



**BECOME  
A  
BEACON**

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**NATIONAL CITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
2020 LENTEN DEVOTIONAL**

Cover Designed by Colleen Walsh

## **Welcome to the 2020 Lenten Devotional**

National City Christian Church is honored to make this Lenten Devotional available to you in print, via email, and through our church website. It contains written meditations by members of the National City community sharing their faith journey during Lent. We pray these meditations will serve as useful resources for your days of spiritual preparation as we journey together towards Easter Sunday.

### **Become a Beacon – Living in the Light**

Growing up in Charleston, S.C., I was blessed to spend many of my childhood days exploring the coastal islands with my father and older brother. I was fascinated by the sea, the rocky jetties leading ships into the harbor, and above all else, the old, abandoned lighthouses. My dad, as a former pilot and then an air traffic controller, took great pains to explain to us how sailors in the “old times” used any navigational guides available to find their way to port: the stars, phases of the moon, shipping currents, timing of the tides, etc.

But none were more important he would say than the lighthouses. From the top of those stone towers, dad would share how the beacon would reach far out into the ocean darkness giving captains of those wooden vessels a glimmer of hope that land wasn't far from sight, and they were indeed heading in the right direction. I still remember the excitement on my first adventure to Morris Island just off the coast. The first stop was the island lighthouse which had been deserted years earlier due to modern radar and depth finders that now guided ships to safety.

You can call me old-school, but I think during these days of Lent as we face continued, national turmoil and a time of transition at National City, we certainly could use some “old-fashion” lighthouses. In fact, if we look carefully enough, we will see them in the pews all around us. As we read these devotions together during the next 40 days, I challenge each of us to see if we are truly living in the light and whether our batteries need some extra voltage. One thing I do know, there are some struggling ships out there looking to National City Christian Church to show them the way safely home. Will you become a beacon?

*Rev. Steven C. Baines  
Senior Strategist, Editor*

**February 26 – March 1**  
**Jesus Is Led Into the Wilderness**  
**Matthew 4:1-11**

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"*

*Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'"*

*Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.*

**Wednesday, February 26**

"Merry Ash Wednesday!"

Hmmm. Have you wondered what is an appropriate greeting for this day? After all, it is the beginning of a 40-day Lenten journey of spiritual preparation before Easter. But "Merry" Ash Wednesday? To be sure some still continue the partying of yesterday's Mardi Gras, but today isn't about merrymaking.

"Happy Ash Wednesday!"

Not really a happy day either. Ash Wednesday is more about ashes and remembering our mortality -- "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." Not generally a happy thought, but an important one to ponder on this day.

"Have a Holy Ash Wednesday!"

"Holy" is a good word. After all Ash Wednesday is a Holy day set aside as unique. What makes Ash Wednesday distinctive is that on this day we resolve to begin living differently for the next 40 days. How will you dedicate this season to walking daily with God and worshiping weekly with God's people?

So what is an appropriate greeting for this day? Merry? Happy? Holy? Truthfully, the good news of this day is not in the salutations we share, but in the salvation that we have already experienced through God's mercy. Our focus is not so much on the spiritual disciplines that we do – or do not do – but remembering what has already been done for us in Christ Jesus.

May your Lenten walk be truly meaningful as you draw closer to God and closer to one another; and on this day, may your Ash Wednesday be a heavenly reminder that God is with you always – in this earthly life and in the life that reunites us all.

**Prayer: We greet you this Ash Wednesday, O God, confessing our faults and short-comings, and recognizing our need for your grace and mercy. In these next 40 days, may we walk more closely with you and your people, even as we re-dedicate our heart, soul, and mind to you. Amen.**

*Stephen Gentle*

### **Thursday, February 27**

This episode in Jesus' life is a parallel to the trials faced by Israel as they fled Egypt and wandered in the desert for forty years. The Hebrew people fleeing Egypt were forced to learn to trust in God. When they were faced with hunger, they received bread from heaven. When they faced thirst, they received water from a rock. But the wilderness proved too much. They turned away from God and created golden idols to worship.

With each temptation, the gospel writer connects Jesus to Moses and the people of Israel.

Hungry, thirsty, and alone, Jesus is faced with temptation, but he does not give in or give up. He quotes from Deuteronomy, again making the connection between his ordeal and the people of Israel wandering in the wilderness.

While there is a strong connection between these two stories, there is one important difference.

The people of Israel did not learn to trust in God despite God's constant care and provision. They responded by turning away from God. With each temptation, Jesus shows that the only response to God's care is to "worship the Lord your God and serve only him."

Jesus refused to cooperate with Satan to find food, and to achieve status and power. Evil had no power over Jesus and should have no power over us.

God is surely with us during our wilderness times and during times when we are tempted.

It is so very easy to give in and believe that God has no place in our lives. We are tempted every day to put ourselves first, creating idols and relying on our own abilities to get through life.

How do we respond to God's infinite care, even during wilderness times?

Do we respond by turning away from God and worshipping idols of our making?

Or do we, like Jesus, acknowledge the temptation and resist it?

It's your choice. Make it a good one!

**Prayer: Gracious God, I trust you to always be present in my life, even when I don't feel you near. Help me to draw closer to you during my wilderness moments, that I may follow you more nearly and love you more dearly. Amen.**

*Miriam Gentle*

### **Friday, February 28**

The heading in my Bible refers to this time of temptation as, "Jesus is tested in the wilderness."

Have you ever been tested? Or had a period when you were forced to depend on God? I can only imagine that that is what it feels like when one is forced to live on the streets with no food or shelter, or when one is so sick that medicine and doctors cannot help. I know some have had these experiences.

What I noticed studying this passage is that first Jesus is tested to rely on God for everything and then Jesus shares how he was tempted by Satan after the time of testing. Jesus perseveres, tells Satan to take a hike, and does not succumb to the high-stakes opportunity.

For me, temptations come in many forms all day long. Giving in, in hindsight seems to be such a ridiculous thing and yet it is sometimes my path of least resistance, things I do without thinking, habits that I haven't mustered the courage to send off on a hike because I find temporary comfort in them. When I see the temptation for what it is, I pull out my favorite scripture, 1 Corinthians 10:13 (NIV):

*No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.*

I sometimes recite it multiple times to help me focus on God and God's plan for wholeness.

**Prayer: Lord of heaven and earth, help me to look to you for guidance in everyday situations and decisions to follow your plan for my life as Jesus persevered to follow Your plan for his life. Amen.**

*Teresa Swihart*

### **Saturday, February 29**

The temptation of Jesus story is indeed a strange duck. It falls immediately after the baptism of Jesus where we hear the spirit of God declare, "this is my Beloved son with whom I am well pleased." Call me a skeptic, but does a loving father proclaim his love for his only son, and then drive that son into the wilderness to face a fierce adversary.

Maybe – just maybe, if that loving father knows that his love is a refining fire that molds, shapes, and brings forth something ready for fire itself. These moments of fasting and temptation are real to Jesus, and they are real to us. We face our own demons attacking us from subtle places and in the haunting spaces of loneliness and doubt. And we do so, not knowing exactly what we will look like or be prepared for on the other side.

If we are honest, aren't we all tempted to seize power for ourselves at all cost? Aren't we all tempted to know security by testing our and God's limits for our well-being? Aren't we all desiring to play God's role in the biggest act of life?

The good news for us during these Lenten days is found in verse 11, "Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him."

**Prayer: Oh, loving God, though I face fiery trials and tempter's snares, I will wait for you for you are never too far. Amen.**

*Steven Baines*

### **Sunday, March 1**

Editor's Note: Sundays during Lent are known as "little Easters" when believers in the risen Christ join for prayer and worship. Today, we pause in preparation for our worship to God through a Lenten hymn or prayer. May these songs and prayers prepare our hearts to receive God's holy presence and abiding.

#### **A Prayer from Deitrich Bonhoeffer:**

*I Cannot Do This Alone*

(This prayer was used as one of the Lenten meditations in *The Mosaic Bible*.)

