

MEETING
JESUS THROUGH
CONVERSATIONS
AT THE
THRESHOLDS OF
FAITH AND LIFE.

ON THE THRESHOLD:

Conversations on the Way to the Cross

Lent is not only a season of repentance—it is a season of listening. A season of standing at the edge of something not yet fully known.



2026
Lenten
Devotional Booklet

February 18 - March 5

gcpc.org/lent



MEETING JESUS THROUGH CONVERSATIONS AT THE THRESHOLDS OF FAITH AND LIFE.

Season of Lent

On The Threshold:

Conversations on the Way to the Cross

February 18 – April 5

gcpc.org/lent

Lent is not only a season of repentance—it is a season of listening. A season of standing at the edge of something not yet fully known.

Throughout the weeks ahead, we will meet Jesus not primarily through sermons or miracles, but through conversations. Conversations that happen at thresholds—between night and day, belief and doubt, grief and hope, fear and trust. These are not quick exchanges. They unfold slowly. They ask honest questions. They leave people changed.

In the Gospel stories we will hear this Lent, Jesus does not rush people across the threshold. He meets them where they are—at a well, in the wilderness, in grief, in darkness—and invites them to stay in the moment long enough for truth to surface. These conversations are not about having the right answers. They are about becoming ready for transformation.

Lent invites us into that same space. To pause. To listen. To notice where we are standing between what has been and what might be. At the threshold of repentance, of healing, of new life.

As we journey toward the cross, may we be attentive to the questions Jesus asks us. May we be honest about our fears and our hopes. And may we discover that even at the threshold—especially at the threshold—God is already at work, drawing us toward resurrection.

— Rev. Karen Wright

Lent Calendar:

February 18, Ash Wednesday: 6:30pm worship

February 22, 1st Sunday in Lent: 9:30am worship

March 1, 2nd Sunday in Lent: 9:30am worship

March 8, 3rd Sunday in Lent: 9:30am worship

March 15, 4th Sunday in Lent: 9:30am worship

March 22, 5th Sunday in Lent: 9:30am worship

March 29, Palm / Passion Sunday: 9:30am worship

April 2, Maundy Thursday: 7:30pm worship. Sacrament of Communion. Music by the Praise Team.

April 3, Good Friday/Tenebrae Service: 7:30pm worship. Music by Chancel & Exaltation! Singers.

April 5, Easter Sunday Worship / One Great Hour of Sharing:

Worship at 9am (Praise Team) and 11am (Chancel Choir, Charter Ringers, & Chancel Brass). Sacrament of Communion.

(The flowering of the cross begins 15 minutes before each worship service.)

Celtic Spirituality History and Practice

Lenten Adult Education Study led by Rev. Karen Wright

February 22 - March 29, 10:45am

History is taken from *How the Irish Saved Civilization* by Thomas Cahill and *Mythical Ireland* by Anthony Murphy. Practices come from *The Soul's Slow Ripening* by Christine Valters Paintner.

February 22: History Overview. *Ancient Ireland, Pre-Christian, St. Patrick Monastic Communities.*

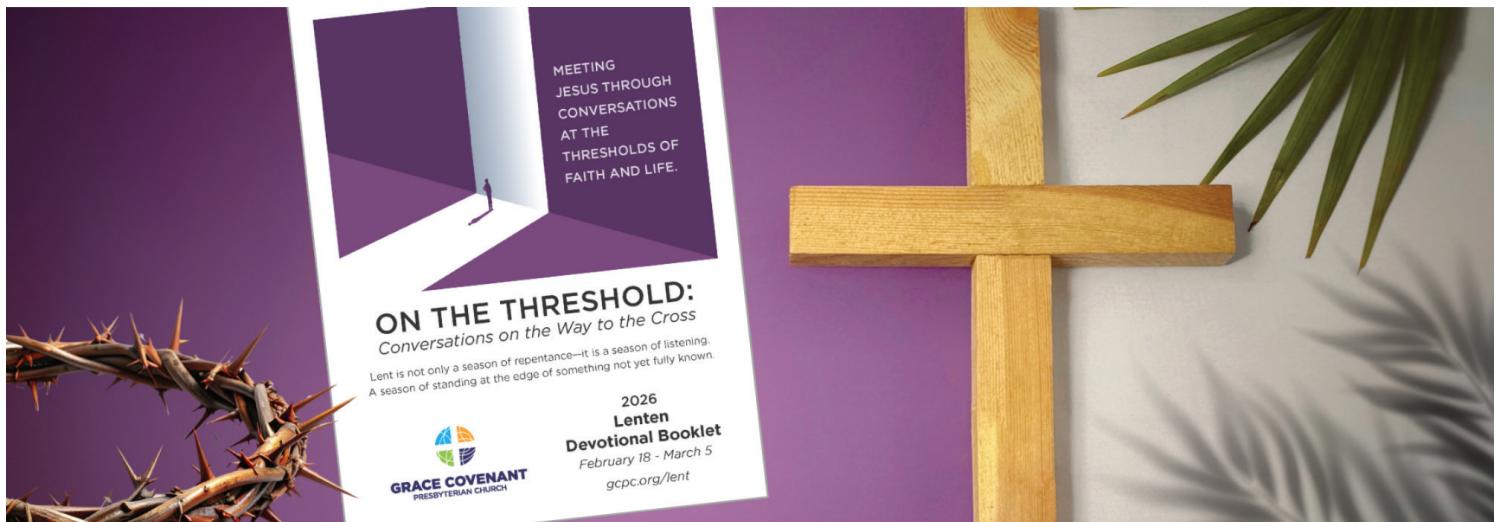
March 1: Spiritual Practice of Thresholds - *Thresholds are moments and places of change. We are invited to pause, notice and listen.*

March 8: Spiritual Practice of Learning by Heart - *Knowing something deep within us is a practice that gives us wisdom even in moments of struggle. It goes deeper than memorization and is engrained within us.*

March 15: Spiritual Practice of Solitude and Silence - *Creating space to encounter God beyond the constant noise of the world. Practice attentive presence allows us to learn to rest in God.*

March 2: Spiritual Practice of Seasonal Cycles - *How do we better live in rhythm with nature and with the season our spirits are in at a given time?*

March 29: Spiritual Practice of 3 Essential Things - *This is a practice to help discern what are the three most important things in this season of your life?*



Lenten Devotional Booklet

Download *February 8th* at gcpc.org/lent

Lent invites us into more than repentance; it calls us into attentiveness.

