill His promise. But on Good Friday, God did *“provide for himself the lamb”* of the offering.

The writer of Hebrews tells us that *“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said ‘Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.’”* By faith, we are justified. By faith, we will be tested. But we can trust the promises of God because the Lord does provide.



### Jesus before Pilate

Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. **"Yes, it is as you say,"** Jesus replied. The chief priests accused him of many things. So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. ... Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged and handed him over to be crucified.

Mark 15:1-6, 15



**Soldiers mocking Jesus**

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, "Hail, king of the Jews!" ... And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

Mark 15:16-18, 20

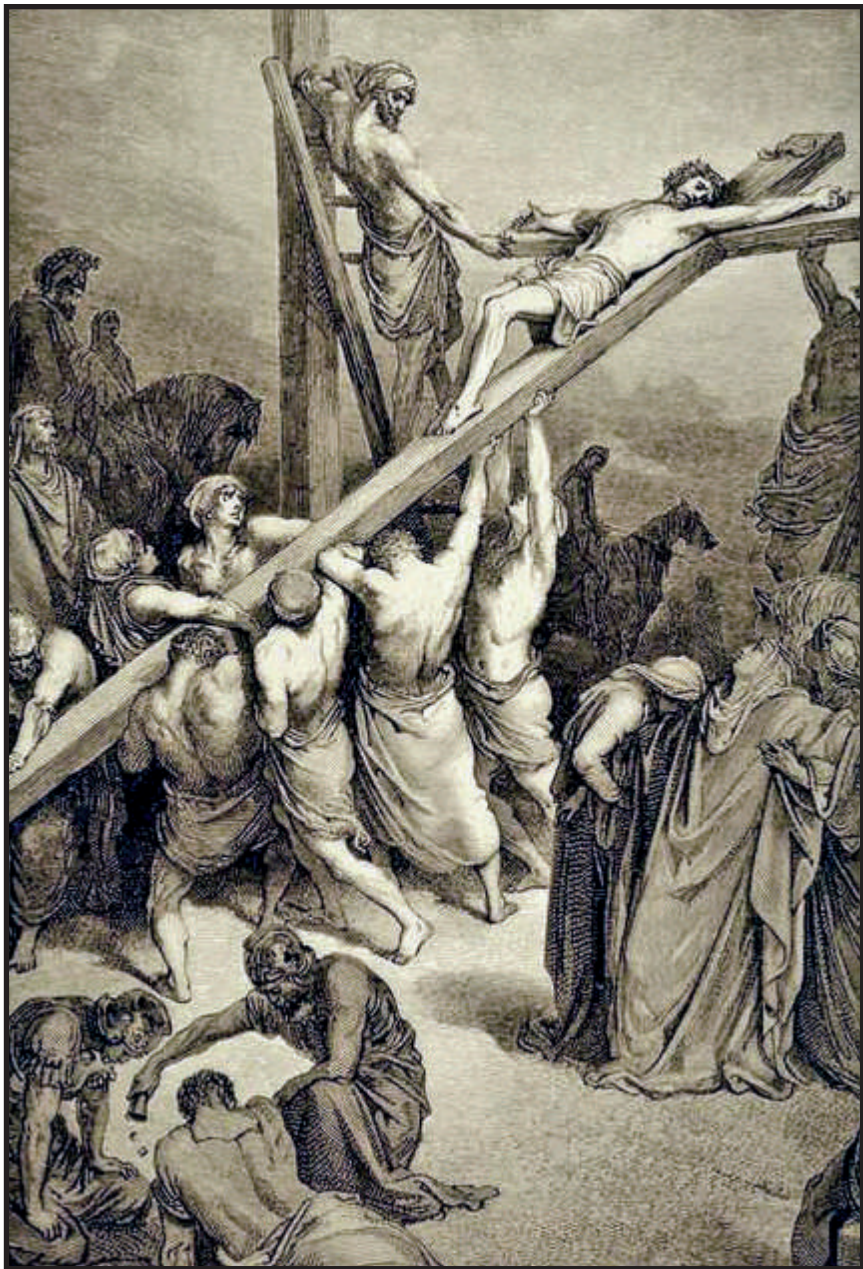




### **On the Way to Golgotha**

A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross.

Mark 15:21



### Golgotha

They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get.

