

LUTHERAN CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

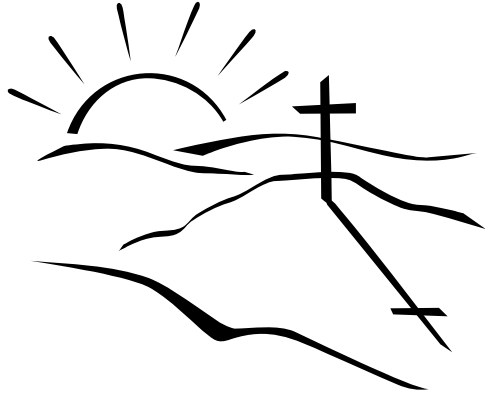
LENTEN DEVOTION 2007

For the friends and members of LCR...

...by the friends and members of LCR

GOD IS GOOD...

...ALL THE TIME!



This year our theme throughout Lent is, *“Don’t give up, give back to God.”* The idea is that instead of giving up something for Lent we would prayerfully consider ways in which we can give back to God out of the gratitude for all God continues to give to us. This Lenten Devotional is certainly evidence of folks giving back. To all the members and friends of LCR who took the time to write their reflections on each reading thank you. By allowing the Holy Spirit to work through you we have all been given a wonderful gift.

I invite you to set aside time everyday to read through the Scripture suggested for the day, read through your fellow sister or brother’s reflection on each reading, and then take a few moments to breathe deeply for you are truly in the presence of the Holy.

I pray this devotional serves as a companion for you on your Lenten journey. May it bring you strength, hope, comfort, and the reminder that we join together as one community... on one journey... praying and reflecting on God’s Word.

Peace,
Pastor Colleen Cox



February 21 – Ash Wednesday – Matthew 6: 1-6, 16-21

These words from our Lord are especially poignant to me as we head into the Lenten season. We’ll all see each other more in worship services on Sundays and Wednesdays leading to the final Thursday, Friday, and Sunday services during Easter Week. What a time to remember the first sentence from Rick Warren’s *A Purpose Driven life*... “It’s not about me.”

Offering up prayer, even wordy, pre-arranged prayer is okay as long as its intention is to glorify God and not ourselves. If it is intended for the honor and recognition of others who hear and see us pray – than we are way off base. Here Jesus tells me again, how to communicate with his Father, our God. Humbly, authentically, and even just in your heart... “Just be there as simply and honestly as

you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.” Tell God what’s on my mind. Tell God in prayer like I would if he were sitting next to me at home. God already knows what’s on my mind and in my heart anyway.

So if God already knows what’s on my heart, if God already knows what I need, why ask in prayer? Prayer was never intended to be informative to God. Instead, it is one of many devices used to nurture my relationship with God. As a result, prayer can change me, rather than my situation, reinforcing my confidence in his sufficiency and aligning my will with his (easier said than done!).

Interestingly, this chapter from Matthew includes the Lord’s Prayer (verses 9-13). That is not a consideration here, but the last verses (19-21) about my heart and real treasure are included... So not just pray – but action on that prayer is required by our Lord.

As I prepare to “Don’t Give Up... Give Back” during this Lenten season, I must consider the ultimate giving back as modeled through Our Savior’s life, death, and resurrection. How will I respond?

Frank Ehrenfeld III

February 22 – Psalm 51: 1-17

When David wrote this psalm he had come to the realization that his impulses had gotten him into trouble. The Lord had revealed to him that his time with Bathsheba, a married woman, was not God’s will for his life. David is asking for mercy and restoration.

As you read this psalm can you feel David’s heartfelt confession and repentance? His life is out of control and he knows the only way to get back on track is to get right with God. He knew this because he had a relationship with God and that what he had was a gift from God. David knew he could come back to God because he knew God loved him even when he gets off track.

We are not any different from David when it comes to getting off track. It is easy to categorize sin, but in the end sin is sin. As human beings this is what we do. Our life is a process of being on track with God and getting off track.

Lent is a time in our church where we try and look as honestly as we can at those things that God is not happy about. To do this we need help from the Holy Spirit because through our eyes often we can’t see or choose not to see the sin in our lives. Sin is anything that separates us from God and God’s track for our lives.

During this season of Lent make a date with God in Jesus Christ. Ask for the help of the Holy Spirit to help you see what needs changing. There is always something that needs changing. When this has been identified, consider how it separates you from God in Jesus Christ. Then go back and pray with David this passage of scripture.

God in Jesus Christ awaits each one of us with outstretched arms saying “Come, my child. I love you. Let’s do this together so we can be closer.”

Let us pray: God of mercy and love, when we are honest with you and ourselves there are always things that pull us away from you. Help us to identify at least one thing this season that as a result

we may grow closer to you. Create in us clean hearts, o God, that we may experience again and again the joy of your salvation. In Jesus name, Amen

Pastor Bruce Thorsen

February 23 – Psalm 91: 1-2, 9-16

This Psalm is a follow up prayer to Psalm 90. Psalm 90 shows God's anger. Psalm 91 is a prayer of praise. That God will protect us. That God will provide security for all of us that trust in God. God will cover us with his feathers, gather us in and protect us from all that is bad or evil in this world. Do not fear the night. God's angels will guard us. I will raise God up to the most high, and I will honor him, for when God calls, I will answer.

Let us pray, God, you have lifted me up to most high places. You are my shelter, my refuge that I most trust. I give you thanks and praise for this gift of life. Loving God, open our hearts to do your work. Grant us the strength, patience and love to go out from this house and bring the good news to all that hunger and thirst. May hope be woven with faith and love to form a tapestry of beauty and possibility. Out of suffering and destruction can emerge something new, a new earth with the mark of God upon it. That your house Lord is a community of hope, heart and love for all creation, continually renewed by the fresh winds of the Spirit. Amen

Cheryl Varga

February 24- Romans 10: 8b-13

As we travel on this Lenten journey, I think about how simple Paul's message is to me – but how terribly complex it must have been to the post-resurrection Jews and Gentiles. Yes, Jesus is above the Law – but now what? On face value it seems so simple to 'use my tongue' to say the words and then in my heart to believe them to have this salvation through Jesus. But like every Christian knows, it is easy to say – but hard to surrender and trust God completely with our lives.

Henry David Thoreau once wrote: "We see the beautiful butterfly in the field – and we can chase and grasp and reach – but never catch that powerful and fragile thing of beauty that eludes our efforts. How much harder to decide to sit down in the field – to really absorb its splendor – and to quietly have that butterfly light on our shoulder... "

So Lord, help me now to truly believe – to come to you in prayer, to honor you with my actions, and, with a humble sense of how helpless I really am in this world, to put everything into your hands. Lord... to Not Give Up, but to Give Back.

Frank Ehrenfeld III

February 25, First Sunday in Lent – Luke 4: 1-13



In this passage of Luke Chapter 4 there are many references of the Devil tempting Jesus for 40 days.