This season asks us to slow down, to linger with questions, and to listen for God at the edges of our lives—where clarity has not yet arrived and faith is still being formed.

Our Lenten Devotional Booklet is a companion for your Lenten journey, offering reflections to help you pause, pray, and realign with God. In these weeks, we meet Jesus not only in grand moments or powerful acts, but in conversation: quiet, faithful reflections that emerge in in-between spaces. These are holy thresholds—between night and morning, certainty and doubt, sorrow and hope, fear and trust.

**May the reflections encourage you to walk in faithfulness,
trusting in God's strength.**

Thank you to Harold Frye for compiling the donations, photos and YouTube video links, to Patrick Bell for creating the weekly email of the donations, and to Kim Krueger for the design and graphics for the Lent season.

Thank you to our booklet contributors:

Harold Frye, Kevin Johnson, Nelson Townsend, Gene Wilson, Stephen Wing, Emily Nelson Dixon, David Pack, Lauren Bond, Karen Wright, Cheryl Johnson, Rich Maxwell, Eileen Thomson, and Don Wilson.

NOTE:

The devotion of the day is sent out by email by the church office each day of Lent. If you are not on the church's email list, email office@gcpc.org to be added to the list.

Wednesday, February 18 Ash Wednesday by Kevin Johnson

Joel 2:1-2

Blow the trumpet in Zion;
sound the alarm on my holy mountain!
Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble,
for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near—
2 a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and thick darkness!
Like blackness spread upon the mountains
a great and powerful army comes;
their like has never been from of old,
nor will be again after them
in ages to come.

We face dark times. Everybody, sooner or later, will likely face dark times.

Most of us try to just keep an even keel day-to-day. We will often push away dark or troubling thoughts. They scare us. We turn towards diversions. Our phones. Social media. Following news feeds. Anything that distracts.

Joel warns that dark times are coming to the people of his day and that “it is near”. Why is Joel telling them this? I believe it is so that they decide to prepare. To stop diverting their time and attention and intentionally prepare for what is coming. Learn now how to handle the worst.

Our church helps us find ways to do this. Going to church is one common way of intentionally practicing our faith. It is also a self-admission that we need to have help getting closer to God. As we find God in our inner core we find help, calm, peace and love. All these things will help us navigate dark times.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VekYPnf3duM&list=RDVekYPnf3duM&start_radio=1

Thursday, February 19 by Nelson Townsend

Joel 2

I'm trying to think of a time when I did something that caused me real shame, regret, and guilt. Something I needed to recognize inside of me, something that broke my own heart.

I'm really good at thinking of things other people should apologize for! Political leaders who wield unjust power, criminals who make the national news, people at work who make ridiculous decisions, and bad drivers!

They are the ones who need to look at themselves, realize the error in their ways, and ask for God's forgiveness.

Wait. I just thought of a few things. I'm not a perfect person. I can be petty; I have betrayed people and let them down.

Still God loves me no matter what. And that thought makes me realize that no one is beyond God's grace, forgiveness, and love.

Rending your heart, recognizing your failures, turning from an unjust action doesn't affect God's love for you. It changes your own way of being in the world. It leads to peace and understanding, which is a gift from God.

Prayer: God, forgive me for the harm that I have done, and lead me in the way that I should go. Let it be so.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUo7ogI36TQ&list=RD TUo7ogI36TQ&start_radio=1

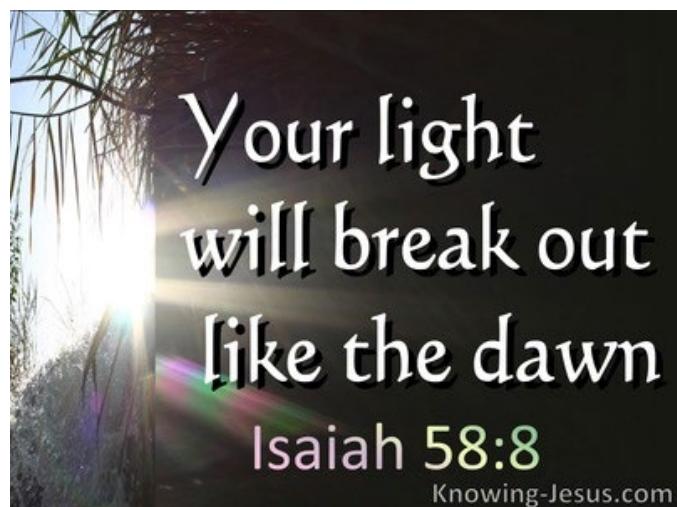
Friday, February 20 by Gene Wilson

Isaiah 58:1-12

All three major branches of the Abrahamian faith traditions observe some period of reflection, cleansing of our souls and seeking forgiveness each year: the Muslims have Ramadan, the Jews have Yom Kippur, and we Christians observe Lent.