Mark 15:22-24

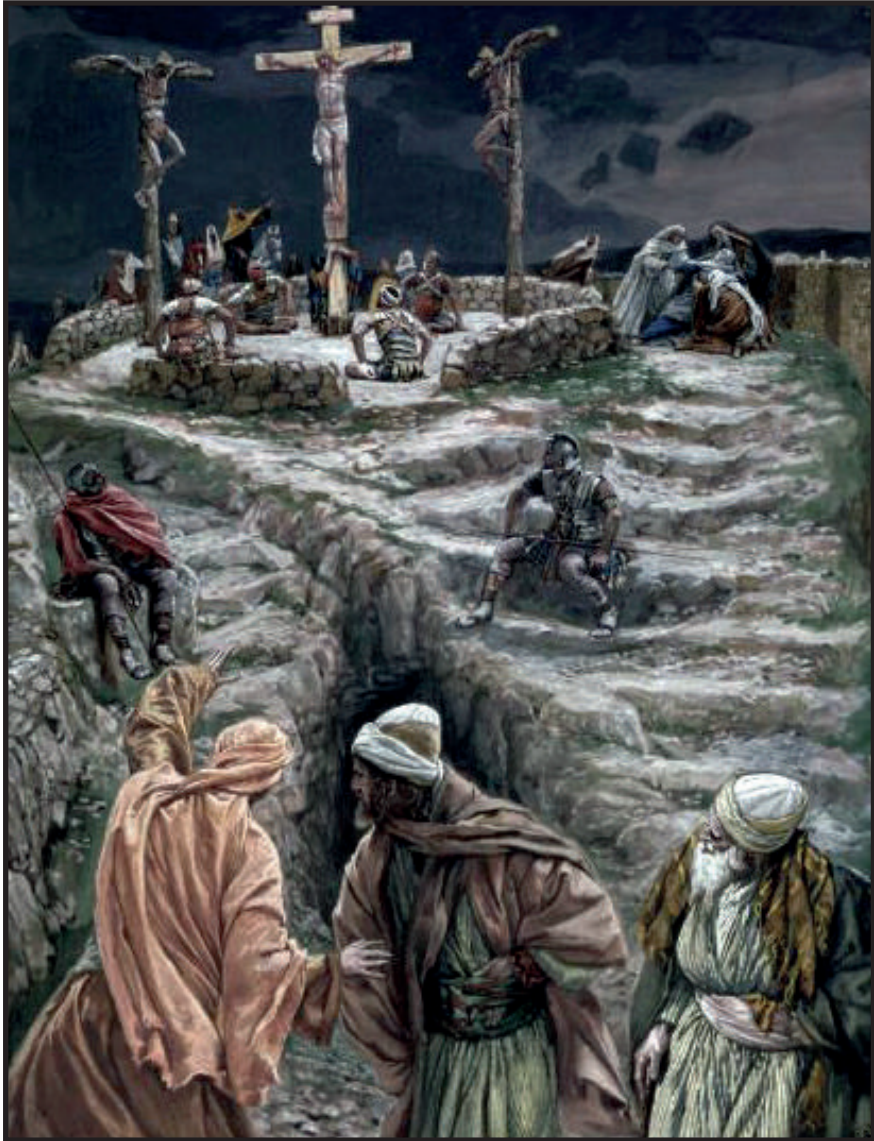




**Crucifixion**

It was the third hour when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two robbers with him, one on his right and one on his left.