In thinking about the Devils temptations it reminds me of the choices and sacrifices that we make everyday. This especially reminds me about the temptations, sacrifices and choices that are made during the 40 days of the Lenten season to Easter. The Devil's temptation also reminds me of the story of Judas. This story told how Judas was tempted by the Devil with 30 pieces of silver. He betrayed his friend Jesus by telling the people that were looking for him, where he would be, so that they could arrest him and later crucify him on the cross. It seems to be amazing how choosing to be tempted by the Devil could lead up to the devastation of betraying a friend, possibly losing your faith and dignity. All for what seemed to be at the time a wise decision for money and notoriety. Just think that the choices we make could lead to losing someone or possibly many other things that are important to us. The real question is was it all worth it?!

My point is chose your decisions wisely. Do not tempt God or anyone with spiteful, evil or hurtful thoughts or ideas. Remember to keep in mind is it worth losing your dignity and faith, just to feel important for a small amount of time.

God is good ----All the time
All the time----God is good

Ronnie Gropper

February 26 – Genesis 15: 1-6

Two things stand out for me in these passages. The first is God telling Abram “do not be afraid”. The second is “Abram believed the Lord and the Lord declared him righteous because of his faith”. Fear and faith. I believe these two words describe many times of my Christian walk.

In my early walk the first words God impressed on me were “have faith in God.” And ever since then my faith has been tried, tested, stretched, inflated and sometimes deflated.

I found fear to be a companion too because if we allow him, God will keep encouraging us to step out of our comfort zones. This is necessary in order to grow our faith. Faith untried will never grow. I am certain the “wings of faith” coalition experienced both fear and faith during their recent rehab of the home in Yardley.

I have been thru several mountaintop experiences but to get to the top can be difficult and sometimes painful. Each time the end results absolutely amazed me. God has placed me in situations where I could do nothing but trust him and then I saw how he weaves the pieces together to create a masterpiece.

Satan will show you his best stuff first and the worst is always disguised behind it. But God shows you the worst first and saves the best for last. Like when Jesus turned the water into wine. The master of the ceremony remarked that most hosts serve the best first and when the guests are drunk they serve the less expensive wine. *But you saved the best for last.*

So do not be afraid and have faith in God.

Marian Robey

February 27 – Philippians 3:17-4:1

This passage is a reminder to me that as followers of Christ we should be vigilant that the many worldly distractions of our busy lives not interfere with our focus on the Kingdom of God. This is not so easy in a world that is filled with distractions that consume our lives in such a variety of ways. The every day busyness of work and family, of course, is necessary, but sometimes we find ourselves spending so much of our time and energy striving for things in this world that are not really important to fulfill our lives. We live in a “want more culture” and easily become entrapped with satisfying our worldly desires and trying to “keep up with the Joneses.” Do we really need all these things?

Paul urged the Philippians to pursue “Christlikeness.” As Christians our citizenship is in heaven, not in this world. How can we claim to be Christians if we are focused on self-indulgence and don’t live up to Christ’s model of service and self-sacrifice? If we truly follow Christ, it means to think about the needs of others before satisfying our own desires. Paul said to follow the example of those who live according to the pattern set for us by our Lord Jesus Christ. What kind of a Christian example are we to others? Are we so continually focused on earthly matters that we lose sight of keeping our hearts and minds focused on Christ? Help us always to remember that, because we belong to Christ, all of our worldly struggles, expectations and desires will be gloriously transformed when we finally experience our true citizenship in the Kingdom of God.

Betty Berner

February 28 – Genesis 15: 7-18

These verses talk of how God has made a second promise to Abram. Abram is promised the land that he was brought to by God. But Abram was cautious and wanted to know how he would know this was his land. After doing as God said, he fell into a deep sleep. Here he found out about his life and his descendants. He was told that his descendants would be slaves in a land owned by others but when they were set free, they were very wealthy. After four generations his descendants would come back to the land where Abram was and it would be theirs after they took it back from the sinful people that lived there.

As I sit here and write this devotional I am almost envisioning this as the Kingdom of God and the new land to be Heaven. We are promised to be able to enter Heaven after we have lived our lives here on Earth. This is the covenant that we have made when we are baptized. We are not really slaves in the sense that Abram’s descendants were back then but we are slaves to our times. The money, the houses, and jobs; as well as the pressure to be like others instead of what God wants us to be. I view it this way and when we die, we are set free with all our riches – God and all his love for us and ours for him.

Jenn Vajda

March 1 – Psalm 27: 1-6

Before the meditation on Psalm 27 I would like to give a little background on Psalms in general. The Book of Psalms is the first book of the *Kethuvim*, or writings in the Hebrew Bible or Tanakh. A text from the Dead Sea Scrolls, MMT (4Q397: 14-21; C.9-10) speaks of “the books of Moses and the

Prophets and David”, thus indicating its status. The Hebrew name of the book is *Tehilim*, “songs of Praise”. The English title Psalms, a translation of the Greek *psalmos* of the Hebrew word *mizmor*, “a song with an accompaniment of a stringed instrument.”

Psalms is a collect of collections, divided into five books to mirror the Five Books of Moses. Book One, an early collection, contains Psalms 1-41, its chief author is David, the ‘sweet psalmist of Israel’ (2 Samuel 23:1), and is considered songs of worship. This first collection is similar to Genesis, just as Genesis tells how mankind was created, fell into sin and was promised redemption, many of these psalms discuss how humans are blessed, fallen and redeemed by God, something David was very familiar with.

The time frame for Psalms covers about 1000 years, from Moses (Psalm 90), about 1500 BCE to Psalm 137 during the Babylonian Captivity in 538 BCE. Most Psalms contain a similar structure made up of the following elements:

- (a) an address to God
- (b) the lament itself
- (c) confession of trust in God
- (d) exclamation of certainty the psalmist prayer will be heard by God
- (e) the vow of praise

This psalm is a statement of trust in God and the opening line, as in other psalms, uses various metaphors to reflect different aspects of God’s great power. Here, light and stronghold are used as in Psalm 23, where David calls the Lord his shepherd. The phrase, ‘devour my flesh’ is not to be taken literally. It is an idiom for slander me similar to the English idiom backbiting.

Fear is a dark shadow that envelopes us and makes us prisoners within ourselves. We can all relate to this as we have all, at one time or another, been a prisoner of fear. But we can conquer our fears by using the bright light of God who brings us salvation. David had been a prisoner, when his son Absalom raised an army against him, but putting his trust in God was delivered. Just as the light drives away the darkness and the shadows, so does the ‘light of God’ overcome our enemies and our fear. As David found his peace and safety in the house of the Lord so are we able to enter into that place and experience that protection and peace. All we have to do is ‘live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life’.