When we read the 58th Chapter of Isaiah, we need to remember that the Judeans had just been freed from Babylonian bondage. They believed that would immediately bring God's promise of Glory and a Bright Light coming over ALL the lands, but so far, that had not happened and they were having a hard time dealing with their present realities. The Prophet Isaiah thus is taking the Judeans to task (again) for falling into their self-serving ways. Their sacrifices had become superficial, and their prayers hollow. Isaiah excoriates them and calls them to honor God faithfully and heal their souls. He demands that they stop seeking their own pleasure and stop fighting among themselves, and satisfying themselves with good things, but to humble themselves honestly before God, feed the hungry, and care for the afflicted. Fast forward to the New Testament, and we might wonder if the Apostle Matthew might have learned from Isaiah when he wrote in Matthew 25 of Jesus saying: "...for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me." And "When you did it to the least of these, you did it to me. (Which is why GCPC is a Matthew 25 Congregation.)

So, as we use this time of Lent to reflect on our own lives, we ask God to give us courage to examine our own hearts to account for where we have fallen short; where we might have done better; or where we have done nothing but should have done something. This is our opportunity to "come clean" before God and repent for our misdeeds or our lack of action. All of us are human, and all of us are sinners. God already knows how short or long our list is. Isaiah and Mathew both laid out our path. Lent is our time to seek real redemption, knowing that God sent his Son to give us a fresh start and lift that heavy burden from our souls. Let's not waste these days nor the days to come.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrSPakC-7s&list=RDzrSPakC-7s&start_radio=1

Saturday, February 21 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 51:1-17

“...my guilt...” “...my sins...” “...my evil...”

Back in 1973, Dr. Karl Menninger, the founder of Menninger Clinic in Topeka, wrote a bestselling book titled, *Whatever Became Of Sin*. One of the main ideas of Dr. Menninger’s book is that society doesn’t talk about sin as a deeply moral or spiritual problem anymore. Instead, we have become more comfortable framing sinful behavior in other terms such as crime, sickness, or simply a mistake. If you do something for which you feel guilt, do you say, “I have sinned,” or something tamer, like, “I messed up”? Most people use one of two strategies: ego inflation and ego protection. Ego inflation uses words like, “I’m not all that bad.” Ego inflation makes you think you can do nothing wrong, and if someone thinks you did, they are the ones who are wrong. Ego protection is seen in blaming others, or the situation, for your actions. It’s used to deflect judgement for any of your actions. The term, “teflon personality” describes the ego protector—they don’t allow anything to “stick.” But the Psalmist will have none of this. What we do is not a crime, not some kind of sickness, not a mistake, nor a mess up. It is sin. And the reason it is sin, from the Psalmists standpoint, is because what we have done is not just against another human being. It is also, and foremost against God: “You are the One I’ve violated...” the Psalmist confesses. In our modern moral mathematics, we tweak the problem of sin by leaving God out of the equation. If you put God back into the equation of your actions, then you must use the only word that is a one-size-fits-all: sin. (Journaling Prompt: Make a list of the words people use instead of sin. Put a star by the ones you have used. Now write, in big letters in the middle of the page, GOD. What does that addition do to your list of words?)



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eSAaF5VHsmg&list=RDeSAaF5VHsmg&start_radio=1

Monday, February 23 by Emily Dixon

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10 (New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition)

“So, we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ be reconciled to God. For our sake God made the one who knew no sin to be sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. As we work together with him, we entreat you also not to accept the grace of God in vain. For he says, ‘At an acceptable time I have listened to you, and on a day of salvation I have helped you.’ Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation! We are putting no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way: in great endurance, afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; in purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, holiness of spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; in honor and dishonor, in ill repute and good repute. We are treated as impostors and yet are true, as unknown and yet are well known, as dying and look—we are alive, as punished and yet not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing, as poor yet making many rich, as having nothing and yet possessing everything.” (OR if there’s not enough space, due to my verbosity...we can paraphrase the scripture as such: “So we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God... See, now is the acceptable time; see, now is the day of salvation!”)

Paul’s words arrive with urgency, not the frantic urgency of fear, but the holy insistence of love that knows just how much is at stake. Now, Paul says. Not someday when life settles. Not after we become better people. Now.

After over twenty-five years of ministry, I’ve learned how often we postpone transformation. We wait for quieter seasons, for fewer responsibilities, for children to grow, for grief to soften, for work and home to be less stressful—that ever-elusive “when things calm down”. We begin to think about reconciliation with God, one another, and with ourselves as a future project.

But Paul interrupts that idea with grace.

“Now is the day.”

Reconciliation in scripture is not simply about personal forgiveness; it is about restored relationship, healed community, and renewed participation in God’s ongoing work of making all things whole. To be reconciled to God is to be drawn back into the divine movement of love that refuses to give up on the world.

Then Paul does something unexpected. He does not describe this ministry of reconciliation as neatly tied-with-a-bow or even triumphant. Instead, he names exhaustion and heartbreak alongside hope: “as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing everything.”

This is the paradox of faithful life.

Ministry, parenting, friendship, caregiving can be so rich and fulfilling, yet you rarely feel victorious. More often it looks like: showing up tired, loving when misunderstood, holding space for pain while still daring to believe in joy, and carrying grief in one hand with hope in the other.

In times such as these when divisions feel insurmountable and even truth is contested and when fear is louder than compassion—reconciliation can feel naïve or even impossible. Yet Paul insists that this is precisely the work entrusted to the church.

Not silence and not withdrawal. But courageous, embodied love. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, warned against what he called “cheap grace”—grace that comforts without transforming, that forgives without justice, that avoids the cost of discipleship. Instead, he called Christians to costly grace: faith that shows up in the world, even when it is dangerous or uncomfortable.

Reconciliation is costly.

It requires listening across differences, naming injustices, standing with the vulnerable, and refusing to let fear shape our ethics.

“Now is the day of salvation,” Paul says. But we don’t have to receive this as additional pressure in our lives. We can receive it as possibility.

Now is the time. (as “Seize the Day” from Newsies begins to softly swell in the background)

Paul said NOW, not someday when the world calms down. “Now can mean in daily connections, in school board meetings and voting booths, around dinner table conversations and public witness, in quiet prayers and brave interactions. In our hearts, in our minds, in our hands, and in our feet.