Mark 15:25-28



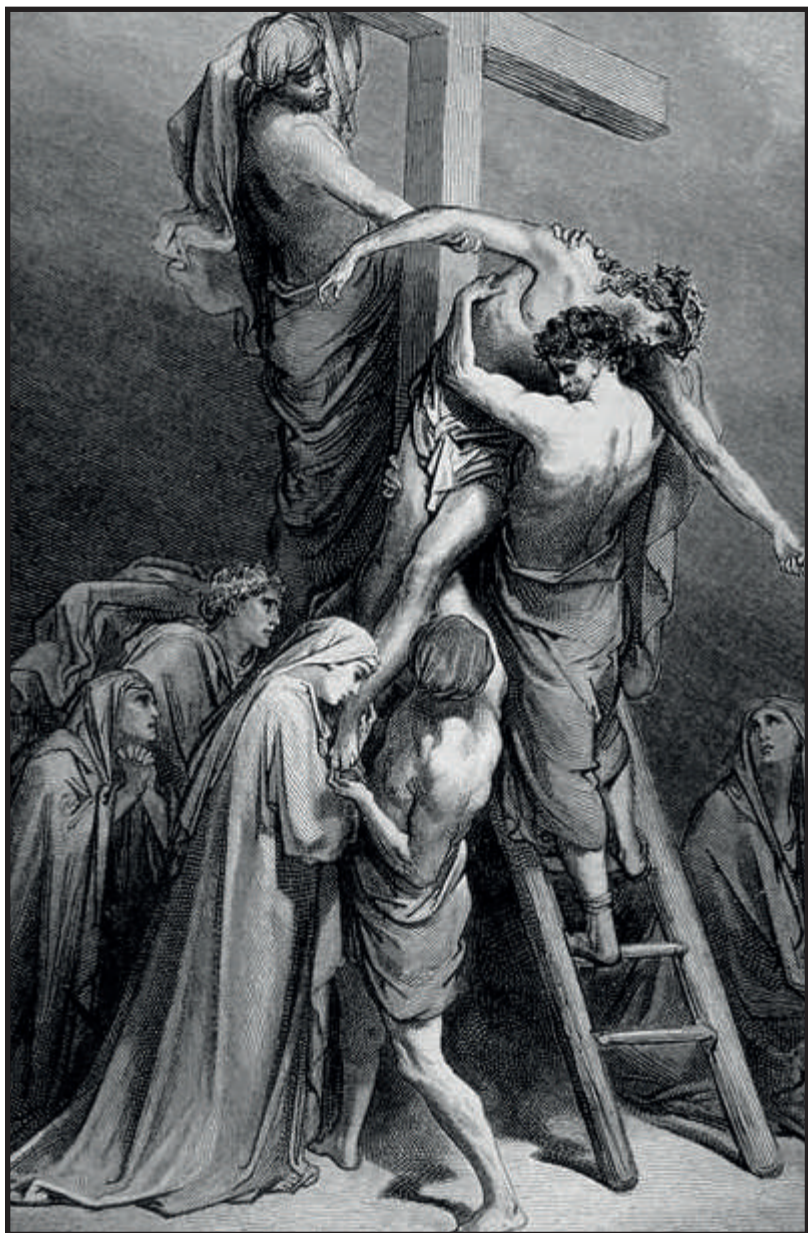
**“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”**

Luke 23:46

At the sixth hour darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, **“Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?”**—which means, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” ... With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, heard his cry and saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!”