Clyde Beury

March 2 – Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-19

These inspiring words from Hebrews remind me of the journey I have been on in establishing the Be the Change Foundation. When I first began to create the Be the Change Foundation I had no idea what the plans for this were. I just knew that it was something God had placed in my life. I still have no idea as to what God's plans are, but I am sure that I watch them unfold everyday as the foundation comes together. For someone like me who likes to prepare ahead of time for everything, and always has a plan, it has not been easy to just follow God's plan without knowing where I am going. I am just sure of the hope I have for the Be the Change Foundation and that God is in control of this. Like Abraham being called to a place, I feel I was called to this work. Like Abraham, I also am not sure of where I am going. I have complete faith that God is building up this foundation to allow us to help women and children affected by the human trafficking industry. I am

looking forward to God's plans. I may not know what they are, but I always go forward and follow with faith.

Kara Beardsall

March 3 – Psalm 27: 7-14

In verses 1-6 we saw echoes of the Twenty Third Psalm. These were the metaphor of God as shepherd and a desire to 'dwell in the house of the Lord'. Now we hear the psalmist seek God, worried that God will abandon him. There is the total surrender of verse 10 that even if his parents abandon him, through death or otherwise, he will have a divine 'parent' who will protect and instruct him. Years ago when my father died, I finally made peace by understanding that as long as I was alive I would carry him in my DNA and my memory and I had a 'heavenly father' who would be there for me always. David using the motif of the god as a parent of the king is familiar from Mesopotamian hymns and elsewhere in biblical literature.

This section, verses 7-13, is perhaps the most powerful for me. It contains the return of fear and the acknowledgment of God as the ultimate parent, the presence of enemies and lying witnesses and finally the land of the living, as opposed to the land of the dead where there is no access to God. There is the balancing of fear and deliverance, enemies and rescue and finally the lands of the living and the dead. It is a set of either/or, there is no gray here, it is life stripped to its essentials and confronted at a basic human and divine level.

The closing verse is for me both an affirmation and a command, "Look to the Lord; be strong and of good courage!" I can almost see David exhorting his army before a big battle with these words. It also reminds me of the closing word Edward R. Murrow would use while reporting from London during the blitz in World War II. He simply said, "Courage." In our daily life as Christians there are many times when all we have is courage that we carry, knowing that God has in his sight and other Christians have us in their prayers.

Clyde Beury

March 4 – Second Sunday in Lent – Luke 13: 31-35

What is it like to be disappointed?

Consider the child hoping for a special birthday gift that does not appear.

Or the parent who's child runs into trouble with 'the law'.

Or a Savior who hears a dear friend curse and swear that he never knew Him.

Our Christ knew that last disappointment as well as the one in St. Luke's story. He was the prophet rejected and destined to be betrayed, to be denied, and then to be killed in the most humiliating execution devised by sinful man.

Some weeks before when He was alone and looked back on the city that was the very center of all of the Bible's promises for the coming Messiah, Jesus very likely let the tears flow. Tears of painful acceptance that the very people who He was sent to by His Father, had turned their backs on Him.

Rejection is one of life's deepest sorrows.....

“Surely, He has born our grief and carried our sorrows”....

Michael J. Reynolds

March 5 – Luke 13: 1-5

At a first glance, this reading seems a little harsh. It’s a pretty grim message – repent or perish. In fact, Jesus feels the need to mention it twice in this short passage. So it must be pretty important. My first reaction was to the idea of some sinners being worse than others. I immediately looked outside myself and thought of the ways I find to rationalize my behavior by judging the actions of others. I’m not so bad in comparison. There are worse sinners than me in this world. However, after re-examining the passage, I thought more about the beauty and simplicity of Jesus’ message. How easy this directive from Jesus will be to follow. Simply repent for my sins. Any sins – large, small, known and forgotten – just repent and I will **NOT** perish. It’s that easy. By the Grace of God, I am forgiven. And so are you. Amen.

Marie Speers

March 6 - Psalm 105: 1-11, 37-45



This is such a wonderfully uplifting and happy Psalm. It helps us to remember God’s miracles of the past, how he fulfilled his promises to his people and how he brought Israel to the Promised Land. It encourages us to live close to him, to trust him, to rejoice in him, give thanks and sing praise to him and glory in his holy name or, in other words, just have a loving and joyful relationship with him! The Psalmist suggests that if God seems far away to us, we should persist in our search for him and be encouraged by the way he has helped his people in the past. God is always there for us, waiting for us to find him and to trust him to supply all of our needs. Let us look to the Lord for his strength and his love, seek his face always, be joyful in him, and remember the wonders he has done.

Betty Berner

March 7 – 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13

Haven’t we each, on one occasion or another, felt that we have been given more than we can handle?

I know there have been times in my life when I felt I had more than my share of pain and heartache, but when I look back, I realize God was there beside me every step of the way working through others.

One such time was New Years Eve, 1986, when my daughter was 4 years old. I was recently separated from my husband and Jenn became very ill the week between Christmas and New Years.

I took her to the pediatrician on New Years Eve afternoon as her eye was black and blue and swollen. The doctor told us we needed to go immediately to the hospital. Jenn had a rare infection which developed through a sty. The doctors told me that in most cases, the child is left blind or mentally impaired. She needed strong intravenous antibiotic treatment immediately.

Feeling very alone, I set out to the hospital but called my parents from the doctor's office first. (this was in the days before cell phones!) My mother was at work, but my father was there with my grandmother, who was visiting from Michigan for the holidays. She answered the phone and insisted that I stop by to pick her up on the way to the hospital. I tried to tell her that there was really no reason for that, after all, there was nothing she could do. But... you would have to know my grandmother. She was a strong-willed woman. She had raised her daughter alone after being widowed when my mother was 5 years old. My grandfather was killed in an auto accident which also left my grandmother with life-long physical limitations. She went on to college to earn her masters degree and had taught the deaf her entire career. She had traveled the world and was not about to take my no as an answer. So...I stopped by and picked her up. We traveled to the hospital and she sat with me as we silently prayed together. And that did make all the difference. Just having her there, I felt stronger and more capable of taking care of my child, even though I was feeling very alone in the world at that moment. Thankfully, Jenn was not permanently harmed by the infection and all ended well. I truly believe I grew stronger from the experience.

I believe that God was with me that day and worked through my grandmother to give me strength and courage to endure the pain and concern I had for my daughter. God uses each of us in very special ways to help others. We just need to be open to hearing that call. Sometimes we feel that we really can't do anything to help – but we should remember that sometimes all that is needed is to sit quietly beside the one in need and God will do the rest.

Diane Casey

March 8 – Jeremiah 30: 12-22

Dear God,

We live in an imperfect world. Daily we see greed, hate, hunger, prejudice, war. We long for love and peace. Love and peace can only come from You, from our commitment to put You first in our lives. It's hard, Lord. We try and fail. You lift us back up. We fall again. Center us, Lord. Keep us always mindful that You are our God and we are Your people.