God’s grace is not waiting for a gentler political environment. It is already at work, calling us into healing, courage, and hope.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sJS58ntcrEI&list=RDsJS58ntcrEI&start_radio=1

Tuesday, February 24 by David Pack

Matthew 6:21 – Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (CEB)

The text for today's Lenten devotional is Matthew 6: 1-6 and 16-21, ending with the familiar verse seen above.

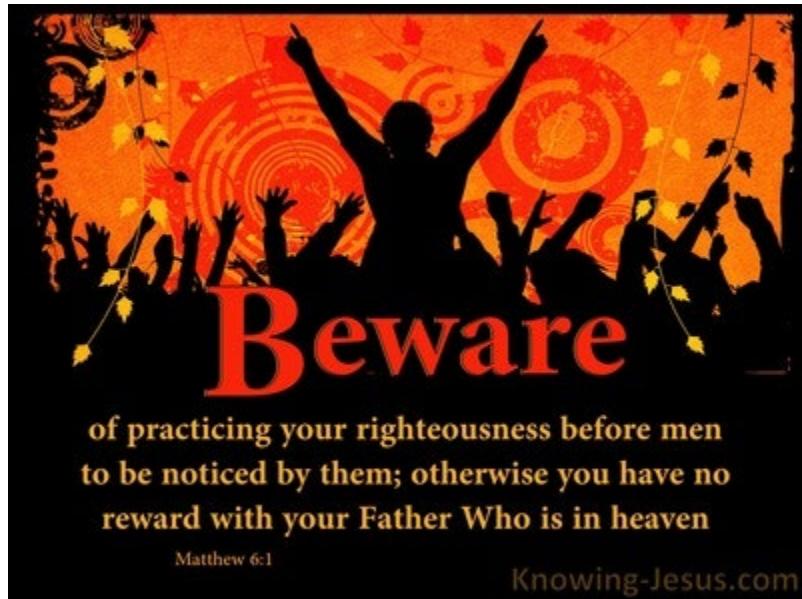
This text suggests several things not to do:

- Don't do showy religion
- Don't do showy giving to the poor
- Don't do showy prayer
- Don't do showy fasting
- Don't collect treasures for your own benefit on earth.

The text implies that you should do religion, giving to the poor, prayer, and fasting and speaks to how to do these things in an appropriate manner.

I cannot claim to have ever done fasting, except as required for a medical procedure. What is the Christian objective of fasting? I found words suggesting fasting serves "as a spiritual discipline aimed at deepening one's relationship with God, seeking guidance, and enhancing prayer life."

Have you ever considered fasting? It is something to think about.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghsQgD0fj_I&list=RDgzsQgD0fj_I&start_radio=1

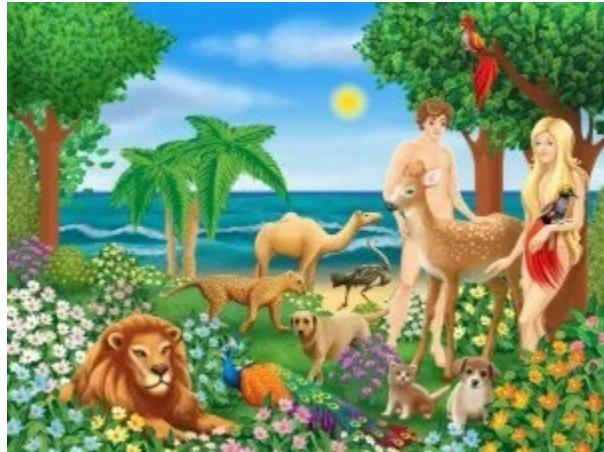
Wednesday, February 25 by Lauren Bond

Genesis 2:16 “But the Lord told him, ‘You may eat fruit from any tree in the garden, except the one that has the power to let you know the difference between right and wrong. If you eat any fruit from that tree, you will die before the day is over!’”

Parents know this scene. A stern warning given to a child is disobeyed, making it necessary for the parent to follow up with the threat. Adam and Eve were tempted by the devil in the form of a snake, ate the fruit, and was confronted by God. While they had gone against God’s order, God did not have the heart to carry out his threat. Instead, he ordered Adam and Eve to what amounted to today’s “go to timeout.”

So, why is this story out of the Creation included as a part of the Lenten season? Jesus was not sinful. Rather, he became the person to take on the burden of sin from all mankind. Tempted as we are to go against God’ wishes, salvation comes through Jesus and the sacrifice he makes on the cross.

“As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be.”



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LztTEVSvEDM&list=RDLztTEVSvEDM&start_radio=1

Thursday, February 26 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 32

What do you do with all the pain of living? What do you do with your grief? What do you do with your guilt? Be honest. If you are like most people, you do nothing. You do nothing with all that. Which means you keep it all inside. You hide it all away, thinking you can keep others (and yourself) from seeing it. Here's how the Psalmist describes it: When I kept it all inside, my bones turned to powder, my words became daylong groans. The pressure never let up; all the juices of my life dried up. (The Message) What's going on in the inside of each of us has an effect on the outside of us. What we look like, how we carry ourselves, our tone of voice, can all be visible signs of our inability to deal with some of the harsh realities of life. There's only one remedy, says the Psalmist: Then I let it all out I said, "I'll make a clean breast of my failures to Yahweh." (The Message) This is where it must start. What the psalmist discovered was that there is only one way to be able to stand before God and feel the total freedom God gives when we get it all out before him. We can't deal with it all as we have in the past, by hiding, or deceit, or rationalizations, or excuses, or subterfuge. The only way to experience the freedom to live as God wants is to get it all out. (Journaling Prompt: Make a list of all the fears you have that are keeping you from releasing all your pain, grief, and guilt. What does that list tell you?)