*O God, early in the morning I cry to you.*

*Help me to pray and to concentrate my thoughts on you;*

*I cannot do this alone.*

*In me there is darkness, but with you there is light;*

*I am lonely, but you do not leave me; I am feeble in heart, but with you there is help;*

*I am restless, but with you there is peace. In me there is bitterness, but with you there is patience;*

*I do not understand your ways, but you know the way for me....*

*Restore me to liberty, and enable me to live now that I may answer before you and before men.*

*Lord whatever this day may bring, Your name be praised.*

**Amen.**

**March 2 – 8**  
**Nicodemus Searches for Eternal Life**  
**John 3:1-17**

*Now there was a Pharisee named Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews. He came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." Jesus answered him, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above." Nicodemus said to him, "How can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother's womb and be born?" Jesus answered, "Very truly, I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and Spirit. What is born of the flesh is flesh, and what is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not be astonished that I said to you, 'You must be born from above.' The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." Nicodemus said to him, "How can these things be?" Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand these things?"*

*"Very truly, I tell you, we speak of what we know and testify to what we have seen; yet you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you about earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you about heavenly things? No one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*

**Monday, March 2**

God sacrifices His Son for our salvation and our everlasting life! Wow! I hesitated to select this passage for a meditation because it encapsulates so much of the Christian message in just a few phrases - phrases that have been parsed and interpreted by saints and scholars through the centuries. But I identify with Nicodemus, a very human member of the religious establishment in Jerusalem, who was comfortable with his position yet curious and open to the ministry of Jesus. I understand Nicodemus' spiritual openness, but I also can appreciate his discretion in making a private visit to Jesus. He wanted to learn more, but he wasn't ready to risk making huge changes in his life. For me and maybe you, there is always the tendency to keep my mind focused on the "here and now" as I deal with the requirements and distractions of my everyday life, and to avoid or minimize experiences that challenge those priorities. My commitment to attend Sunday worship and to spend time in daily prayer and meditation is an important counter balance to this tendency, and over time has changed the way in which I experience life. As a pharisee and "teacher of Israel," Nicodemus also spent time in worship, daily prayer and meditation on holy scripture. His decision to meet with Jesus arose from his desire to further understand God's presence in his life and in the world.

As we learn in **John**, Nicodemus sought Jesus out and questioned Him about His knowledge of the kingdom of God. Nicodemus' question about whether a person can be born again by passing twice through his mother's womb is probably a rabbinic dialogue device aimed at eliciting further information by offering an absurd interpretation of Jesus' initial statement. And Jesus responds to Nicodemus' desire to understand Heaven with great patience and love. In a few words, Jesus describes His earthly presence as intended to redeem all of humankind through His miracles, teachings and sacrifice.

When I ponder these words of Jesus, I am overwhelmed by the love that God offers to us so freely, love that transfigures our earthly lives and leads us to eternal joy if we only accept it. As a choir

member, I love to sing the chorus "God So Loved the World" from John Stainer's "The Crucifixion" (there are some good recordings on YouTube) because it so movingly presents these words of Jesus' promised love that are at the heart of Christian faith.

**Prayer: Dear God, thank You for offering spiritual rebirth and eternal life to us all. Help me to be like Nicodemus by seeking to become more attuned to what is holy, and by seeking to understand and experience Jesus' message of divine love and redemption. Help me to order my life so that I maintain and strengthen my faith and my decision to follow Jesus' example and teaching now and always. Amen.**

*Kent Woods*

### **Tuesday, March 3**

Nicodemus' silent night visit to Jesus could have been interpreted as an evil visit or to have a private meeting not to be seen. Nicodemus was a "ruler of the Jews," and a member of the Sanhedrin (also known as the Council). Jesus was an unknown too questionable to the Council and considered a troublemaker. Nicodemus had many questions, and Jesus had answers, albeit confusing ones. Jesus replied, "Very truly, I tell you no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again." (John 3:5)

Nicodemus didn't understand the term, "born again," and needed clarification being a teacher of the Jewish faith. The Jewish people consider proselytes to be reborn upon their conversion to Judaism.

Being born and raised Catholic, christened at a month-old, and as an adult, being born again by water and the spirit through Baptism affirmed my faith. But there were times during my illness that my faith wavered with the question, "Why me?" I was ashamed of my weakness. Continuing daily with prayer and scripture reading, I woke up one morning and realized my illness was not life-threatening but life-altering. In that moment I realized that God had me in God's hands and all was good. It strongly reaffirmed my faith, and as I took care of my mother during her illness, I knew I was fine living anew in my God. "For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

**Prayer: Oh, heavenly Father, I affirm my faith in you. May you always remind me – "not my will, but thy will be done." As I live in your light, continue to order my steps. Amen.**

*Theresa Beaton*

### **Wednesday, March 4**

To paraphrase Jesus, he said, I know it's a new concept to you – it's hard to grasp perhaps - but it's like the wind, we don't understand where it originates, or where it's going. In other words, we see the effect but not the cause – that's the way it is when we are born again – it's a great miracle.

The wonderful thing about being spiritually reborn is that you never die – you die physically but not spiritually. It's the pathway to eternal life. Being born of the spirit releases us to simply believe in Jesus and allow his presence to guide our lives and change us from the inside out.

We should always put our trust in God and trust him with the elusive things in our life – the things we don't understand and the things we can't fix and trust Jesus with the earthly things in life as well. Most of all, trust Jesus with the eternal things in your life. He is the only way to be saved, the only way to have your sins forgiven, and the only way to live in Heaven forever.

When we are born of the spirit, we receive light, and we begin to walk in the light. We begin to follow the leadership and guidance of the Lord. Our lives begin to shine with good works. All the glory goes to God, because He drew us to the light, and He is ever working in our lives.

Although all the glory goes to God, we get to share in the satisfaction of knowing that our life in the light with Jesus is the best life anyone can ever have. Trust in the Lord and light your pathway to Eternal Life.

**Prayer: Come to the Light of the world. Come to Jesus Christ today, and start living in the light of the Lord. Amen.**

*Charlie Daniel*

#### **Thursday, March 5**

While reading this scripture, I wondered why Nicodemus had come to Jesus. What was on his mind? It seemed to me that he had come with a purpose but had become distracted by Jesus' talk of "being born from above."

And why did Nicodemus come "by night?" Did his quest cause some worry, angst, or secret longing which could not quite bear the light of day? Are there troubles on your heart which you shy away from bringing to Jesus in prayer because they engender pain, embarrassment, or confusion? Are you open to having God's light bestowed on you or, like Nicodemus, are you adhering to familiar ways of coping and hesitant to adopt a new perspective?

Perhaps it feels safer to hide in darkness, despite your longing for the light, because it is too painful to open the wounded, pained, grieving, or injured places in your soul? What is preventing you from trusting that God's light is beckoning and will lift you up - perhaps fear, distrust, weariness, disillusionment? What do you need to do, during this Lenten season to open yourself to receive Jesus' promise that "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life?"

**Prayer: Dear Lord, during this Lenten season help us to courageously share our wounded places with you and open us to your healing presence, even when it comes in unanticipated ways. Amen.**

*Sarah Hedlund*

#### **Friday, March 6**

My first memory is of accepting Christ as my savior when I was three after my parents spent a week proselytizing me. I've been less dogmatic with my own children, so I discussed this week's passage with my children, mostly Jude (7), to see what they believe and what questions they have. There were more questions than answers. Jude is confident in God's love and has faith in God, but fuzzy on eternal life. He and his sister, Sage (4), want to know how to make their parents immortal. I tried to break it to them easily.

Ultimately, there were more questions than answers. What does it mean to be reborn? What does it mean to have eternal life? What does it mean to believe Jesus is the son of God? What is a spirit (is it like a friendly ghost)? These are the good and honest questions of a child, but also many adults, even firm believers. Fortunately, my children have recognized that the foundation of faith is love, even if they're fuzzy on the details, and open to dialogue.

**Prayer: Abba, we thank you for your love and grace. Help us to be open to the questions we ask and are asked as we rest on our confidence in your love. Amen.**

*Alan and Jude Williams*

#### **Saturday, March 7**

When I am sharing the good news of the gospel with others, I have found that there are generally two types of attitudes in each individual that either I approach or who approaches me. In one there is a spirit of argument and in the other a spirit of earnestness. This is where discernment is very important in determining how far I will go with someone. In some ways it's the same as a doctor diagnosing a patient and offering a prescription. It's not just the medicine alone that is important, it's the dosage.

In the case of Nicodemus, Jesus found a man who was "ready" to make changes in his life. Sometimes as eager as we may be to see someone who is struggling in their life to come to a knowledge of the ultimate truth, they are not ready for a discussion but can only receive the example a believer can demonstrate. Actions will always speak louder than words in the end anyway. Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying, "When all is said and done seems more tis said than done. Well done is better than well said."

When Jesus approached Nicodemus, his heart had been prepared by the Holy Spirit to receive the words of Jesus. This coupled with the perfect example of Jesus was a winning combination to have the dramatic effect that Jesus intended to have on Nicodemus. The process went very smoothly as questions were answered and Nicodemus came to the desired understanding of the love of God revealed through Jesus Christ.

**Prayer: How blessed we are, O God, to have this magnificent gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. May we portray his life in us as accurately as possible to reach many people who are like sheep without a shepherd. May we have humility and gratitude in our hearts as we grow in this love each and every day. Amen**

*Paul Heffron*

### **Sunday, March 8**

Editor's Note: Sundays during Lent are known as "little Easters" when believers in the risen Christ join for prayer and worship. Today, we pause in preparation for our worship to God through a Lenten hymn or prayer. May these songs and prayers prepare our hearts to receive God's holy presence and abiding.

#### **We Walk By Faith**

(This hymn by Henry Alford {1810-1871} was first published in his book *Psalms & Hymns*.)

We walk by faith and not by sight:  
No gracious words we hear  
Of him who spoke as none e'er spoke,  
But we believe him near.