Amen

Jane Helms

March 9 – Luke 13: 6-9

"The gardener said, 'Let's give it another year. I'll dig around it and fertilize, and maybe it will produce next year; if it doesn't then chop it down.' " (from The Message)

These are not "feel good" verses rather a reminder that while we have a gracious God there will be a judgment day. God expects a response to all that we are given. We are called to be fruit full, "to produce", to give in response to what we have been given. Just showing up on Sunday morning and being a "pew potato" is not enough.

Lord help us in our abundance to remember that we are called to give back, to produce fruits of a faith filled life.

Barbara Spencer

March 10 – Isaiah 55: 1-9



This reminds me of the first experience of becoming a member of a Church. Being a new member, you go through the experiences and discover the wonderful gifts and joys of celebrating the glory of the Lord together as a congregation.

This passage of Isaiah is almost like receiving an invitation of a Blessing to seek the Lord. In the first nine verses of Chapter 55 it stated, “If you are thirsty I will give you a drink. If you are hungry I will supply good food that fattens up your soul.”

Come and worship with me and hear the words that will keep your souls full. Hear the message and spread the good news about this wonderful gift. You will always have strength though the Lord to do amazing thing to glorify God. You will always be safe for I the Lord your God will supply all your needs. Listen to my words and know that they can change your life. Do not be afraid, I the Lord your God will always be with you and never leave you.

For if you hear and seek the Lord and allow him in your heart. Your journey has just begun to a wonderful and life long experience with the Lord.

Ronnie Gropper

March 11 – Third Sunday in Lent – Psalm 63: 1-8

This psalm is written by David while he was on the run most likely from the pursuit of King Saul’s assassins in the wilderness of Judah. Typically a desolate, wild and lonely place, i.e. not a suitable land for farming or any form of lush vegetation.

David cries out to God in a manner of seeking deliverance from his enemies-a form of lamentation- as well as a song (prayer) of trust for strength and reassurance. David seeks a connection (verbally and literally) to his Lord God through various means of physical & mystical forms of communications. For example he says things like, “my soul thirsts for thee,” “I have looked upon thee in the sanctuary”(remember the temple was not built at the time);” “I will lift up my hands and call on thy name,” “when I think of thee upon my bed and meditate on thee through the watches of

the night,” and finally he gives of his self, “My soul clings to Thee, as Thy right hand upholds me.”

These words, thoughts, and ways that David used back in his days are words that we too can use today in our Lenten journey through our own wilderness; isolation, sickness, grief over death, divorce, separation from our families (in the armed services overseas), friends and loved ones, loss of a job and anxiety over the stress of daily life.

Let us ponder and recall humbly this Psalm during this Lenten season as David, John the Baptist and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ did while he was tempted in the wilderness. In order that we may come to the realization, “Gods Steadfast Love is better than life.” And that each one of us can face with confidence the realities and fears of our wilderness journey and say, “O God, thou art my God, I seek thee, my soul thirsts for Thee!” To God be the glory!

Ray Weddington

March 12 – 1 Kings 6: 1-14, 21-22

When I read these verses about Solomon building the great Temple in Jerusalem I am so often struck by the exact detail offered. “Sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high.” Then there is the depth of its rooms, the recessed windows, the nave and the inner sanctuary... such exact details. One imagines the grandeur and the beauty of the Temple throughout this passage. But then right in the midst of the construction details comes the word of the Lord telling Solomon that if he follows God’s ordinances and obeys the commandments then God will dwell among the children of Israel. It seems that all the attention to the outward details is not what is important to God. For God it is what is on the inside that matters most.

You see Solomon did build the great Temple, but Solomon then forgot about obeying God’s ordinances and keeping the commandments and Solomon lived outside the Temple as if there was no God. From that moment on Solomon was on his own, he had turned away from God, and God then not only moved out of the Temple, but he moved out of Solomon’s life.

How often do we pay more attention to the outward details rather than to the voice of God that speaks to our insides? How often do we live outside the Temple as if there was no God?

During this Lenten season may we focus on the only detail that counts: the unconditional and unwarranted love of our Lord whose Son we journey alongside to the Cross. May we know that this love is written in our hearts, and knitted into our very being. May that be the detail that leads us, guides us, and inspires our journey.

Pastor Colleen Cox

March 13 – Psalm 32

Several years ago there was a popular song by Bobby Macferren, “Don’t Worry, Be Happy.” It was a very catchy tune with useful advice. My only problem was it never told you how to be happy or why you should be happy. David is much more helpful, in the first two verses of this Psalm he tells us that we are happy when God forgives our sin and does not hold us guilty. In fact, this is so powerful

a statement that Paul quotes these two verses in Romans 4: 7-8 to show the happiness we can have of forgiveness through faith in Christ.

The study guide for my Bible suggests that this Psalm be read in conjunction with Psalm 51 as both are penitential psalms. They concern David's sins committed against both Bathsheba and her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11, 12). Although there is no direct mention of the incidents, the reading of 2 Samuel makes a compelling argument for this meaning. David had been overcome by guilt and was relieved of that burden after confession of his sin to God. I was reminded of the words found in the hymn "Amazing Grace", "I once was lost, but now am found. Was blind, but now I see." In both cases the writer is relieved that a great burden has been lifted from them.

In our daily lives, we often find ourselves stressed about a problem or something where we have wronged another person. At times this sense of guilt is so overpowering that we cannot sleep at night. I wonder if the other party is losing sleep. David tells us in this Psalm that the best medication for this insomnia is prayerful time with God and the rest of a person 'whose sin is covered over'.

Clyde Beury

March 14 – Mark 11: 15-19

When reading this passage, the thought of Jesus being angry is what first we notice. There are passages in the Bible when Jesus is annoyed and disappointed with people and his disciples, but this might stand out as different in the fact that Jesus is physically 'turning tables and benches'. What is it that angers Jesus?

As humans we also become angry at times. Is this passage here to remind us that Jesus is the Son of Man as well as the Son of God and with that he had the same human emotions as we do? It might be part of the meaning for this passage, but after reading the words of Jesus, "**My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations,**" the real reason for the anger appears.

Often when people become angry or annoyed it is because we aren't getting **our** way. What we want is not provided; whether it is recognition, a word of thanks, for the computer to cooperate, the list could go on, but the bottom line is about **us**. The difference between the anger of Jesus and our daily anger/annoyances is the focus of the anger. Jesus is angry because the people at the temple were not doing what **God** wanted. The temple is a **house of prayer for all nations**.

This part of the passage seems to be speaking directly to LCR at this time. Our church is **Building Up and Reaching Out** and in so doing we are making a house of prayer for all nations. The building of a house for all nations is not easy and is not without anger and annoyances. This Lenten season is a time for us all to keep our focus on what God wants his people to do. Throughout his ministry on the Earth, Jesus continually told us to go out and make disciples of all people. This is what **God** wants, and should be what we want too.