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVvzIBYeogQ&list=RDiVvzIBYeogQ&start_radio=1

Friday, February 27 by Karen Wright

Romans 5:12-19

Thresholds are a part of Celtic Spirituality. The belief is there is a sacredness in crossing from one place to another. Thinking of the threshold as a bridge from what we know and crossing into that which is not yet fully known. In Romans Paul names Adam as the doorway where sin and death entered the world. It is the space that I simply refer to as being human. We are fallible. We are mortal. Then Paul defines the coming of Christ as a way to grace.

As we look at the world around us, do we move toward a world of fear and of blame? Or do we want to choose to live into grace. We get to step into a different way of being in Christ. While grace does not make the world less dangerous or frenetic, but we change in our response to the world. How can we meet the world with grace and love?

Prayer:

God of grace, we stand at the threshold between what binds us and what sets us free. Turn our hearts again toward Christ. Help us receive the abundance of your grace—not as something we earn, but as a gift that reshapes our lives. Lead us across this threshold into righteousness, hope, and new life. Amen.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g09Hb9qBwRs&list=RDg09Hb9qBwRs&start_radio=1

Saturday, February 28 by Kevin Johnson

Matthew 4:1-11

In these verses, Jesus has just come from his baptism by John. He is full of the Holy Spirit. He now sets out on his new life journey by first fasting in the wilderness for 40 days. As he does this, he faces some of the most common temptations people face day-to-day in their lives.

Turn stones to bread: (Using your status or power to serve yourself and ignoring God's call)

We think that getting "things" will make us happy. We are told often that we "deserve" to have something. But self-serving drives rarely satisfy for long—they promise much and deliver little. We hear from God often that we can know in our hearts that true happiness comes when we find love in our hearts and water those seeds of love. When we water seeds of self-serving desires, we often choke out the roses of love that truly make us happy.

Leap from the temple: (Make God prove his love for you.)

This temptation seeks quick, visible proof—something dramatic that feels convincing in the moment but soon needs to be repeated. In Deuteronomy Moses speaks to the children of Israel as they enter their promised land. Deut. 6:4-5: "...Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your mind." Deut. 6:6-9 ...teach it, rehearse it, build into your daily life. When we test God we have stepped back from loving him to looking only at our own needs or desires. Deut. 6:10-12 This is easy to do when we get comfortable. Deut. 6:16 "Do not put the Lord your God to the test...".

Self-engrandizement: (Do God's work without God.)

In the third temptation, the devil offers Jesus a shortcut to influence: the kingdoms of the world without the way of the cross (Jesus now understands the cross is God's plan for him). This is the temptation to make a name for ourselves—even in "religious" work—by grasping for results, control, approval, or power. It can look like doing good things for God while quietly shifting our trust from God to our own abilities, strategies, or image. Jesus' reply brings everything back to the center: "Worship the Lord your God and serve him only." When worship is first, our work becomes faithful rather than frantic; we can pursue God's purposes without compromise, without shortcuts, and without needing to be the hero.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rcTR22nexTQ&list=RDrcTR22nexTQ&start_radio=1

Monday, March 2 by Nelson Townsend

Genesis 12

This passage seems like a pretty good deal for Abram! He does have to leave his country, his friends, and his family; but there's a big pay off! He will become a great nation, he'll be famous, and God will always be on his side.

But I think there should have been a caveat. Something like God winking and saying, "This ain't gonna be easy!"

Think about what is ahead of Abram, soon to be called Abraham. He is promised "a great nation;" but his first child, Ishmael, is born to Hagar; and Sarah sends them into the desert. At age 100, Isaac is born; and at 137, Abraham is tested to sacrifice Isaac.

Abram was born about 1,200 years before David became king. That's a long time to wait to "become a great nation!"

Prayer: God, in this time of lengthening days, give us patience, give us reminders of your love, and strengthen our hope. Let it be so.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g-Rt0tmNYk0&list=RDg-Rt0tmNYk0&start_radio=1

Tuesday, March 3 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 121

The psalmist is looking for help. He wouldn't be looking for help unless he was anxious about some situation in his life. The question, then, is personal and about the psalmist himself. The psalmist is not asking just for some generalized sort of help that has to do with everyone. He's looking for a particular help for a particular situation in his life. All our helping questions probably start out this way—they are about us. Think about it: hope and help mean little where no anxiety exists. Basically, what this is saying is that we, as human beings, are full of anxiety. Our anxiety takes many forms. The psalmist identifies several forms of human anxiety, for when we need help from God. The first form of anxiety revolves around the question, What am I here for? Do I have a purpose? Is that purpose for me alone to decide, or is there something larger going on in this human life? The second form of anxiety has to do with wondering if our foundations are strong. The third anxiety comes from our wondering, sometimes, if God is listening. Is God attentive? we might ask. Is God off asleep somewhere? The fourth anxiety has to do with our fear of evil in the world—the kind of evil that only takes away from us. It peels us back, layer-by-layer, like an onion, until we feel there's nothing left of us. Another way to translate this word, evil, is, "exceedingly great grief." This kind of evil wants to keep us in such a state of grief, because of great loss, so that we think we will never be able to dig out of that hole. The last anxiety the psalmist names, that most of us have questions about, is the future. (Journaling Prompt: Choose one of these anxieties that seems to get at you most, eating away at your best self—the self-God wants you to be. Write about how and when it rears itself most often. How can God help you with that?)



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzJkC0-CSng&list=RDEzJkC0-CSng&start_radio=1

Wednesday, March 4 by Cheryl Johnson

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

I remember a few debates in my life stemming from this passage. If Abraham was deemed righteous by faith alone, then why would people engage in good works? Why go build Habitat for Humanity houses on blazing hot days or drive down to KCK on icy roads to serve a meal to hungry people if we can stay in our comfortable homes and still be called righteous because we believe in God?