We may not touch his hands and side,  
Nor follow where he trod;  
Yet in his promise we rejoice,  
And cry, "My Lord and God!"

Help then, O Lord, our unbelief,  
And may our faith abound;  
To call on you when you are near,  
And seek where you are found.

That when our life of faith is done  
In realms of clearer light,  
We may behold you as you are  
In full and endless sight.

### **March 9 – 15**

#### **A Samaritan Woman Draws Living Water**

##### **John 4:5-26**

*So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon.*

*A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." (His disciples had gone to the city to buy food.) The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask*

*a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water." The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life." The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."*

*Jesus said to her, "Go, call your husband, and come back." The woman answered him, "I have no husband." Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him. God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."*

### **Monday, March 9**

In this passage, Jesus shines his light on tribal and judgmental divisions, our tendency to write off people who are different from us or who do not meet the mores of our society. As the Samaritan woman pointed out, Jesus, in speaking to her, disregarded the divisions between Jews and Samaritans. Not only was she of another tribe, she was also a woman, and one of dubious morals at that.

Accordingly, there were several reasons why a good Jewish man would not speak to her, let alone carry on an extended theological discussion with her. But Jesus chose to do so. In John's account, the Samaritan woman comes across as intelligent and knowledgeable about the religious differences between their tribes. And it was when she mentioned the Messiah that Jesus announced to her that *he* was the Messiah.

The Samaritan woman took this message to the village, urging her neighbors to come back with her to talk to Jesus. They did, and many Samaritans were converted. John 4:28-30, 39-42. Jesus wisely chose the Samaritan woman, an outsider, to carry the good news of his coming to the Samaritans. And all of this happened because Jesus ignored social and psychological walls that divided people then and that continue to divide us.

**Prayer: Father, help us to overcome the distinctions that divide us, and to recognize that we, and more importantly, "They," are all your children and equal in your eyes. Amen.**

*Sara Ann Ketchum*

### **Tuesday, March 10**

Why did Jesus come to the well? Why did the Samaritan woman come to the well? Why do you or I come to the well (church)? What are we looking for? Who do we think we might encounter there?

The Samaritan woman certainly got more than she had expected. Her heart was not necessarily prepared to meet Jesus. Was she even looking for Him? She maybe was expecting to be filled with water, but with living water? What is that? Surprise, there was Jesus offering her living water, God's Spirit and love.

Are our hearts open to receive the message Jesus brings to us? Do we recognize the Christ, the Messiah? Are we open to His love and mercy? Do we even recognize Him? Are we prepared for this exciting encounter?

The all-knowing Jesus recognizes our needs and is prepared to fill them.

**Prayer: Help us, Lord Jesus, to open our hearts and minds to your presence and to accept you into our lives. May we share you with others as the Samaritan woman did in John 4:28-29. Amen.**

*Kathleen Swihart*

### **Wednesday, March 11**

Jesus never followed the conventional path – or the easy road. He was both human and divine.

In this story he was an exhausted and impoverished traveler whose companions had gone for food without even leaving him a pitcher to dip into the well. Jesus did not perform a miracle like at the wedding at Canaan or feeding the multitudes; rather, he reached out to the Samaritan woman at the well. Perhaps that gesture was a miracle of its own.

No Jewish man of the time would think of speaking to a Samaritan woman – especially in such a public place as a community well. But Jesus spoke to her.

Jesus spoke to her knowing that the details of her life made her a scandal in her village. In fact, the story says that it was about noon. Most of the women came to the well early in the morning or in the evening to avoid the heat of the day. Maybe she came at noon to avoid the dismissive looks...Jesus engaged her. Jesus preached by his actions more powerfully than even his words. He acknowledged that he knew her story and still offered her the living water of God's love. Indeed, he told her that "God is spirit, and those who worship God must worship in spirit and truth." Jesus freed her from the religious controversy of the day about who had the right place to pray. Jesus delivered his message that God's presence is everywhere, and the energy of God's love is living water flowing for everyone. Jesus delivered that message to a woman others would ignore as unclean.

And the woman listened. She was one of the first people to whom Jesus revealed his divinity. She spread the word and the story goes that many Samaritans became believers listening to her.

With whom should we be sharing the message of God's love?

**Prayer: Living and Loving God, we are challenged and inspired by the work of our beloved savior Jesus Christ. Just as he reached out to the woman at the well, help us to reach out and see the light in the most unexpected people. Help us to drink deeply at the well of your Living Water. Help us never take your Holy Spirit for granted. Thank you for your incredible grace that brings us to faith and sustains us unto eternal life. Amen**

*Jane Campbell*

### **Thursday, March 12**

*Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."*

(John 4:13-14)

It is noon and Jesus is tired from the long journey he has made with his disciples. He rests while the disciples go to get food in the nearby city. A Samaritan woman of questionable character approaches him and he asks her for a drink of water. The woman is very wary of the tired gentleman because she recognizes that he is a Jew. And Samaritans and Jews do not socialize.

Jesus neither rejects nor discriminates against her; his sole purpose in conversing with the woman is to allow her the opportunity to recognize her sins and to give her hope that her sins can be forgiven. He was not there to judge her for her sins, but to give her a taste of the living water that never runs dry – God’s amazing grace.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, in this time of distrust and chaotic behavior, help us to grow closer to your word and meditate on the song, which states:**

*Amazing grace how sweet the sound,  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost but now am found,  
Was blind but now I see.*

*‘Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears relieved;  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour I first believed.*

**Amen.**

*Loretta Tate*

### **Friday, March 13**

Having read this passage many times, the one thing that has always stood out to me is the fact that the woman’s name is not in the scripture. Without her given name we are free to step into her story more fully and scribble our names in the margin, Ann, Elizabeth, even Sadye.

Like the woman, I have been to the well many times in my life as I have dealt with the challenges of everyday living, but whenever I have gone to the “well” for that refreshing and saving sip, Christ has met me there.

This story tells us how easy it is to talk with Jesus. Just like Jesus knew all about this woman’s life, He knows all about you and me, our successes and our failures and still, He talked to her and offered her compassion and reassurance. He had what she needed.

If we reached out to Him and talk with Him every day, He has everything we need, and He understands whatever you are going through. If we stay filled through prayer daily it will be easier to share this “water” with others.

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, we are thirsty, hungry people stumbling through the world in need of a drink of living water from the well. Let us strive to lead a better life knowing that you will always meet us there to revive our longing spirits. Amen.**

*Sadye Sanders*

### **Saturday, March 14**

The woman at the well could not understand what Jesus was telling her. She heard his words literally and they made no sense. He asked her to give him a drink, since he was tired and thirsty, having traveled from Judea on his way to Galilee, a three-day journey that took him through Samaria.

In a long conversation, she asks many questions of Jesus who talks of “living water” and “eternal life.” Finally, she says “I know that Messiah is coming...When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us.” Jesus said to her, “I am he, the one who is speaking to you.”

This is a scene away from crowds, a gentle scene between two people breaking down barriers of nationality and orthodox Jewish custom--the centuries-old feud between Samaritans and Jews; the orthodox Jewish custom that forbid a Rabbi to greet a woman in public.

Our personal conversations with the Lord lead us to break down barriers: seek justice, love kindness, love our enemies. Like the woman at the well, we don't always understand. We don't always know how. The time of Lent is so welcome, as it draws us back to deepen our faith...to talk with our God...and to listen.

**Prayer: Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. (Chalice Hymnal No. 259)**

*Diana Morse*

### **Sunday, March 15**

Editor's Note: Sundays during Lent are known as "little Easters" when believers in the risen Christ join for prayer and worship. Today, we pause in preparation for our worship to God through a Lenten hymn or prayer. May these songs and prayers prepare our hearts to receive God's holy presence and abiding.

#### **A Prayer from John Wesley**

(John Wesley was an English cleric, theologian, and evangelist who was a leader of a revival movement within the Church of England known as Methodism. The societies he founded became the dominant form of the independent Methodist movement that continues to this day.)

O merciful Father, do not consider what we have done against you;  
but what our blessed Savior has done for us.

Don't consider what we have made of ourselves,  
but what He is making of us for you our God.

O that Christ may be "wisdom and righteousness, sanctification and redemption"  
to every one of our souls.

May His precious blood cleanse us from all our sins,  
and your Holy Spirit renew and sanctify our souls.

May He crucify our flesh with its passion and lusts,  
and cleanse all our brothers and sisters in Christ across the earth.

**Amen.**

### **March 16 – 22 A Blind Man Sees the Light John 9:1-25**

*As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him. We must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man." But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know."*

*They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a Sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the*

*Sabbath.” But others said, “How can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?” And they were divided. So they said again to the blind man, “What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” He said, “He is a prophet.”*

*The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight and asked them, “Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then does he now see?” His parents answered, “We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age. He will speak for himself.” His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews; for the Jews had already agreed that anyone who confessed Jesus to be the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. Therefore, his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.”*

*So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, “Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner.” He answered, “I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.”*

### **Monday, March 16**

How could God let this happen? This is often the human response to seeing a tragedy or someone suffering. This is caused by our focusing on what we see on the surface as opposed to digging deeper to look at the big picture – How this creates an opportunity to revel in our belief and be amazed at God’s glory.