Thy Will be done.

Berni Beury

March 15- 2 Corinthians 5: 16-21

This passage made me think of the parable Jesus told, about the servant who went before the king with an enormous debt, which the king graciously decided to cancel out of the kindness of his heart. That same servant then went to a man who owed him a tiny sum, and when that man refused to pay, the servant had him thrown into debtor's prison. The servant failed to be an ambassador of the incredible forgiveness and mercy that had been shown him!

God erased our debt to him by having his son pay it for us, and now we are called to respond to this by settling our relationships with each other. God has charged us with being his ambassadors – to show others the same love, mercy, and forgiveness that has been shown to us by God. If we accept these gifts from God, but then turn around and deny them to our friends, family, and neighbors, we fall short of fulfilling God's purpose for us on Earth.

Sound like a tall order? The message of hope for me in this passage is that we don't have to go it alone. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" It is only through the power of Christ that we can be more like the king and less like the servant. And when we fail, we know that God's forgiveness is always there for the asking, allowing us to be continually made into new creations.

Becky Dreibelbis

March 16 – 1 Corinthians 3: 10-23

When I read this very busy discourse written to the people of the church of believers in Corinth, the words St. Paul wrote seem to swirl around several topics. In all of this, the words that stand out for me are verses 16 and 17: **"Do you not discern and understand that you [the whole church at Corinth] are God's temple, and that God's Spirit has his permanent dwelling in you [to be at home in you, collectively as a church and also individually]? If anyone does hurt to God's temple or corrupts it [with false doctrines] or destroys it, God will do hurt to him and bring him to the corruption of death and destroy him. For the temple of God is holy (sacred to him) and that [temple] you [the believing church and its individual believers] are."**

I reflect back and forth from our recently commissioned Phase I expansion of our church 'temple' to the simultaneous expansion of the individual temples of the people excited by this new work of God the Holy Spirit. Verse 16 says that the Spirit is dwelling, is literally: 'at home' in each of us! Wow! What a thought!

The coffee cups that we received during the capital campaign recite Psalm 127:1. And as we see the Lord constructing the new church building, as he first builds his house in each of our hearts, that labor is not in vain.....!!

Michael J. Reynolds

March 17 – Luke 15: 1-3, 11b-32

The parable of the lost or prodigal son – is one of the most difficult texts for me. Every time I read or hear this parable I search my heart and soul for the meaning of the story in my life and in this particular time of my life. My first thought is always that I am the older brother and am most

indignant about this whole forgiving thing! My righteous older sister mind-set comes forth; one that I have worked hard to perfect most of my life. Then I remember that many, many, many more times than I want to remember I have done things for which I need to be forgiven and I want to be asked back into the “flock.” This is a humbling story when you remember that God is infinitely patient and forgiving and that many of us have very short attention when it comes time to remember our own faults and harmful actions. This parable is a great one to think about every day.....try it.

Elizabeth Young

March 18- Fourth Sunday in Lent – John 3: 14-21

There are so many strong, meaningful words in this passage: “believes”, “eternal life”, “one and only Son”, “light”, “deeds”, “truth”, “God”. It’s important to me that this passage seems to be talking about the here and now, as well as eternal life. God sent one person, the “one and only Son”, whose light shines for us to follow, as in to follow here and now. Seeing the light, following the truth, it’s for us to respond to or reject the life offered to us through the only Son; Jesus Christ. Living our lives as His light shows us the way will lead us to eternal life with God. What a gift – God gave his one and only Son to us, and we are given every opportunity to believe in Him, follow His light, and let His light shine through us!

Sandy Mullican

March 19 – John 12: 1-8

I never claimed to be the perfect Christian. I'm well aware that there are things that I *should* do that I don't. Spiritually, I consider myself a beginner. So when Pastor Colleen suggested that I select one of the writings for the devotional, I was skeptical. When I asked for advice, she said simply "Let the Spirit guide you." Well, that was not quite the specific direction I was looking for, but I agreed to give it a shot. I jotted down a few available verses and nervously sat down to start.

The thing that grabbed me the most about this passage was the last verse. Jesus said to Judas: "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me." Well, I thought that was an odd thing for Jesus to say, because Jesus **IS** always there for us. He was talking to one of his disciples, who knew him in the physical sense. However, for us, although we don't know Jesus as a physical being, we do always **have** him.

I'm glad Pastor C. encouraged me to write one of these devotionals this year. This passage serves as a reminder for me to rethink my priorities. After all, if Jesus is always there for me, shouldn't I be sure to make time for him?

May the Spirit guide us all.

Christie Paton

March 20 – Numbers 20: 1-13

The punishment for Moses striking the rock was difficult for me to accept at first. I initially kept thinking how unfair it seemed that this one act of disobedience caused Moses journey here on earth to end. After all I remembered many acts of obedience on Moses part.

I wrestled with it for weeks. Then I began to see that Moses never had ANY POWER. The staff he used had the power. Even though Moses struck the rock, which he was not told to do, water still came out. I believe it's because that staff was representative of the power of God. The problem was Moses took credit for the action.

We have NO POWER, except what is given to us by the Holy Spirit, to do God's work. If we try to live the Christian life under our own power, we will fail. We should always remember to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit and give God the glory.

Marian Robey

March 21 – Isaiah 43: 16-21

This passage of Isaiah reminds me of the story of Moses. The Lord gave Moses the wisdom and resources through the word of God and the Holy Spirit to lead the people out of the desert to their own land they could call home.

The Lord gave Moses the blessing of parting the sea with his staff, so that the people of Israel could cross to avoid Pharaoh and the chariots that were chasing them.

Just think of how wonderful it is to have a chance to start your life over again and be blessed through the words of the Lord and Holy Spirit.

For the passage states: "I'm going to do a brand new thing. I will make a road through the wilderness of the world for my people to go home and create rivers for them in the desert, so that my people, my chosen ones, can be refreshed. I have made Israel for myself, and that my people will some day honor me before the world."

Ronnie Gropper

March 22 – Philippians 3: 4b-14

Paul starts off here with a certain sense of confidence -almost to a point of cockiness, maybe even a sense of pride, as a warning signal to his fellow Christians who have recently come to their new faith. He says, "*If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I (Paul) have more.*" A bold statement to warn his fellow Jewish & Gentile converts to Christianity as he states "*circumcised on the 8th day, from the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.*" Look at me folks I'm "the man", "phat," "cool," I have it made!

My own personal example I would like to share as my wife, (thank-you Lord), Liz always humbles me whenever I think, say ,suggest, or act out to get attention, she says- like the world revolves around you, Ray, of all people, huh?