Long before I went on mission trips with GCPC youth to work on Katrina-damaged houses, I had discovered the joy that comes from helping others. In college, I volunteered with a group that sorted donations at a local charity. When I got back to the dorm one evening full of the joy of knowing I'd done a good thing, I remember a debate with my roommate about whether there were truly any altruistic acts. If I got joy from doing a good deed, then I had received my payment, right? There's nothing like late-night serious discussions when you're a teenager. But, that thinking goes hand-in-hand with what Paul is saying in this Romans passage. Abraham — and the rest of us — can't earn our way into heaven by doing good works. As the passage says, if you do a job for pay (or do good works to get an eternal reward), you have earned your pay.

So, why are we called to do good works? Look at James 2:17 — faith without works is dead. Our faith in God calls us to reach out to others. Not because of a promised reward. By the gift of grace, we are already assured of our salvation. But our faith means we can't snuggle down into our comfortable life and ignore our fellow human beings who are suffering. It calls us to engage with the world.

Prayer: Lord, help us to see the people who need our help. Show us what you would have us do. Amen



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tlh81iz9BCM&list=RDTlh81iz9BCM&start_radio=1

Thursday, March 5 by Rich Maxwell

John 3:1-21 (NIV) Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him.”

3 Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.[a]”

4 “How can someone be born when they are old?” Nicodemus asked. “Surely they cannot enter a second time into their mother’s womb to be born!”

5 Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit[b] gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You[c] must be born again.’ 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.”[d]

9 “How can this be?” Nicodemus asked.

10 “You are Israel’s teacher,” said Jesus, “and do you not understand these things? 11 Very truly I tell you, we speak of what we know, and we testify to what we have seen, but still you people do not accept our testimony. 12 I have spoken to you of earthly things, and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things? 13 No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man.[e] 14 Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,[f] 15 that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”[g]

16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. 19 This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. 20 Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. 21 But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

“Believe” is the word that has framed my times of meditation for months. So, when I read John 3:16 in today’s passage—“...whoever believes in Me will have an everlasting life”—for the 1,000th time, it stopped me in my tracks.

This was Jesus’s answer to Nicodemus, “an educated ruler among the Jewish people,” who came to visit Jesus at night, asking, “How can one be born again?”

Nicodemus had seen the power in Jesus’ teaching, how his time in Israel was changing people, even healing their sick. Jesus knew this Pharisee—his reputation for strict adherence to the Scriptures: daily prayers, fasting... He even noted that Nicodemus was a teacher (v. 10).

Confused, like Nicodemus, we too struggle to understand this new birth. We forget to read Jesus’s explanation that follows (vv. 18–20) about the “light that comes into the world.” To this respected leader,

Jesus demanded something deeper than legalistic obedience: “Believe in Me—the Light that has come into the world.”

I think real, “jump-off-the-cliff” believing is like opening your eyes in a dark room and suddenly seeing what was always there—God’s love in the people around you, in Nature, and in your own heart. I think the threshold in this passage is shifting from “being saved” by relying on ritualistic, rule-following, to seeing the Light, believing, and being instantly “born from above.” If we don’t, we are doomed already (v. 18).



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=llb22SMVjTg&list=RDllb22SMVjTg&start_radio=1

Friday, March 6 by Karen Wright

Matthew 17:1-9

Thin places are part of Celtic Spirituality. They believe there are places where the human and the divine are barely separated. One experience with a thin place was while attending a conference at the YMCA of the Rockies in Colorado. We had time to reflect on John 4 and the Samaritan woman at the well. I was sitting on a rock and was doodling when I started to feel raindrops. Looking up, there were no clouds in the sky. Looking around, I could see a couple other people in my group looking as bewildered as I. On the way back to the meeting room, I could see the rain drops. Yet as we talked about our experience in the group, only two other people had the same sensation of rain. I still cannot explain it.

It was hard to leave that conference all those years ago. But thin places are not places you can linger. The moment has been experienced and we all must return from the mountain top. But as we descend back into the rhythms of daily life, we have crossed a threshold and we have been changed and so we enter the world once again in a very different way.

Prayer:

Holy God, you meet us in moments of light and clarity. When we long to stay where faith feels easy, remind us to listen to your Son. As we come down from the mountain, give us courage to carry what we have seen into the valleys of daily life. Change us at the threshold, and send us forward without fear. Amen.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9qwymu9AfU&list=RDK9qwymu9AfU&start_radio=1

Saturday, March 7 by Karen Wright

Exodus 17:1–7

This is one of my favorite Old Testament Stories. The people have been wandering in the wilderness and are grumpy with Moses and with God. They complain about not having enough water. Moses goes to God who tells him to take his staff and strike a rock. Moses does so and water springs forth.

The Exodus story is a place between slavery and freedom. There is promise of a new life, a new land, and a new identity as the people of God and there is a long wait for the fulfillment. In those times when we feel like we are waiting on God, the very human tendency is to question just as the Israelites did. Is God with us?

Then God shows up, often unexpectedly. God has been with us the whole time, but we may have missed the signs in all our grumbling. A reminder that when going through the wilderness, you have to keep going.