In John 9:2 the disciples could not believe that God would allow a blameless person to have been punished by being born blind. It must be someone’s fault. Was it him or his parents? Jesus explains that the impairment is present not as a punishment but so the world can see the impact of God’s awesome power, as revealed through Jesus and his works, i.e.: the curing of his impairment.

These revelations can only occur when this power is fully revealed. Jesus uses the analogy of day and night to explain this. Since one cannot see at night without aid, they are in darkness unless their path becomes lit. When Jesus reveals that he is “the light of the world” he is revealing that the full glory of God’s power can only be seen by those who follow him. When we do not follow Jesus, our world becomes dark and these works are hidden from our view. It is only through our belief in Jesus the Christ that we can see the wonder of God and understand the greatness of his power.

**Prayer: God of glory, too many times we are wandering in darkness unaware of what you are doing in our lives. Open our eyes, God, that through Lenten faith in Christ we may truly see. Amen**

*Tom Kelley*

### **Tuesday, March 17**

Faith is having confidence or trust in God as what he says is true. Having faith allows for us to witness miracles already performed in our lives with the hope for things unseen to still be blessed with by God. As Christians we are meant to walk by faith and not by sight.

In this scripture there is a man who was born blind. Jesus performed a miracle giving sight to this man who had never seen before. Upon listening to what Jesus told him to do he received his sight. After this man was healed the people who knew him before this change in his life was made were able to witness he was new creature. There were many who knew the man and believed Jesus had restored his sight while those who never knew the man did not have faith in this miracle being performed. The man who had been blind gave glory to God while some in the crowd still did not believe, because they had not seen for themselves.

My grandfather was a Disciples of Christ preacher who proclaimed the gospel for over 66 years. One of his favorite Bible verses was John 9:4 which says “I must work the works of him who sent me while it is day; night is coming when no one can work.” Jesus went about his life performing works to the glory of God everywhere he went. As we live our lives we are to continuously be about

our father's business and live to do God's will. Our faith is what guides our path as we let our light shine so that others might see God's grace within us. For those who believe through the miracles God has performed in their life their faith is strengthened. The greatest faith comes from those who believe through the works performed in others' life and through the hope of what is to come.

**Prayer: Dear God we come to you knowing you are all powerful and can do anything but fail. We fully trust and believe you can do all. We humbly ask you to strengthen our faith. Allow us to be a beacon of light for our faith to shine to all your people of the world. Show us the way to be the best Christians possible while living lives to continuously do God's will.**

*Travaughn J. Lovick*

### **Wednesday, March 18**

The story of Jesus healing a man blind from birth should be fairly straightforward, a tale of joy and thanksgiving. Instead this miraculous healing event becomes a source of dissension and controversy, among Jesus' Disciples as well as among Pharisees in the temple.

The Disciples became embroiled in heated conversations on what caused the man's blindness; could it have been misdeeds by the parents that was visited upon their child? Was this man's blindness part of an angry God's retribution?

The Temple priests were also vexed by Jesus' healing of the blind man. Why?

First, because Jesus did this act of healing on the Sabbath, a day on which work of any kind is forbidden. Yes, the priests assumed that an act of miraculous healing involved work.

The priests went even further by disputing whether the blind man had indeed ever been blind. They went so far as to visit his parents, encouraging them to say that this was not their son and that he had not been blind.

In the midst of this heated controversy and doubt, the hero of this story is the blind man, who, when questioned by the Pharisees, spoke a simple statement of faith, "What I know is that I was blind & now I can see."

True blindness was revealed to be among the Disciples and Pharisees who could not see the new world of Christ that was unfolding before them.

**Prayer: Lord, in this time of skepticism & fake news, give us the courage to recognize the truth of your healing spirit, both in our lives and those around us. Give us faith in your works through us, your people. Amen.**

*Kathleen Burger-Gerada*

### **Thursday, March 19**

This parable – a man's blindness is healed, and he "becom[es] a beacon" "living in the light" – teaches *all of us* that focusing on man's frailties (sinning) blinds us to the good in the world.

Jesus heals a man born blind. Rather than rejoicing in the wonder of his rescue from blindness, the Disciples focus on its cause: Whose sinning caused the man's blindness – the man or his parents? Jesus says: neither sinned; the man "was born blind so that God's works might be *revealed in him*." We must work during the day, because "night is coming when no one can work."

The neighbors ask, "Didn't he used to beg?" Really? Come on guys, "I am the man." The Pharisees ask him how Jesus, a "sinner," could be "from God." The man yells, "He's a prophet!"

Finally, the Jews ask the man's parents, "How could he have been blind but now see?" But fearing the Jews would throw them out of the synagogue if they "confessed Jesus to be the Messiah," they say they don't know he was cured, nor by whom. "Ask him; he is of age." He'll tell you.

Then the Jews said, “Give glory to God; Jesus is a sinner.” But the man says, “though I was blind, now I see.”

**Prayer: Dear Lord, “there are none so blind as those who will not see.” Help us to shift our focus from the darkness of the human condition to the light hidden all around us. Amen.**

*Chrys Lemon*

### **Friday, March 20**

The assumption made by the disciples and so many of us is that when we see someone suffering, we believe that person has done something to deserve the suffering. This is not always true. Suffering is not always penal.

Instead of discussing theodicy, or the justice of God, though, I suggest that the blind man’s faith was the resource for his survival – the resource that he used to gain his sight and bring light into his life.

You might argue that the blind man was surviving. He was surviving by begging. However, I contend that God wants us to have life and life more abundantly. This blind man did not just want to survive; he wanted to experience all of the promises of God.

He didn’t care what others thought about him or his predicament. He didn’t argue with Jesus or linger on the thought that he might be considered a spectacle as he fumbled his way through town with dirt and saliva on his face. He didn’t care that he had to find the pool of Siloam where he needed to clean himself in front of strangers.

During Jesus’ ministry, Jesus helped; he healed; and he delivered people. He spread the light of God wherever he went. But, unlike the blind man, Jesus chose to suffer. Jesus was unjustly persecuted by the Roman government, he was violently murdered, and laid to rest in a borrowed tomb. But on the third day, we know what happened!

Jesus’ work on the cross and his resurrection made him the Light of the World. When this blind man received his sight, that light was passed on. When we come to know Jesus as our Savior, that light is passed on. When we help those who are in need, that light is passed on. When we share the Gospel, that light is passed on. When we care for creation, the environment, that light is passed on. And, hopefully, if we are asked, ‘Who has wrought a miracle in your life?’ or ‘From where did your “light” come?’ like the blind person in the scripture, we can proudly proclaim, “...the man called Jesus...”

Sometimes our deliverance isn’t instant. Sometimes it takes determination, physical exertion, and patience to follow through with what God has told us to do. Sometimes we will have to stand our ground when others seek to destroy or deny our miracle. Sometimes we may not understand how God has wrought our miracle, but we can recognize and receive the blessing.

This blind man did exactly what Jesus told him to do. His faith was the resource for his survival.

**Prayer: Miracle working and delivering God, increase my faith that it might be a resource for my survival and abundant life. Amen.**

*Beverly J. Goines*

### **Saturday, March 21**

Where’s your blind spot?

Maybe you know, and maybe you don’t. That’s ok! God knows your blind spots, and God can restore your sight. God can open your eyes to light and glory, shutting out the darkness.

It's not always easy, though. Like the parable, it can get messy. You might get a little mud in your eyes before you can wash them clean. The "answers" are often not immediately clear. It takes time - sometimes a very long time - and what we see may not be what we expected to see. But no matter our journey, God has a plan. God knows the way, and we can see it if we pause, pray, and let the mud be placed on our eyes (metaphorically... probably).

One of my favorite worship songs is *Open the Eyes of My Heart*. Sing along if you know it.

**Prayer: Open the eyes of my heart, Lord. Open the eyes of my heart. I want to see you. I want to see you. Amen**

*Gentry Alexander*

### **Sunday, March 22**

Editor's Note: Sundays during Lent are known as "little Easters" when believers in the risen Christ join for prayer and worship. Today, we pause in preparation for our worship to God through a Lenten hymn or prayer. May these songs and prayers prepare our hearts to receive God's holy presence and abiding.

#### **A Prayer for Hope & Solidarity from Rev. Annabel Shilson-Thomas**

(Rev. Shilson-Thomas is Chaplain at Westcott House, an Anglican theological college in the heart of Cambridge, England.)

Lord, you set your face towards Jerusalem  
and walked alongside those who suffer.  
Be our vision that we too may walk the way of the cross  
and extend a hand to those we meet.

*Lord, give us the gladness of your help  
And support us with a willing spirit.*

Lord, you stopped to heal the sick, cure the lame  
and give sight to the blind.  
Be our vision that we too may give time to others  
and respond to their needs.