“Beware pride comes before the fall.” That is as Paul is saying (as he literally did on the way to Damascus) the fall before Christ’s feet, realizing that what Christ did for Paul, all people of that time as well as all of us and all people throughout the whole world and myself, (yes little ray) when he went to the Cross to give of himself. All the things that Paul was before Christ have become “refuse” or worthless, because belief in Christ made him a new person i.e. a new creature, the old has passed away. That is Good News folks!!!

Paul is talking to us this day with this warning and sharing the power of Christ’s Resurrection for us as his chosen people. Don't forget folks, as Paul writes, “I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ.” GOD IS GOOD! ALL THE TIME! GOD IS GOOD!

Ray Weddington

March 23 – Psalm 126



In Psalm 126, I am reminded that God does amazing things each and every day. God works miracles for us. For me, God gave me the miracle of life. When I was nine days old I had to have open-heart surgery. Because the case was so rare, the doctors told my parents I only had a 10 percent chance of living. After 8 hours of surgery, many prayers, and a month of recovery I pulled through. You see, without God's miracles, I might not have been writing this. I am very thankful to God for giving me life. God works miracles so that we can use them. I plan to use my miracle by living my life to the fullest. I do not take this gift for granted. I put my faith in God, for I know if I have faith God will lead me throughout my life.

Nicole May

March 24 – Psalm 107: 1-16

Psalm 107 speaks of people in many situations, those who wandered the desert, those who are hungry and thirsty, those in prison and all these people gave thanks to the Lord for his goodness and his enduring love. No matter what situations we find ourselves in we too can know that God loves us and his love for us endures forever. God sealed this promise for us and shows his everlasting love by sending his only Son to the cross to die for us all. We all seem to know this but do we take time everyday and remember to give God thanks? I ask that during this Lenten season we all try to remember to take a moment everyday and simply say, “Thank You God.”

Kim May

March 25 – Fifth Sunday in Lent – John 12: 20-33

In these verses, Jesus explains why he must die--to pay the penalty for our sin, and to show his power over death.

In reading and studying these verses, the words of the hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” came to mind. I want to share with you the words, which so beautifully tell us what our response to his loving sacrifice can be.

When I survey the wondrous Cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ, my God;
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.

See, from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e’er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

**Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a tribute far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.**

Carole Oggero

March 26 – Isaiah 50: 4-9a

The Sovereign Lord has given me his words of wisdom... We all are exposed to God’s wisdom when we study his word. I have found this to be the primary vehicle God uses to teach about his ways.

Morning by morning he wakens me and opens my understanding to his will... God desires all of us to spend quality time with him. Since my brain does not function as well in the morning I have found this to be my best time to just soak in whatever God desires to show me.

The Sovereign Lord has spoken to me... I remember a very simple lesson years ago. I was reading the Bible before going to work. One of the passages said “do good when it is in your power to do good.” For whatever reason I said, “Lord show me an example of this verse today.”

Probably somewhere about mid-day a woman entered the building where I worked. I normally wasn’t in the position to greet visitors but I sensed I was supposed to speak to this woman. She and her daughter were not only lost but were almost out of gas (they had a New York license plate). I knew that because of our somewhat desolate location, she probably would run out of gas before reaching a gas station.

Then the Bible verse I had read came to my mind. I knew what I needed to do. We just happened to have a working gasoline dispenser on our property at the time. This was not available for public use.

I believed we were to give her some (just enough to get her to a gas station.). They were most grateful and off they went. I felt good because I knew this was a divine encounter. First, she came to the only place that happened to have a gasoline pump which she could not have known about. Second, I was the only one around at that moment that had the power to help her.

.....*and I have listened*

Marian Robey

March 27 – Isaiah 44: 1-8

As I read these verses I was brought back to the Ten Commandments. I hear the first one over and over again in my head. This commandment is ringing throughout this passage. I even went back and read that first commandment again and I see that God is reminding us who God is in Isaiah's passage, "I am the Lord your God". God is the one who gave us everything we have now. There is no one better and more powerful than God. If there is – show yourself.

Can you say that you are more powerful than the Lord God? I know I can't. I know deep down inside of me that my God will give me everything I need each and every day. Even the bad things – they are to remind me that I don't have control over what happens. God does. And it is good that I am being reminded of this too.

Dear Lord –

Thank you for all that you have given us and please help us to stay humble before you. You are our Almighty God and we shall not forget it.

Amen.

Jenn Vajda

March 28 – Psalm 31: 9-16



The psalmist is asking for solace and a refuge from the weariness and distresses of her life. She is beseeching the Lord to remember her; reminding herself that love and trust in her God will deliver her from this anguish and distress.

For me it is easy to think only about myself and to dwell on the difficulties I have. I forget that others for centuries have lived lives that were emotionally, spiritually and physically very taxing and more difficult than I want to imagine. It reminds me that I am human and that the trials of my life are not so unusual or significant. This is a humbling thought that helps me to think of my life and contributions as one cog or gear in a vast human system that really does not revolve around me. Indeed the good news is that the world (or our concept of our universe) does not revolve around us humans – it revolves around God and his goodness and mercy.

Verse 16 is “Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love” is the last line of this section. This reminds me of one of my favorite lines in our worship services: “May His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you.” How wonderful to think that God’s shining face of warmth, love, trust, honesty, joy and peace can shine on me and make me whole. This light can bring my life full circle – worth the pain and struggle because of his great gift of goodness. Even though the world does not revolve around me, my struggles and trials and joys and happiness.... God has not forgotten me and God can give me moments of peace and great joy!

Elizabeth Young

March 29 – Luke 22: 14-23

Thanksgiving may just be my favorite holiday. I love the family gathering, the atmosphere of sharing, and, of course, the wonderful meal. There’s no hectic preparation (unless you count the food) like Christmas or even Easter. We just concentrate on being together and eating that wonderful meal.

We share a much more wonderful meal that nourishes our souls...the meal that Jesus established as he shared the Passover Meal with his disciples... the meal that he asks us to share “in memory of me.”

We should approach the communion rail with the same anticipation we feel as we head for the Thanksgiving feast. Instead, it seems the ritual of communion has lost its meaning. It’s lost in the repetition of the sacred words, much like the way we say the Lord’s Prayer without thinking of the beauty and meaning of its language.

This Holy Thursday I resolve to celebrate with thanksgiving. I resolve to think of the meaning of the words, “this is my body given for you,” and “this is my blood poured out for you.”

I resolve to remember every time I share in the communion meal to do it in memory of the one who gave himself for me.

How about you?

Catherine Plummer

March 30 – Philippians 2: 5-11

This passage from Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi is about the joy of serving and an invitation (challenge?) to imitate Christ’s humility. In addition, the verses are probably from a hymn sung by the early Christian church. Lutherans who have been around for a while may recognize parts from our worship as well.