Prayer:

Faithful God, when we are thirsty and afraid, we question your presence. Meet us again in the wilderness. Open our eyes to the water you provide, even from unlikely places. Teach us to trust you at the threshold of uncertainty, and to believe that you are among us, even now. Amen.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4fL3p7xu7A&list=RDt4fL3p7xu7A&start_radio=1

Monday, March 9 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 95

Making a list can help you select and prioritize what is important. Looking at your lists, you can decide what is just minutia, and what really matters. Once you have your list made, you can cross off those that really don't matter. They don't create the kind of ripple effect you hope for. Now you've gone a long way in setting your priorities. Now that you have a short list of your core values, you can develop the actions you will take in which those core values will shine through. There are times in anyone's life where you feel chaotic, scattered, unclear and out of control. Making a list of these situations and looking at them on paper can help you organize and contain a sense of inner chaos, which can make your load feel more manageable. In Psalm 95, the Psalmist makes a list of that which he is thankful for. The first thing Psalm 95 thanks God for is that, Yahweh is the best, High King over all the gods. (vs. 3, The Message) The Psalmist is thankful that the LORD is better than anything else he might call god in his life. Secondly, the psalmist is thankful that the LORD holds the deepest parts (meaning, the oceans) in his hands. To the peoples of that time, the oceans held the scariest beasts anyone could imagine. Think of the scariest parts of your life—the things that terrify you the most. God has control of those, holding them in his hands. For God to hold our scariest thoughts, and experiences means God can deal with them in mighty and powerful ways. And, lastly, the psalmist is thankful for how God tends to us like a shepherd does her sheep. The psalmist sings, "Oh, yes, he's our God! and we're the people he pastures, the flock he feeds!" (The Message) (Journaling Prompt: Make a list of the scariest "beasts" in your life. Write the list in the middle of the page of your journal. When you are done with the list, draw large hands on each side of your list, symbolizing how God holds them in his hands. Or make a list (in the middle of the page) of the ways you would love to have God tend to you. In and around and through that list draw the grass of God's pasture, symbolizing your thankfulness for how God keeps you in his pasture.)

*Let us sing for joy
to the Lord...*

Psalm 95:1

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_h8hvqpfV0&list=RD-_h8hvqpfV0&start_radio=1

Tuesday, March 10 by Cheryl Johnson

Romans 5:1-11

In this passage, I'm struck by two parts of it. One is verse 7 — rarely will anyone die for a righteous person; though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. It seems like such a funny thing to say. Shouldn't being a righteous person mean that you were worth dying for? You probably realized, as I did after thinking about it, that this passage is referring to Jesus dying for our sins while we were sinners. Like the passage from Romans 4 last week, it's making the point that we are saved through God's grace, not anything we've done to deserve it.

The second part of this passage I focused on was the bit about suffering producing endurance, endurance producing character and character producing hope. Maybe it's celebrating a milestone birthday recently, but I think life has shown the truth of this statement. When faced with physical challenges for myself or a loved one, what choice do we have but to keep putting one foot in front of another? Eventually, that problem is resolved, or we find ways to deal with it. Having experience with facing problems gives us strength the next time we are met with trials.

But this is not to say that we can do this alone. Challenging times often bring us to God like happier times do not. (Of course, we should give thanks for rosy days just as much as we turn to God for help when storm clouds appear.) When troubles crop up, turn to God in prayer. After you've gained some perspective, you'll be able to look back and see God's faithfulness at work in your life.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your faithfulness and the gift of your son. Help us to feel the strength that comes from resting in the knowledge of your love for us. Amen.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A2IpWYUDb34&list=RDA2IpWYUDb34&start_radio=1

Wednesday, March 11 by Eileen Thomson

John 4:5-42

The Woman at the Well passage is the familiar story of Jesus speaking to a Samaritan woman. He speaks with her and reveals himself to be the Living Water. The woman becomes a believer and leads many in her community to become followers of Jesus as well.

As I was reading about this passage, I came across one commentator who claimed this passage can be thought of as “The Other Samaritan” in contrast to “The Good Samaritan” a passage so common to us that it is a common day expression.

Cultural norms of those times would have prohibited Jesus from speaking with the woman at the well. She was a Samaritan, a group of people that others did not associate with. A woman alone fetching water in the afternoon indicates she was an outcast from within her own group. Women typically went to the well in the morning to fetch water and to socially connect with each other. Jesus initiates conversation with the woman. Initially she is uncertain and perhaps a bit suspicious of Jesus. As their conversation continues, their relationship grows. Jesus reveals himself to be the Living Water. The woman, not having revealed anything of her life is surprised and amazed that Jesus knows everything about her life: of having had multiple husbands and currently unmarried while living with a man, and yet he accepts her and offers her Abundant Life through Faith in God.

Her response to Jesus is to accept him into her life and to play a vital role in the development of her community as a growing community of believers.

What can this “Other Samaritan’s” interaction with Jesus teach us about how we can live today?

Like Jesus we are called to reach out to others especially to those who have been marginalized or “othered” We need to engage with others in non-judgmental ways. Unlike Jesus we don’t know someone before we reach out to them but perhaps Jesus’s example is to remind us that even if we are strangers, we are all God’s children.

Reaching across cultural divisions or any kind of separateness instead of “othering” individuals or groups of people builds mutual respect.

Helping others is not just about what we can do for others. It is also recognizing how others help build-up our community. This Samaritan woman’s contribution to her community has been undervalued or at least gone unappreciated in the stories most familiar to us.

Let’s never forget that when we lift others, everyone benefits and that often times the contribution of “Others” can be beyond measure.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLm58v74mgc&list=RDzLm58v74mgc&start_radio=1

Thursday, March 12 by Nelson Townsend

Samuel 1

In this episode of the Old Testament, Samuel is sent to anoint the next king of Israel.

God doesn't reveal everything at once. First, Samuel is worried about Saul's reaction, because he is the current king of Israel, and he is going to remain king for quite some time. David hasn't even killed Goliath yet!

So, Samuel needs a cover story for why he is going to see Jesse in Bethlehem. God tells him to take a heifer and say, "I have come to sacrifice to the Lord."

Second, there is the parade of Jesse's sons. Samuel thinks, Eliab, the oldest looks like a good candidate, but God rejects him with the famous commentary, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him... People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart."

Finally, after seven sons have been rejected, and there doesn't appear to be anyone else, Samuel asks, "Are these all the sons you have?" Which is kind of funny, since seven sons seems like enough to me!

But there is another, the youngest, who is tending the sheep. When David arrives, his outward appearance is "glowing with health... and handsome features," and God says to Samuel, "this is the one." (A little ironic that David is good on the outside as well as inside!)