*Lord, give us the gladness of your help  
And support us with a willing spirit.*

Lord, you said, "The first shall be last and the last first."  
Be our vision that we too may work towards your kingdom  
when the exalted will be brought low and the lowly exalted.

*Lord, give us the gladness of your help  
And support us with a willing spirit.*

Lord, you ate with tax collectors and sinners and heard their stories.  
Be our vision that we too may listen to the despised and rejected  
and value their lives.

*Lord, give us the gladness of your help  
And support us with a willing spirit.*

Lord, you took time to pray and time to be silent.  
Be our vision that through our prayers, fasting and almsgiving  
we too may draw closer to you and find your way.

*Lord, give us the gladness of your help  
And support us with a willing spirit.*

Lord, you entered Jerusalem with peace in your heart.  
Be our vision that we too may desire peace where others desire war,  
and may work for justice where injustice reigns.

*Lord, give us the gladness of your help  
And support us with a willing spirit  
For you are our hope and our salvation.*

**Amen.**

**March 23 – 29**  
**Jesus Raises Lazarus from Death to Life**  
**John 11:30-45**

*Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"*

*Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."*

*Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.*

**Monday, March 23**

Every one of us needs inspiration to keep us spiritually nourished and to help us to be open to receiving divine guidance. This story is a great example of this principle. Mary and Martha were real people who sought to understand what was happening with their beloved brother who was taken from them unexpectedly. They were living in the light and yet wondered what God's purpose was in all of this.

Sometimes when we are going through a trial it is not just to teach us faith, trust, and hope. It is also for the benefit of those around us who are watching our way of handling a situation. This is now a test of our ability to endure with a power we claim to have as believers in Jesus Christ. Tests like this come up all the time for me in my workplace. Make no mistake about it. People who know we are believers are watching and drawing good or bad conclusions whether we like it or not.

When the Jews in this story saw Jesus weep at the time of learning of the death of Lazarus, they were very impressed with his love for Lazarus. This in itself was no small revelation. Next it made them wonder why Lazarus had died when Jesus had been seen by some of them to restore sight to the blind. A further miracle was about to take place when Jesus restored Lazarus back to life. This event resulted in many believing in Jesus.

There will always be things in this life we don't understand and yet there is a peace offered to those who place their trust in the savior that passes all understanding. This has been my experience many times and often, sometimes years later, I have a certain glimpse of the reason as to the why of a trial or test. In the meantime, I intend to endure to the end by faith.

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, we can so often be doubtful of your loving care and plan for us. May this story build confidence in each of us as we look to you alone for guidance and every grace needed to live our best lives. Amen.**

*Paul Heffron*

## **Tuesday, March 24**

### *His Ways Are Not Our Way*

Jesus felt things deeply. He wept at the news of the death of his friend and he is described as being disturbed when he approached the tomb where Lazarus lay. Just like Jesus, we too feel deeply. Despair, fear, hatred, love, grief, disappointment, and doubt are a few of the deep emotions we experience.

Jesus spoke aloud to God at the tomb. "Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me."

What was he feeling? Was He disturbed by the doubts of those present? Perhaps He wept in response to Mary's despair at losing her brother? Could it be that He wept because we so often fail to rely on the gift of Jesus? Maybe all of these reasons?

What will it take for us to recognize Jesus for who he is and what he represents? When will we believe that His ways are not our ways and cling to our faith? Even when we are in the throes of emotional turmoil – remember. God hears us and is with us! Even when the world seems cold and offers little evidence of His presence.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, please keep my mind focused on Your power. Help me to remember that You grieve when any of us hurt or are troubled. Help me not to give into the power of emotional despair and lose hope, for You are always with me. Remind me that Your ways are not my ways – and that trusting in You is the only path to true peace. Amen.**

*Karla Williams*

## **Wednesday, March 25**

In life, we know death is certain. The pain, the suffering, the grieving comes for all of us. So, what should we do with so much death around us? In John 11, Jesus teaches us in the face of death, we must love. Love deeply, love passionately, love expecting nothing in return.

You may have seen the YouTube video that visualizes the average time you have to live. (If you haven't, I encourage you to Google "The Time You Have (In Jellybeans).") The artist brilliantly demonstrates how short our time on earth is. This reminder of our mortality is a powerful incentive to make the most of the present moment, appreciate the gifts you have been given, and shower your family, friends, co-workers, and even your enemies, with love.

When Jesus goes to be with Mary and Martha as they mourn the loss of Lazarus, Jesus knows his own death is just a few days away. What would you do if you knew your death was just a few days away? Jesus's lesson for us in John 11 is to live urgently and love incessantly. Make time for the people you love and then show them how much you love them. Death is certain. We must move through life in Jesus's footsteps: making the most of our time, showing mercy and kindness, and loving like today may be our last.

**Prayer: Dear God, help us live our life with urgency, purpose, and grace. Make the thought of our own mortality be a constant reminder to value the present moment and love with abandon. We ask this in your holy name. Amen.**

*Anthony Mague*

#### **Thursday, March 26**

Deep within the darkness of adversity, finding light can seem improbable. Becoming a beacon can feel nearly impossible.

Yet God pushes us to seek and believe. For me, Lenten reflection challenges my heart, encourages me to listen, and goads my fear into embracing faith.

By pursuing faith, there is a call to be answered. That call for me is to observe, heed and surrender. In doing so, I may not only see the light, but perhaps be a beacon of light to others.

Proverbs 4:18 says “The path of the righteous is like the first gleam of dawn, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.”

The great civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hamer often sang “This Little Light of Mine, I’m Gonna Let it Shine.” Despite being severely beaten in her pursuit for equal rights, she walked by faith. God’s light shone through her, and she became a beacon of light for others.

Recognizing God’s presence and guidance is hard. In this reading from the book of John, Martha was brought to her knees by grief, weeping for her brother and the finality of his passing. Her faith tested, Jesus gently admonished her for her tears, asking, “Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?” Once Jesus implored God to resurrect Lazarus, her faith was restored. It is within those impossibly dark days that we must hold onto our belief in God’s light. That light that will not only guide us, but allow us to be a beacon that shines for others.

**Prayer: God, in the dark and doubt of Lent when we feel overwhelmed by what life offers us, may your eternal light brighten the tomb of death and revive us into the way of the living through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.**

*Robin Hamilton*

#### **Friday, March 27**

“Jesus wept.” This isn’t the phrase we typically think about when discussing this week’s passage, unless it’s trivia night. We usually think about Jesus’ faith, commanding a miracle into existence despite the doubt of those around him. This week however, reading this passage afresh, I’m struck by Jesus’ emotions. We see his grief (indignation in some translations) and love, frustration and compassion. He doesn’t hide his emotions, nor is he derailed by them because he knows who he is. He moves forward. In this time of transition for our congregation, I find a lot of inspiration in our Lord’s example. Let’s remember who, and what, we are as we move forward.

**Prayer: Heavenly Lord, bless our hearts and minds as we move through our lives and our ministries. Help us to be honest with ourselves and with each other as we work together to fulfill your ministry. Amen.**

*Alan Williams*

#### **Saturday, March 28**

Where were you when we needed you? Why were you not here for us? These are questions that are often asked during our hours of sorrow, pain and grief. We want someone special in our lives to be there for us...family, friends, and ministers. We don’t want to carry the burden of grief alone. We don’t want to be alone.

Often the darkness of grief appears to shutter out any light of life, or feelings of normalcy. The spiritual blanket of God’s warmth and assurances that He is with us during these trying times can

be hard to hold onto. Physical pain and grief are overwhelming and distracting. We cry out for God's arms to carry us through uncertain times.

It is no wonder that Mary sought Jesus, the Comforter. Mary knew that she could express her grief with Jesus, and He would provide needed light in her darkness. Jesus felt the pain of Mary's grief and, also the loss of His friend. Jesus became consumed with grief as well, and He began to weep.

As the son of God, Jesus asked the Father to be with Him as He shone light into the tomb and called Lazarus out to the living. What a sight this should have been for the crowd which had gathered. Astonishment to see that Lazarus was brought back to life and awe to see the wonders of God through Jesus Christ.

We are given the opportunity each day to accept the light of Christ into our lives. We have free will to accept God's love and to model His love in our lives. Caring for others and providing kindness can bring light into relationships. God's light gives us an opportunity to see the beauty in each person. It also gives us the needed charge to ignite and power the light within us.

**Prayer: Breathe on me, breath of God. Fill me with life anew. That I may love what thou dost love and do what thou wouldst do. Amen. (Chalice Hymnal No. 254)**

*Eddie and Loretta Franklin*

### **Sunday, March 29**

Editor's Note: Sundays during Lent are known as "little Easters" when believers in the risen Christ join for prayer and worship. Today, we pause in preparation for our worship to God through a Lenten hymn or prayer. May these songs and prayers prepare our hearts to receive God's holy presence and abiding.