As I read the passage, I could recall the sound of my father’s voice singing, “and became obedient unto death- even death on a cross”. Somehow, in my young ears it sounded both a lament and a warning. I struggled with the idea of a son who could be so obedient to his father that he would even submit to death to do his father’s will. All through my early years and my Catechism Classes, I

struggled to wrap my mind around a son who was this perfect and this strong. It was not until years later that I read the sixth verse and the words “who...did not consider equality with God something to be grasped”, that I was able to understand it is not the death, but the servant hood that we are to imitate.

What finally made me embrace this hymn was the idea, expressed in verses seven and eight, that Christ did not just have the appearance of being human- he actually became human to identify with our sins. Understanding that Sin is a turning away from our relationship with God; and Christ, part of the triune Godhead, not only had that relationship but also lived for it, I now saw why he had to become human. In addition, with this I understood that paradox of a being that was both fully divine and fully human. Moreover, for me the good news was that since I was only human, I should work to imitate Christ, but accept who I am with my human limitations. Paul writes in Romans 3:23, “We all sin and fall short of the glory of God”, yet everyday we are called to become the servant to others, as Christ became the servant.

During our Lenten journey, it is easy to fall into the trap of becoming the suffering servant in Isaiah 53 and focus only on what we are asked to give up. However, would it not be easier for us to ask, “What can I give back, rather than what can I give up?”

Clyde Beury

March 31 – Psalm 118: 1-2, 19-29

Nothing in these verses seems to introduce or to be related to verse 22, “***The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.***” The overall message of the psalm is praise to God, rather than praise to people since people are basically untrustworthy; only God can be trusted to help in times of trouble, to be strength and salvation.

So what is verse 22 all about?

Obviously, from our CE (previously, AD) historical perspective, we know that our Savior is the rejected stone that will become the Chief Cornerstone. We know that Jesus was totally rejected by the leaders of his faith, and subsequently by the blood-thirsty masses that blindly followed that sinful leadership. St. Luke in chapter 13, verse 34 tells us of how bitterly Jesus mourned that rejection by his own people. And yet, God meant for that rejection to one day stand as the cornerstone of the building of his Kingdom, his Church, within the very hearts of his Blessed Children. Thanks be to God!

Michael J Reynolds

April 1 – Palm Sunday – Luke 19: 28-40



“Then they brought the colt to Jesus; and after throwing their cloaks on the colt, they set Jesus on it.”

Have you ever thought about the fact that Jesus does not climb up on that colt by himself? The disciples, after finding the colt, bringing it to Jesus, and covering it with their cloaks, then lift Jesus onto the back of the colt. I am often struck by the closeness and intimacy involved with this action. It seems almost unnecessary. I mean Jesus has healed the sick, restored the sight of the blind, fed the 5,000 and resurrected Lazarus from the dead. I would imagine he could have stood upon a fallen tree or a nearby wall and hoisted himself onto the back of that colt somewhat effortlessly. Yet, that is not how Luke reports it. According to Luke, it is his close friends who gently and lovingly lift him onto the back of the colt.

It is a quick moment and easily overlooked, but it is just one of many intimate moments that Jesus will share in the last days of his life. There will be the washing of the feet, the sharing of the bread and wine, the praying in the Garden, and the kiss by Judas. All intimate and close moments that reveal an openness and a willingness on the part of Jesus and the disciples to rest upon each other, feed each other, and act lovingly toward one another. And all these moments lead to one other where loving and gentle hands will reach up under the arms of Jesus, put their faces to his face, and set him down from the Cross.

The journey of discipleship is marked with close intimate moments. Moments where we will be called to stand ready to love one another in gentle and life giving ways. Times where we will be called to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, wipe the tears from those who mourn, and hold the hands of one who is dying.

Gracious Lord, may we be strengthened by your love so we may rest upon one another in times of struggle, lift up one another in times of weakness, and carry one another in moments of sorrow. As our journey to the cross grows closer may we be lifted and guided by your death defeating love. Amen

Pastor Colleen Cox

April 2 – Isaiah 42: 1-9

“Thus says God, the Lord, who gives breath to the people...”

Breathing.... it is something we all take for granted right up until the moment we cannot catch our breath. Think about the times when we have sprinted inside to avoid the rain, when we run up the stairs to fetch the crying child, when we are exercising, when we are sick and coughing, when we have the wind knocked out of us. These are all moments when our breathing, or lack of breathing, is all that is on our minds. But have you ever stopped to realize that we breathe because God first breathed for us?

In Hebrew the word is ruah and it literally means the breath of God. And whenever I hear this word I am instantly transported back to the beginning. In Genesis 1:2 it says, *“the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind (ruah) from God swept over the face of the waters.”* Then in Genesis 2:7 it is the same creative breath which formed humankind. *“Then the Lord God formed mankind from the dust of the ground, and breathed into the nostrils the breath (ruah) of life.”* God’s life giving breath brought order to chaos, God’s breath was the spark of life for humanity, and God’s breath is active and given to all the people of the earth.

The word of the Lord that comes to the prophet Isaiah reminds us all of God's creative powers and none are more life giving than the breath that God gives to all people. It is an intimate act, breathing. Think about holding a baby and feeling the breath of the baby on your neck. Think of hugging a friend and feeling their breath on your face. To feel the breath of someone we love requires that we are close to one another.

This is how close God is to us. Close enough that we can feel God's breath on our face. Close enough that we are reassured it is the ruah of God that brings us life, gives us strength, empowers us for discipleship, and guides our waking and our sleeping. Our God is not a far off God. Our God is a close intimate God who is in charge of and active in our lives. As we journey together this Lenten season may we be reminded of how close God is to us...close enough to breathe on us, in us, and for us.

So take a deep breath.....

Pastor Colleen Cox

April 3 – Isaiah 49: 1-7

"I have placed you as a light for other nations; you must take my saving power to everyone on earth"

God's desire is to love and bless the world. In the words of the prophet Isaiah we hear that God's plan for salvation is to extend beyond Israel to all peoples. So often we get "caught up" in our own little circle of influence that we forget our connection to rest of the world. At the last youth group retreat, we did something called a map prayer. The group stood in a circle with a globe in the middle. Everyone reached out and touched the globe in a different spot. Then each person prayed aloud for the place they had selected. For some reason I found that prayer extremely powerful. On one hand, it was heartwarming to pray for places like Tanzania and Thailand and to realize that we know people in those places. When we prayed for them, we could picture them in our minds. Yet, it was also moving to pray for countries and people that we do not know. It reminded us that God's love connects us to all people, even those we do not know personally. Perhaps if we spend more time praying for one another, we can spend less time warring with one another.

Let us pray:

Saving God, may your love for all nations motivate us to love the world and all its people. Break down the walls that divide nations and bring reconciliation to places of violence and war. Fill us with your peace and help us to share that peace with the world. Amen

Pastor Sharon Taylor

April 4 – John 13: 21-30

"So Judas took the morsel and went out at once-and it was night"

It seems appropriate that Judas left in the darkness. Perhaps John meant the darkness that surrounded Judas or perhaps John meant the darkness that filled Judas. The text tells us that Satan entered into Judas. John wants us to know that it is always night when one chooses to follow the call of evil rather than the call of God. Jesus gave Judas every opportunity to choose the good.