Mark 15:33-35, 37-39

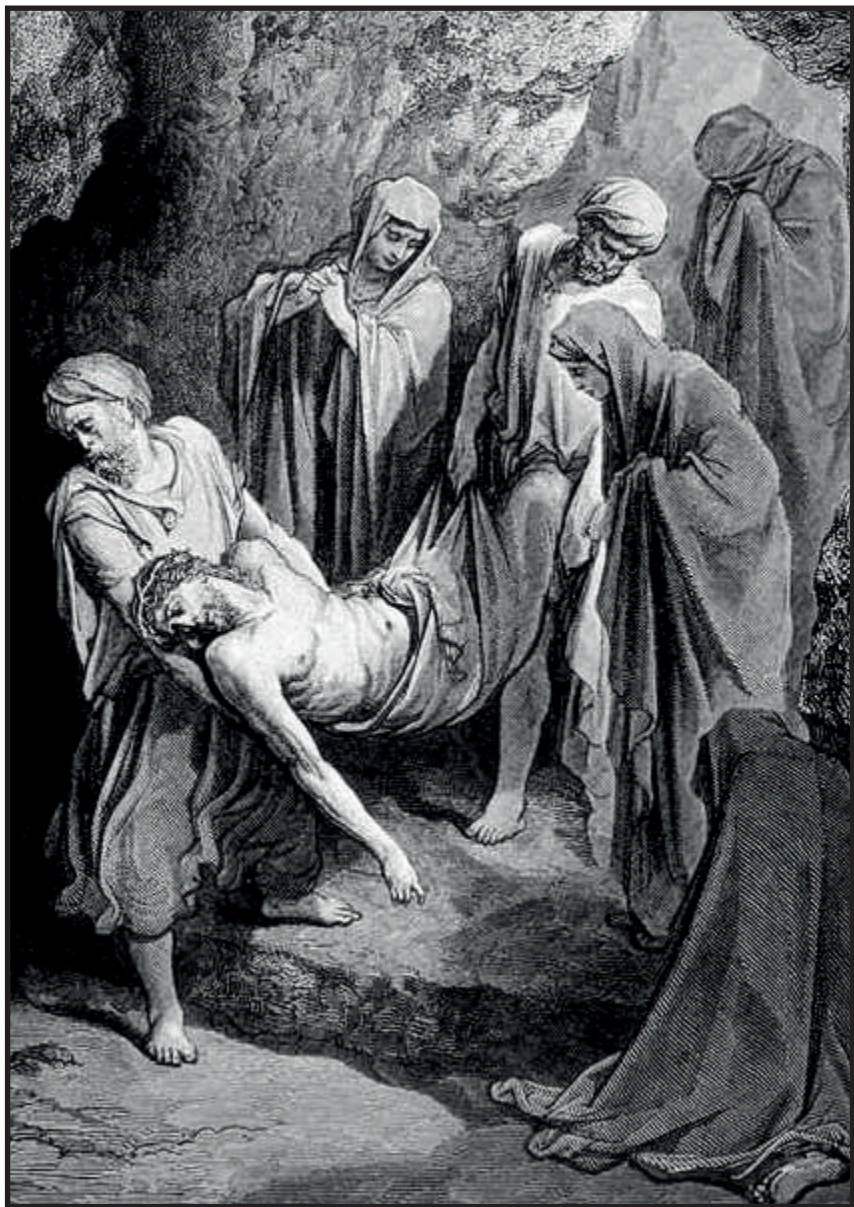




### **Descent from the Cross**

It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body.

Mark 15:42-43



### **Burial of Jesus**

So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where he was laid.

Mark 15:46-47





### Sealing the Tomb

"Take a guard," Pilate answered. "Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how." So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

Matthew 27:65-66

## **HOLY SATURDAY, APRIL 20**

**Week 7**

### **Job 19:21-27, Hebrews 4:1-16 and Romans 8:1-11**

The day following the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus on the cross must have been a long and sad one for his followers. Likewise, Job suffers from earthly physical pain in the loss of family, and he cries out to God for mercy. Job knows his Redeemer lives and that someday he will see God. Faith during and beyond suffering strengthens Job's belief and resolve.

From creation, and through the time of Moses and King David, we see God's abundant gifts and man's relentless sin. Man disobeys and God is merciful. The Word of God is alive and active. Our loving, all-knowing God and His plan started at creation's first light. When Paul writes in Hebrews that God has given His Son for our sins, we know that Jesus knows us. He has suffered with us as the Son of Man and for us as the Son of God. Just as God rested on the seventh day, let us rest and hold firmly to the faith we profess.

Holy Saturday may have brought much regret to those who loved Jesus: Peter's denial, Judas' betrayal and the crowd's conviction. Their minds and hearts were set on earthly desires and fears. Paul tells us in Romans that if we believe that Christ has died for us as Savior, indeed the Spirit of God lives in us. So, we embrace this great gift of salvation, knowing that we can rest in an unknown future as long as we have a known God. Our hearts are set on God's work, not the circumstances of this world.

The day after the crucifixion and before the resurrection may have been the longest day. It was a day to mourn for most and, for a small band of believers, a day to wait. For there were those who knew Jesus as Lord. They had glimpsed the light of His Glory in His teachings, and the Godly healing in His signs. They served the Son of God, the Messiah. The second day will end, the night will slip to dawn, the stone will be rolled away, and joy will come in the morning.