#### **When Jesus Wept the Falling Tear**

(This four-part round was written by American composer William Billings (1746-1800), based on John 11:35. It was first published in *The New England Psalm Singer*.)

When Jesus wept, the falling tear  
In mercy flowed beyond all bound;  
When Jesus groaned, a trembling fear  
Seized all the guilty world around.

#### **Jesus Wept**

by L. Leinbach (From the Moravian Community)

Jesus wept! Our Lord and Savior,  
When he was on earth below;  
Sympathized and felt for others  
In their sorrow, grief and woe.

Jesus wept, what rich compassion!  
None appealed to him in vain;  
All received his consolations,  
E'en the dead arose again.

Jesus wept, amazing wonder!  
For the Son of God to be  
So affectionate and tender,  
To our frail humanity.

Jesus wept! and now, believer,  
Whatsoever our sorrows be,  
He will comfort his beloved  
With his love and sympathy.

Chorus

Jesus wept! O heart so tender!  
Heart of love and sympathy!  
He will comfort his beloved  
Whatsoever their sorrows be.

**March 30 – April 5**  
**Jesus Turns Betrayal Into Forgiveness**  
**Matthew 26:14-30**

*Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.*

*On the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where do you want us to make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover meal.*

*When it was evening, he took his place with the twelve; and while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, "Surely not I, Lord?" He answered, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." Judas, who betrayed him, said, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" He replied, "You have said so."*

*While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

**Monday, March 30**

These scriptures reveal the greatest sacrifice known to man. A man knowingly lying down his life for his fellow man.

The story begins with Judas Iscariot selling His SAVIOR to the chief priests for thirty pieces of silver. His actions bring to mind the scripture, "For what shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36 KJV) The downfall of Judas Iscariot was just the beginning of sorrow, but the end gave humanity the greatest "Beacon of Life – Jesus Christ."

Events now rush to a close, as Matthew describes the final days of Jesus's life on earth. Matthew tells of Jesus's preparation for the celebration of the Passover before he was to ascend to his father in heaven. He discloses in detail how Jesus included the disciples in his preparation. And how he knew just what was needed and who would be the supplier, the man described as the "certain man." Some theologians think that the "certain man" was one of a group of disciples who stayed in the background for fear of being discovered by the high priests and/or the Romans. Whoever he was, he was someone Jesus knew would carry out his requests without questions. Not only did Jesus know of the "certain man's" allegiance to him, but he knew that he was trustworthy, as Judas was not.

In preparing the disciples for his ascension, he was shining a light for them, which in days to come would be an example for how they would have to live when he was no longer with them. Always "Living in the Light" and guided by a Beacon inspired by the spirit of God.

**Prayer: May we always live in the light of Jesus Christ that we may become a Beacon for others to follow. Amen.**

*Loretta Tate*

### **Tuesday, March 31**

There are few people in the Christian faith as hated as Judas. Appalling in his betrayal and despicable in his guile, his disgraceful behavior seems intrinsically removed from Jesus's grace.

Yet, it is at the same dinner that Jesus confronts Judas – and Judas adds further lies to his deception and treachery – that Jesus breaks bread and drinks of the cup in the first communion.

Communion is our faith's coming together, a "practice of unity." As early as the church in Corinth, Christians have recognized it as a symbol that affirms Jesus as Savior and connects us to one another as Christians. Among Disciples, communion is a central element of the worship tradition – open to all believers and celebrated weekly. Liturgies may shift among congregations. Yet still at the core, bread and cup are a remembrance that we are part of a whole body of believers.

In this way, Matthew's 26<sup>th</sup> chapter tells of how one of the Bible's greatest betrayals and one of its greatest unifiers come together in the same meal. It is an uncomfortable juxtaposition. But of course, Jesus's teachings are full of those – love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you" (Matthew 5:44). It is hard to imagine at times how loving your enemies translates to action, but at the Passover supper Jesus shows us. Jesus loves his disciples and leaves them with a tradition that will help them remember him – and remember their connection to each other in a face of a deception that could easily have splintered them.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, this Lenten season help me remember you by trying to live in your grace, love my enemies, and find unity in this world. Amen.**

*Laura and Evan Zasoski*

### **Wednesday, April 1**

From the piercing beam of bright white light emanating from atop a coastal light house to the flashing red marker light atop a tall building or TV antenna, we understand the role of beacons to warn of danger. We may be less aware that every civilian and military airport in the U.S. is marked by a bright beacon designating safe havens for aircraft. These beacons rotate at a designated speed, with a single beam designating a civilian airport versus a split/double beam for a military field. A beacon, therefore, serves both to shield us from harm and to point us in a right direction for our welfare.

As individuals, we, too, can live our lives in ways that serve as a beacon to others of a Christ-like way of life. It's essential then that we keep our inner light shining brightly. We can strengthen and refocus our inner light by regularly participating with other like-minded persons in observing the Lord's Supper which Jesus instituted at the Last Supper with his disciples in the Upper Room. At the news that "one of you will betray me," the disciples became greatly distressed by the uncertainty of which of them was the likely betrayer. The disciples would soon embark on their individual paths to becoming the embodiment of the dedicated follower of Christ that He envisioned.

Endless opportunities await us, as dedicated followers of Christ, to be a beacon – to inspire, guide, and bring hope to others. Every time we smile, we connect, we accept, we love, our personal beacon shows others the way to the salvation Christ offers to all who believe.

**Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to develop, strengthen and sustain our Christian faith in a way that it serves as a beacon to others, encouraging and supporting them as they too strive to be one of your dedicated followers. Amen.**

*David Walker*

### **Thursday, April 2**

Passover focuses on sacrifice which requires preparation. Jesus told Peter and John, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us." The two did so – finding a man carrying a jar of water leading to the owner's guest room where the twelve could eat the Passover meal. At the meal's conclusion Jesus tells his group that the one who betrays him is with him. "Who?" eleven of them wondered. Betrayal is such a dastardly deed. Who would betray any of us?

Most people have probably experienced betrayal. Some betrayals may have seemed petty but the sting still cuts to the core. Taking advantage of another, spreading gossip, telling falsehoods, the examples are innumerable. Trust had been shattered. After this meal none of those in attendance would ever be the same. Such is the price exacted for having shattered a trust.

And the antidote? From this point forward, we should strive to walk uprightly, doing what Christ would have us do every day in every way. For trust will make not just a difference but *all* the difference. Many lives we touch could be so different were we to strive throughout our lives from this day forward to do the right thing. Or to put it another way: do we possess the courage to seize the challenge to trust when tempted to forego the harder right for the easier wrong? As a popular minister concludes his brief meditations: it is not a sermon, just a thought. And it's a thought worth our best endeavors as we dwell on the importance of trust.

**Prayer: Each of us has sinned and fallen short, O Lord. Rather than casting about dispersions focused on previous failures, let us pray not for lighter loads but for stronger backs, as Phillips Brooks reminded us, choosing the harder right over the easier wrong as we trust – even to "Trust and Obey" – in every way. Amen.**

*Nett and Bill Brown*

### **Friday, April 3**

I wonder what went through Judas's mind when Jesus announced the betrayal to the disciples. Did he feel guilty? Did he have second thoughts?

The warning of the betrayal adds a sinister element to the Last Supper – an already dark moment. Jesus confirms at the table, "The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him." We know Jesus will die. But knowing one of his confidants will play a key role in ensuring that death makes it sadder, more upsetting. How could Judas do this? Was it worth 30 silver coins?

Jesus knew Judas would betray him. But he broke bread and shared the cup with him just the same. When Jesus declared his blood was "poured out to forgive the sins of many," that included Judas. What a lesson in forgiveness, mercy, and love. Jesus showed all three of these virtues time and again in his final days - as he was betrayed, beaten, and crucified.

We don't know what was in Judas's mind. But we know what was in Jesus's heart. And perhaps that's all we need to know.

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, we pray to be more like Jesus. In times of betrayal, may we forgive. In times of conflict, may we show mercy. In times of darkness, may we be the light. Help us to love as Jesus loved. In your Son's name we pray, Amen.**

*Aixa Diaz*

### **Saturday, April 4**

This passage from Matthew starts with Judas Iscariot soliciting the chief priests for money to betray Jesus. It proceeds through the preparations for Passover, and the beginning of the Passover meal, when Jesus tells the disciples that one of them will betray him. Then he has to endure Judas portending he is the one who will betray him. This can't end well.

Yet, in the end, he gives his disciples and future generations the gift of himself, and promises he will drink the wine with us in his Father's kingdom. Jesus says, "Take, eat." He says, "Drink of it, all of you." Jesus sees beyond the approaching calamity to a future for all together with him in God's kingdom. We see Jesus leading us from darkness into the light. He isn't deterred by Judas's treachery, but loves all his disciples, and all the people of the world. His only thought is for us.

Let us give thanks for Jesus's loving beacon of light. Let us give of ourselves as He did – sacrificially.