Even though Jesus knew that Judas would betray him, Jesus still got down on his knees and washed his feet. Even though Jesus knew that Judas would hand him over to be killed, Jesus gave him the bread of life. I don't think I could have done that. I don't think any of us could do that. That's the difference with us and Christ. Jesus, because he is God, is able to love unconditionally. Jesus is able to love the unlovable. I often think about that fact when I give communion to others. I remind myself that Christ is the host of this holy meal, and if Jesus gave himself for Judas then certainly he will give himself for anyone. There are churches where some people are refused communion because they are not members or because they have not properly confessed their sins. Yet, Jesus gave Judas the morsel when his heart was still filled with evil. And even though Judas was rushing off to do his dirty deed, he still accepted the piece of bread. When we come to the Lord's table, Jesus offers us the bread of forgiveness; the bread of new life. Jesus loves us even when we are not very lovable. Jesus loves us even when our lives are full of darkness.

Let us pray: Loving Jesus, your gift of love is sometimes overwhelming because we know that we do not deserve it. Bathe us in the light of your love and guard us against the evil one. Help us to accept the gift of your grace and help us to extend that grace to others. Amen

Pastor Sharon Taylor

April 5 – Maundy Thursday – John 13: 1-17, 31b-35



“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

Three times in two verses we hear “Love one another.” It is a command. Jesus loves so we must do it also. This is how people will see that we are Jesus’ disciples.

Love brings with it expectations. In the model we have from Jesus we see demonstrated sacrifice. In a world that is all about me, this is quite a foreign concept. God was willing to come to earth in his son Jesus Christ to die that we could have forgiveness, salvation and new life.

It was a choice that cost a life to give life. Jesus wants everyone to know that he loves them. He has given that responsibility to us. If we are his disciples, which he has called us to be, we have been given the command to “Love one another.”

This is not easy, just as it was not easy for Jesus to show his love for all of us. I believe a way we can show love is by taking the time to listen to people. There is so much “downness” in our world because we feel so insignificant. People often dismiss themselves because everyone dismisses them.

Another of those expectations is to forgive one another. That is not always easy to do. Anger is something that seems easier to hold onto than let go of. In the end we realize that holding on to the anger hurts us more than the other person. It takes love to let go of anger and forgive.

Loving one another is not always making things about ourselves. This is not to say that we erase ourselves. It is to say that we usually do a good job of getting enmeshed with people and owning all of their “stuff.” Love is about connecting but not becoming.

Sacrificial love is a life long learning process. As we are in this Holy Week, let us meditate on Jesus’ model to help us in our learning of how to love. It is only with his help that we can begin and continue. It is a command and a choice.

God of love, thank you for sending your son Jesus to show us how to love each other. Continue to empower us to share your love with others that they may come to experience your love. Help us to see all the opportunities you give us to share your love. In Jesus’ name. Amen

Pastor Bruce Thorsen

April 6 – Good Friday – Psalm 22



When I first read this psalm, I noticed that it consisted of three distinct parts. The psalmist spends the first part of the psalm complaining bitterly to God about the suffering in his life. He then asks briefly for God’s help, before concluding with what seems like a conditional song of praise, as in, “This is how I will praise you if you help me!”

I really believe that God wants us to turn to him even when we are suffering and in pain, or are angry with him, or are feeling like we are always the victim. There is nothing we can bring before God that he will not listen to! And it is a sign of trust and faith in God to ask for his help. We wouldn’t ask if we thought he wasn’t interested in our situation. We get ourselves into trouble, though, when we start bargaining with God to get our way. “If you remove this situation, I will always do this, or will stop doing that...” Even though we say these words as a prayer to God, we are really trying to *be* God. My will be done, not Thy will be done!

Before his crucifixion, Jesus prayed to his Father on the Mount of Olives, crying out, *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."* *An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him. And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground.* (Luke 22:42-44) While we don’t know Jesus’ exact petitions when he ‘prayed more earnestly’, we know from the preceding verse that he was suffering and was asking God to ease his suffering. But ultimately he told his Father that he was willing to submit to God’s will. He trusted in God’s plan for him without bargaining or trying to make God ‘see it his way’, even when he was in anguish. *And he was strengthened.* No matter how dark our lives may seem, we can take comfort in the fact that God is listening, God has a plan for us, and God will give us strength to carry out his plan. And for that we praise him!

Becky Dreibelbis

April 7- Holy Saturday – Lamentations 3: 1-9, 19-24

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his...v5

I have often heard the Saturday before Easter referred to as "Silent Saturday." Here we are - yesterday Christ died - died the most humiliating death and we're waiting and waiting for the resurrection to occur - and yet God is SILENT.

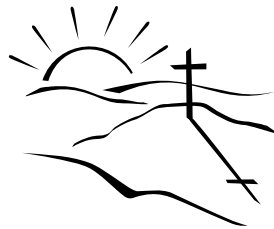
We've all been there - asking God - "Where are YOU?" We all experience pain and suffering - we suffer and we watch loved ones suffer and even die and we ask, "God where are you? Why are you not here - do something, say something -if you're God show your face."

Well, God has shown his face and continues to show his face. God has defeated death- and will show his face tomorrow when we celebrate the resurrection - but for now we wait and we trust in the God who has always been faithful and will continue to be faithful.

Gracious God - we thank you for this day - even as you are silent. Remind us in real and tangible ways that you are present and near us in times of both sorrow and joy. Help us to know and remember that you are faithful - that you have defeated death and that we have been united in Jesus' death and will be united with him in a resurrection like his. Give us comfort and peace - this day and always.

Jenn Casey

April 8- Resurrection of our Lord – John 20: 1-18



It is not until the Risen Jesus calls her by name that Mary recognizes him. Perhaps her vision was clouded by her tears. Perhaps her mind was clouded by her grief. Either way, Mary did not see Jesus for who he really was. She expected him to be dead. Yet, when he speaks her name, the veil of confusion is lifted and she says, "Rabboni...teacher".

It reminds of what Jesus said back in Chapter Ten of the Gospel of John. Jesus said, "The sheep know their shepherd's voice. He calls each of them by name and leads them out." Then Jesus says, "I am the good shepherd". Indeed, on that Easter morning, Jesus' voice led Mary out of despair into joy. Jesus' voice led Mary out of death into life. The Risen Jesus promises the same for us. He promises to call us by name and lead us out of death to life.

Let us pray: Almighty God, we give you thanks for a love that is stronger than death. Help us to hear the voice of our Savior amidst the noise of this world. Fill us with the Light of our Risen Shepherd and lead us by his paths of peace and justice. Amen

Pastor Sharon Taylor