Janet

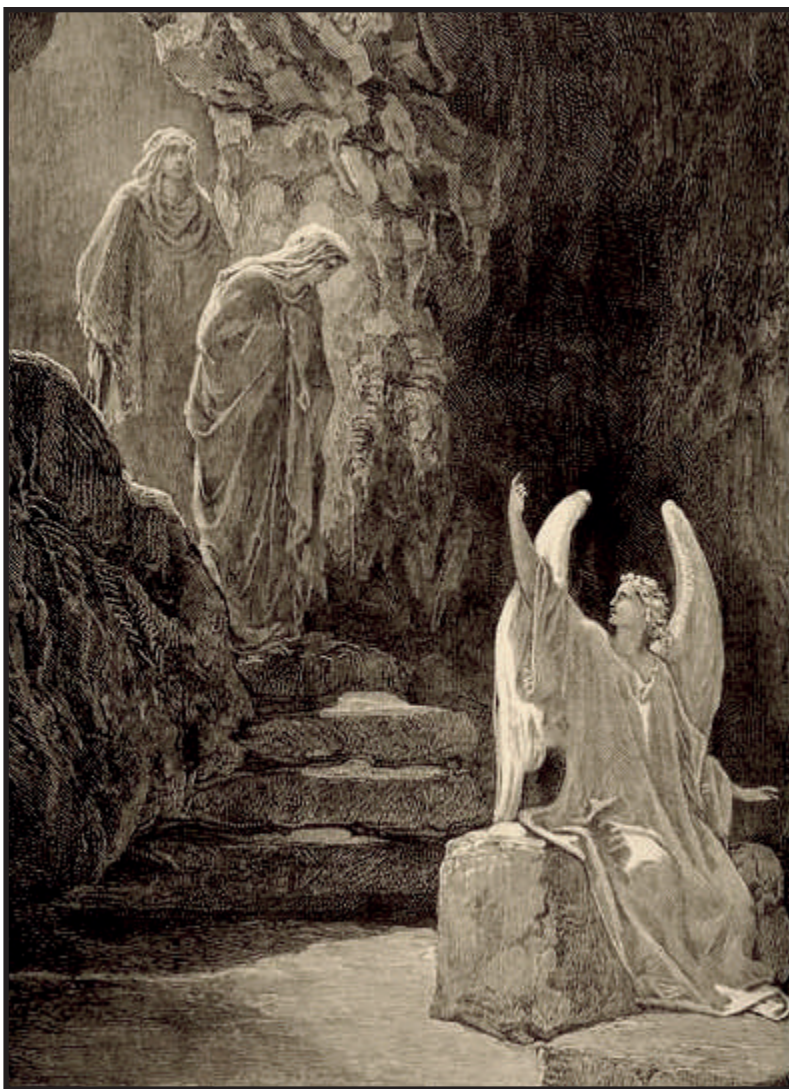


### **Easter Morning**

There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

Matthew 28:2-4





### **Resurrection**

When the Sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome brought spices so that they might anoint Jesus' body. Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, "Who will roll the stone away from the entrance to the tomb?" But when they looked up, they saw that the stone, which was very large, had been rolled away.

As they entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white robe sitting on the right side, and they were alarmed. "Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Mark 16:1-7



You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified.