**Prayer: God of the Table, forgive us of our sins and our "Judas" betrayals to find new life though your sacrifice. Embolden us through your covenant offered at that Last Super so that we may live sacrificially offering your unconditional welcome as you unconditionally welcome us. Amen.**

*Steven Cook*

### **Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion**

**April 5, 2020**

Editor's Note: Sundays during Lent are known as "little Easters" when believers in the risen Christ join for prayer and worship. Today, we pause in preparation for our worship to God through a Lenten hymn or prayer. May these songs and prayers prepare our hearts to receive God's holy presence and abiding.

#### **There's a Wideness in God's Mercy**

(This hymn about God's mercy was written by English minister Frederick William Faber {1814-1863}. It was first published in 1854 under the title, "Come to Jesus." A later collection featured it with 13 stanzas, beginning with "Souls of men, why will ye scatter?")

Souls of men, why will ye scatter  
Like a crowd of frightened sheep?  
Foolish hearts, why will ye wander  
From a love so true and deep?  
Was there ever kinder shepherd  
Half so gentle, half so sweet,  
As the Saviour who would have us  
Come and gather round His feet?

There's a wideness in God's mercy,  
Like the wideness of the sea.  
There's a kindness in God's justice,  
Which is more than liberty.  
There is no place where earth's sorrows  
Are more felt than up in heaven.  
There is no place where earth's failings  
Have such kindly judgement given.

There's a welcome for the sinner  
And more graces for the good.  
There is mercy with the Savior  
There is healing in his blood.  
There is plentiful redemption  
In the blood that has been shed.  
There is joy for all the members  
In the sorrows of the Head.

For the love of God is broader  
Than the measures of the mind.  
And the heart of the Eternal  
Is most wonderfully kind.  
If our love were but more faithful,  
We would gladly trust God's Word,  
And our lives reflect thanksgiving  
For the goodness of our Lord.

'Tis not all we owe to Jesus;  
It is something more than all;  
Greater good because of evil,  
Larger mercy through the fall.  
If our love were but more simple,  
We should take Him at His word;  
And our lives would all be sunshine  
In the sweetness of our Lord.

**Holy Monday, April 6**  
**Jesus Prays at Gethsemane**  
**Matthew 26:36-46**

*Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated. Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want." Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour? Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." Again, he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done." Again, he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. So, leaving them again, he went away and prayed for the third time, saying the same words. Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."*

**"BE WOKE!"** has been a prominent term on social media in recent years. Merriam-Webster defines its meaning as *"being aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues--especially issues of racial and social justice."* Centuries before, Jesus repeated a similar appeal to his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. As he "began to be grieved and troubled" (vs. 37), Jesus urged his closest followers to "remain here, and **stay awake and watch** with me" (v. 38). When instead they fell fast asleep, he prodded again, "**Stay awake** and pray!" (vs. 41). And when those whom Jesus had chosen to be with him in his agony succumbed to slumber yet a third time, Jesus questioned "Are you still sleeping?" (vs. 45) and proclaimed "the hour" (vs. 45) and "my betrayer" (vs. 46) are at hand.

Jesus' pleading to his disciples to "*Stay awake! Watch!*" was much more than just an urging to be physically awake. He wanted them (and us today) to "BE WOKE" to injustices surrounding him, closing in, and infecting society. While Jesus' time at Calvary would focus on horrific bodily suffering, today's passage in Gethsemane highlights the worst of Jesus' human experiences of spiritual and emotional suffering. Perhaps we should not be surprised that the very word "Gethsemane" means "oil presses;" for it was there where Jesus, Peter, and the two sons of Zebedee were feeling tragically pressed and squeezed by invading conflicts.

Though all were well fed on that garden night after their Passover supper together, digestion of coming betrayals and doom was proving difficult. Peter, who'd been the very one just before this passage who'd confidently proclaimed, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you" (v. 35) now found himself nodding off again and again. Jesus, who'd thrown himself on the ground to pray, "If possible, please let this cup pass from me!" (vs. 39) was coming to realize God's will was for him to "drink this cup" of suffering.

In our own time, when challenges and trials leave us feeling overwhelmed – even unto sleep to escape the anxieties that we, like the disciples, are yet unready to face – may we rise to "stay woke." With Jesus, may we be alert to pray and be attuned to the dynamics that may be working "from the inside" (like Judas) and "from the outside" (like the chief priests) to de-rail the rule of justice and love in our world.

**Prayer: God of the weary, and blurry-eyed, wake us and alert us to those on this Lenten journey. Through the eyes of prayer and the hope of resurrection morning, may those who weep from the oppressor's injustices be comforted through your eternal grace and comfort. Keep us awake, Oh God. Amen.**

Sharon Stanley-Rea

**Holy Tuesday, April 7**  
**The Betrayal of Jesus**  
**Matthew 26:47-56**

*While he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him." At once he came up to Jesus and said, "Greetings, Rabbi!" and kissed him. Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you are here to do." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the scriptures be fulfilled, which say it must happen in this way?" At that hour Jesus said to the crowds, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I sat in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But all this has taken place, so that the scriptures of the prophets may be fulfilled." Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.*

A person's true grit is often revealed in moments of fear and chaos. On that dark night of arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, the fortitude of all the disciples was revealed as Matthew 26:56 tells us, "All the disciples deserted him and fled."

One disciple, however, has been labeled throughout history as the prime example of unfaithfulness and deception. For over 2000 years, the name "Judas" has been most closely aligned with "betrayal." Yet Judas did not do anything that every one of the disciples and that every one of us have not done.

Betrayal comes from the Latin verb "*tradere*" which means to hand over. It can also mean to be unfaithful, to violate trust, or to deceive.

Have you ever been betrayed? Betrayal is one of the most painful of human experiences. Discovering that someone we trusted and had confidence in has deeply hurt us can cause us to question all of our other relationships.

Have you ever betrayed someone? Think about it carefully. Have you ever "handed someone over" so that you might be more popular? Have you ever let someone down, or been unfaithful, or

violated a trust? Have you ever deceived someone for your own gain? How many Judas-isms have we committed?

Judas symbolizes something about each and every one of us. We all know the brokenness of having been betrayed. We have all betrayed or “handed off” the needs of our sisters and brothers at one time or another. We are all in need of wholeness. We are all sinners. But we are also all forgiven. These are core elements to what this week is all about.

**Prayer: God of infinite forgiveness, embrace us tightly this Holy Tuesday as we remember Jesus’ betrayal and arrest while here on earth. The pain of our own betrayals are far too heavy this day. Forgive us we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

Woodie Rea

**Holy Wednesday, April 8**  
**Jesus Is Sentenced To Death**  
**Matthew 26:57-66**

*Those who had arrested Jesus took him to Caiaphas the high priest, in whose house the scribes and the elders had gathered. But Peter was following him at a distance, as far as the courtyard of the high priest; and going inside, he sat with the guards in order to see how this would end.*

*Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for false testimony against Jesus so that they might put him to death, but they found none, though many false witnesses came forward. At last two came forward and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’” The high priest stood up and said, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?”*

*But Jesus was silent. Then the high priest said to him, “I put you under oath before the living God, tell us if you are the Messiah, the Son of God.” Jesus said to him, “You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”*

*Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “He has blasphemed! Why do we still need witnesses? You have now heard his blasphemy. What is your verdict?” They answered, “He deserves death.”*

Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the Leper on the Wednesday before his death. While there with his disciples, a woman named Mary anointed Jesus’ head and feet with a costly oil of spikenard. The disciples were upset because they felt that this expensive oil could have been sold to help the poor. But, Jesus told them that Mary was doing a good thing. Jesus told them that Mary would be remembered for this act of love which prepared him for his burial.

The scripture for today highlights Jesus’ “trial” and his sentencing to death. The contrast between the behavior of Mary and that of Caiaphas are diametrically opposed. Mary recognized that she was in the presence of holiness. Caiaphas thought of Jesus as the enemy of Israel and the established Jewish religious tradition who needed to be eliminated. And, the difference between Jesus and Caiaphas is even greater.

There is a commentary that states:

Could there be a more striking contrast of the soul than that between Caiaphas and Jesus? Caiaphas dominant, Jesus strong in the strength of submission to God’s will; Caiaphas shrewd and a clever actor, Jesus guiltless in candor; Caiaphas the champion of entrenched systems, Jesus asking no haven but the wide sky of God’s verity; Caiaphas unscrupulous, Jesus patiently trusting in the unseen might of holy love. (*The Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. 7, 1989)

On this Holy Wednesday, may we, like Mary, recognize when we are in the presence of holiness. And, like Jesus, may we patiently trust in the unseen might of God's holy love.

**Prayer: Gracious God, bless us to be known and remembered for our acts of love. Amen.**

*Beverly J. Goines*

**Maundy Thursday, April 9**  
**Jesus is Mocked and Stripped**  
**Matthew 27:27-31**

*Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the governor's headquarters, and they gathered the whole cohort around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head. After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

Human dignity is at the center of today's passage. In it the author of the gospel according to Matthew narrates the way in which the political and religious Empires collectively attempt to rip away Jesus' very human dignity. The Roman soldiers strip him of his clothes, place a crown of thorns on his head, spit on and mock him before leading Jesus to a most torturous death by crucifixion. While Jesus utters not a single word one can only imagine the suffering, pain, and embarrassment he feels as other children of God treat him in such an inhumane way.