# He has risen!

## He is not here.

Mark 16:6



## **EASTER SUNDAY, APRIL 21**

**Week 8**

### **Exodus 12:1-14 and John 1:1-18**

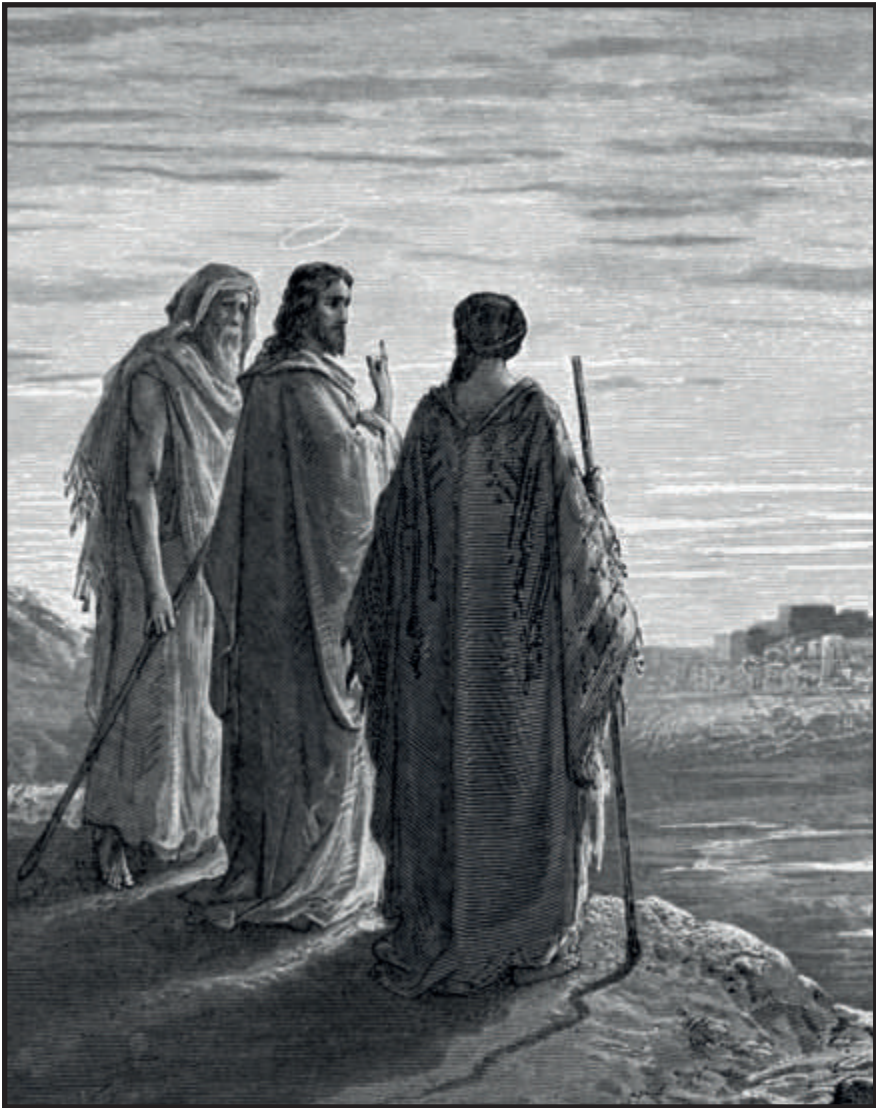
As we rise on this morning of all mornings, in our mind's eye we can see a dewy garden in the early hours of a cool spring day. It is bordered by a sun-dappled stone cliffside that is strewn with sealed rock-cut tombs. Walking toward a freshly carved tomb are several despondent women carrying aromatic spices and ointments, ready to perform a required but depressing task. Their hopes dashed, they are astonished to find the huge sealing-stone rolled away. Two men in blindingly-white clothes appear and tell them not to be afraid, because their friend is risen. They ask the women, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"

The angels, along with our verses this morning, remind us of the scarlet ribbon of prophecy that runs through the entire Jewish scriptures leading toward a savior of God's design and seed, who will eventually crush the serpent's head. The verses in Exodus describe the first Passover, which was God's planned deliverance of Israel from bondage in Egypt, where they were slaves to the Egyptians. Is it any wonder that during a subsequent Passover Festival, a firstborn male without the blemish of sin would be sacrificed by the will of "the whole assembly" to free us from our dead-end slavery to sin?

The angels were surprised that no one believed the one John called "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world," when He told them that He would also rise again on the third day—the "sign of Jonah." But there was no way that Jesus' followers could have possibly understood what He had meant by rising again. No one in the history of man had ever done it before! But what a promise! What joy and hope it gives us, who gladly receive Him and rejoice that He has overcome for us the darkness of death, disease and despair.

So, as we don our own bright-colored clothes in preparation for worship this morning, let us remember not only the cost of the sacrifice, not only the great love of the Father in planning for our salvation by the sacrifice of his Son, Jesus, whose very name means "the LORD saves," but especially remember and celebrate that the Father has saved us not only from sin, but from its wages—death—and that His Son has been our firstfruit promise of rising again to life eternal in His presence. Death has been conquered, Hallelujah! Christ is risen indeed!

Tripp



### On the Road to Emmaus

Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; but they were kept from recognizing him. ... He said to them, **“How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?”** And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.

Luke 24:13-16, 25-27



**Alleluia! Alleluia!**  
**Christ is risen indeed!**





**“Go and make disciples of all nations!”**

Then Jesus came to them and said, **“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”**

Matthew 28:18-20

**This special 2019 on-line edition of**

## **Lenten Reflections**

**was prepared by the Prayer Ministry Committee,**

**which expresses its thanks and gratitude**

**to all of our authors and contributors selected from**

**church officers, teachers and new members**

**“Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”**

**Colossians 3:15-17**

Scriptural references for the artwork are from the New International Version.

Scriptural references within each writing reflect the author's preference.

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**First Presbyterian Church  
San Antonio, Texas**