Religious scholars and theologians agree that behind Jesus' persecution was the Empire's fear of losing its power and dominion. This man named Jesus knew how to draw crowds, people were dropping everything to follow him. Could he really be the 'new' king of the Jews? Had he and his followers come to overthrow the power that the Empire had worked so hard to build? They couldn't take that risk so the only way to go was to strip Jesus of his human dignity and put him to death by means of a State-sanctioned execution.

Unfortunately, more than 2000 years later, political and religious Empires around the world continue to do the same. They continue to flex their muscles and exert their power in most unjust and inhumane ways. They do this by attempting to rip away the very human dignity of those who even remotely appear to threaten the power of the Empire.

An example of this is the way in which the current administration has enacted measures and continually promoted the inhumane treatment of our underdocumented, mainly Black and Brown siblings from across the Southern Border. Many of these are children. Some have been accompanied by adults but many others have made their way alone. As if the long torturous journey across the devil's hot abode wasn't enough, upon their arrival in the United States the government makes it a point to strip them of their very human dignity. Rather than caring for and providing them safety and security these children are thrown into cages like animals. Since 2017 alone, more than 5,400 children have been separated from their parents at the Southern border and placed into jail cells in for profit prison facilities funded by taxpayer dollars.

One might say, "I'm not involved in this" and maybe even think that such treatment of innocent children is a horrendous act. Nonetheless, as the case with Jesus there was a crowd watching. There were those who stood firmly on the side of their innocent teacher/Rabbi. However, there were others, many of whom were even followers of Jesus up until this point, who turned away from his suffering and stood on the side of Empire.

In this Lenten season we are engaging ways in which to become a *beacon living in the light*. As such it is an opportune time to examine our responses to human suffering, in this case of underdocumented children being caged like animals by the government. It's not a question of partisan politics but about human dignity and the justice of God. How are we responding to this and

other injustices? Are we part of the crowd that just idly stands and watches the injustice happen, or even worse condone it? Or are we responding with righteous indignation and outrage? Today we have the opportunity to heed to the invitation of God and become active participants in holy action that leads to the liberation of the vulnerable, the oppressed, and the marginalized. We have been equipped by grace through the Spirit to be co-workers with God in the building of the Kin-dom of love, equity, and justice for all. Ultimately, are we willing enough so that when we are asked, "What side are you on my sister/brother?" We are able to say with confidence, "Freedom side."

**Prayer: Holy God, today we examine and re-examine those things for which we stand and even those for which we don't. May we always find the strength to stand on the side of love, equity, and justice for all your children. Help us to be committed to be a beacon living in the light and part of the movement that brings about wholeness in a fragmented world. Amen.**

C.J. Rodriguez

**Good Friday, April 10**  
**Jesus is Crucified**  
**Matthew 27:33-50**

*And when they came to a place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull), they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall; but when he tasted it, he would not drink it. And when they had crucified him, they divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots; then they sat down there and kept watch over him. Over his head they put the charge against him, which read, "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews."*

*Then two bandits were crucified with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking him, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down from the cross now, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to; for he said, 'I am God's Son.'" The bandits who were crucified with him also taunted him in the same way.*

*From noon on, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, "This man is calling for Elijah." At once one of them ran and got a sponge, filled it with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save him." Then Jesus cried again with a loud voice and breathed his last.*

Jesus died.

The Gospel accounts of Jesus' death make no effort to paper over the reality of Jesus' death. He did not merely "pass away" or "pass on" or "transition." He died.

Not only did Jesus die, but he suffered death by execution in a public, humiliating, brutal, and painful manner at the hands of oppressive occupying power.

Remembering the death of Jesus has been at the heart of Christian belief and practice from the outset, beginning with the preaching of Peter to the crowds on Pentecost and continuing to this very day in the faith we profess and in the Lord's Supper that we celebrate each Sunday.

The earliest Christians had no annual observance to commemorate the death of Jesus, but kept Sunday as the Lord's Day, on which they gathered in his name, heard and reflected on the Scriptures together, and remembered with thankful hearts the dying and rising of Jesus as they shared the bread and cup. For them and for us too, the death of Jesus is part of a larger mystery that also includes the resurrection.

The death of Jesus is good news because it gives meaning to our own death. United with Christ in death, we are also united with him in resurrection.

The dying of Jesus is good news also because it proclaims God's identification with the least among us and with all of suffering humanity. We remember that in the dying of Jesus, God has chosen to take the side of all who suffer at the hands of the powerful and extends to them the promise of new life.

God is on the side of the nearly 200 Salvadoran asylum seekers and refugees who were deported back to their home country only to be killed upon their return. God is on the side of people who face the death penalty today. God is on the side of all who suffer because of racism, xenophobia, homophobia, misogyny, or any other form of injustice.

The death of Jesus calls us to be like him, to cast our lot with all who suffer death or injustice today, to trust that God will bring us with them and with Jesus to the fullness of life.

**Prayer: We adore you, O Christ, and we praise you, because by your holy cross you have redeemed the world. Amen.**

*J. Michael McMahon*

**Holy Saturday, April 11**  
**The Burial Of Jesus**  
**Matthew 27:57-66**

*When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who was also a disciple of Jesus. He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus; then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.*

*The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' Therefore, command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." So, they went with the guard and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.*

I am taken by the different responses of those in power to the death of Jesus. In these few verses we see two very dissimilar reactions to Jesus' crucifixion and death. In verses 57-61 we learn of Joseph of Arimathea. This is the only time in the story of Jesus that mentions this Joseph, although he is noted in all four gospels for the same gift he gives: the use of his family tomb to bury Jesus. Our text from Matthew simply describes him as rich and a disciple of Jesus. Other gospel accounts add that he was a member of the council, that he had not consented to their decision and action, how he assisted Nicodemus in taking Jesus' body off of the cross and preparing it for burial, that he even bought the burial cloth. Whatever the details, it is clear this wealthy follower of Jesus was willing to be seen and known as his disciple, even though Jesus' teachings had been clear and harsh for those with great wealth and power (Matthew 6:19, Matthew 19:21-23, Luke 4:18, Luke 14:33, etc.)

This is contrasted with the response of the Pharisees (vss. 62-66), also in a position of power, at least relative to most of the citizens of Palestine. The Pharisees respond with fear, and with some of the typical human reactions that are based in fear. They assume the worst will happen and that Jesus' followers will engage in deceit, just as they are doing. They concoct stories that would divert the public's attention should something happen outside of their control. They use force and the

assumption of violence to try to minimize a presumed uprising if Jesus' body does not remain in the tomb.

Most of us reading this devotion have some access to wealth and some semblance of power. Do we respond to Jesus' life and teachings which seek to hold us accountable for our privileges with understanding and empathy, as Joseph of Arimathea did, or do we respond in fear and with force, as did the Pharisees? What if we spent Holy Saturday quietly pondering this challenge?

**Prayer: God of the sacred wounded and light of the oppressed, we wait in silence aware of the void without you in our midst. We wait in silence for your power once again in all places and for all persons. Amen.**

*Allen V. Harris*

**Easter Sunday, April 12  
Resurrection Day  
Matthew 28:1-10**

*After the Sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came to him, took hold of his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."*

Matthew's telling of resurrection morning is probably my favorite of the Gospel accounts of the first Easter. The entire Matthean narrative, from a who's who of Jewish ancestry in chapter one to those dramatic moments with the angel descending from heaven in dazzling light amid the earth shaking from its foundations, seems ripe for the big screen. Let's face it, this is Easter morning, and our over-stimulated senses need to experience the full 3-D Imax, Dolby surround-sound special effects of this miraculous moment – God raising his only son from earthly death to eternal paradise.

But this isn't Hollywood, this is a book of miraculous faith for people of expectant faith. The angel knew the women's hope, and their grief, as displayed in the greeting, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised, as he said." The angels again this Easter morning are proclaiming the triumphant news that we know who you are looking for but he has been raised, your expectant faith has been born again in the risen Christ. Alleluia, amen!

We have been sharing these many weeks how our faith should be a beacon brightly shining for all to experience its beauty and light. But as I wrote in the introduction to this booklet, the beacon also leads the wayfaring sailors safely home. With mixed emotions we have faced the long journey of Lent, but today we hear Jesus proclaim, "Do not be afraid, go and tell my beloved to come, and they will see me." Yes, dear God, the empty tomb has been our eternal beacon; we are living in your light; and today, we are safely home.

**Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for guiding us through these turbulent waters. As we cast our anchors onto solid ground, may we continually proclaim the good news of Easter morning – Christ is risen from the dead; the grave has forever been conquered; and we will live in your house forevermore. Alleluia, Amen!**

*Steven Baines*