What stands out to me in this passage is Samuel's trust in God. Samuel has been in conversation with God ever since he answered, "Here I am, Lord," as a young boy. He is willing to risk the wrath of an intemperate King Saul. He does not just anoint the "good enough" son; he faithfully heeds God's instructions as each one is rejected until David arrives.

Prayer: God, in this time of lengthening days, give me patience to hear the "still, small voice," which is your will for me. Let it be so.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h8i7jA9l9FM>

Friday, March 13 by Kevin Johnson

Psalm 23

“The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.” What a deep statement of faith this truly is. Sincerely believing that holding God in your heart will make you never want anything again.

Several years ago, I worked in a group that was very challenging. I was inserted into a team of “Good ol’ boys” who had their own established way of doing things. And so, my joining the team was not welcome. Day after day as I walked into the office from the parking lot I recited in my head the King James version of Psalm 23 that I had learned in my confirmation class years before. This settled me. It centered me. It helped me step into this challenging environment and do well in it.

I also found that re-affirming my good intentions—and choosing to hold each team member in a place of love and respect—helped me understand the anger and fear underneath their reactions. I could accept their animosity because I was not meeting it with contempt. I didn’t love and respect their way of handling these changes, but I tried to go deeper and identify with their fears and needs.

In the end, most of the workgroup worked well with me. There was still one man who just could not accept me. I may never fully understand why, but I know I genuinely wished that I could.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q25xEFyTHFY&list=RDq25xEFyTHFY&start_radio=1

Saturday, March 14 by Kevin Johnson

Ephesians 5:8-14

8 for once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Walk as children of light, 9 for the fruit of the light[a] is found in all that is good and right and true. 10 Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. 11 Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness; rather, expose them. 12 For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly, 13 but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, 14 for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore, it says,

“Sleeper, awake!

Rise from the dead,
and Christ will shine on you.”

Many religions teach that people live most of their day asleep at the wheel. We move through routines on autopilot—reacting, consuming, coping—half-aware of what is shaping us. But Ephesians 5:8–14 puts a sharper point on it: “Once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light.” Paul doesn’t just say we were in darkness; he says we were darkness—until Christ remade our identity. Lent invites an honest inventory of the dim places in us: the habits we excuse, the words we don’t examine, the quiet compromises we’ve normalized. The goal isn’t self-loathing; it’s waking up.

Light does something practical: it reveals what’s real. That’s why this passage urges us to “live as children of light,” letting goodness, righteousness, and truth become the recognizable fruit of our days. In Lent, we don’t merely avoid “deeds of darkness” as a rule-keeping project; we step into practices that expose them—prayer that names what we’ve been dodging, Scripture that corrects our self-justifying stories, and relationships where we can’t hide behind a polished version of ourselves. The astonishing promise here is that what is exposed can be transformed: “everything exposed by the light becomes visible.” Not to shame us, but to heal us.

So the call is simple and bracing: “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.” This is not just a warning to stop doing bad things; it’s a resurrection invitation in miniature. Today, choose one place where you’ve been drifting—your attention, your tongue, your generosity, your resentment—and ask Jesus to shine there. Lent is not about proving you can be disciplined; it’s about letting the Light make you alive. Prayer: Christ, wake me up. Expose what is false without crushing me, and form in me the fruit of your light—goodness, righteousness, and truth. Amen.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRfwRIQw3NI&list=RDjRfwRIQw3NI&start_radio=1

Monday, March 16 by Lauren Bond

John 9:39 “Jesus told him, ‘I came to judge the people of this world. I am here to give sight to the blind and to make blind everyone who can see.’”

The passage for today is familiar – Jesus encounters a blind man begging on the street, presumably a young-ish guy, and performs a miracle to cure his blindness. Jesus uses the healing of the man’s vision to point out to the Pharisees that they are spiritually blind.

Have you ever pondered what happened after the story?

Formerly blind man (let’s call him FBM); his life was changed by Jesus himself, and not only does he gain the ability to see, but he comes to understand that conventional Jewish teaching may not be entirely accurate.

31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.” (New International Version)

A bit later, when Jesus seeks him out again, FBM attests that he believes, and he worships Jesus.

Physically, suddenly gaining sight was probably difficult. I wonder if he had trouble once he began to see – maybe he had problems with depth perception, not having the experience of growing up with vision. Bright light might have been painful. Maybe he sought out darkness from the sensory overload.

FBM didn’t have a trade to support himself, as a formerly blind beggar. Did he still have to beg? Did he become a late-life learner and apprentice in his father’s trade?

Now he had a chance to get married and have a family. Did he?

I also think about what he might have done with his new spiritual insight, especially after being thrown out of the synagogue (v. 34). Maybe he continued to grow in faith and became a respected teacher or counselor. I wonder if FBM showed up at any of the other events in Jesus’s life that drew a crowd.

We never even know his name.

What would you do after an encounter with Jesus that profoundly changed you?



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1eeLNly2tiQ&list=RD1eeLNly2tiQ&start_radio=1

Tuesday, March 17 by Karen Wright

Ezekiel 37:1-14

Exhaustion. Physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual exhaustion. I have been in that place that feels devoid of life. A place that feels like God is far away. That place where you know you are at the end of your rope and you are just clinging to the knot on the end, hanging on.

Ezekiel is led into a valley of dry bones. A place that feels beyond hope. A place where the bones are not just dead, they are dry. And God asks, “Can these bones live?” Lent is a season that does not rush past the hard parts, past despair, past the agony. Rather, in Lent we wait. Despair and grief are part of the journey and yet we wait for the Spirit to move. Just like in Genesis 2 when God breathes life into the earth creature, here the Spirit moves and bone meets bone, ligaments and muscles are restored, life returns. This story is a reminder that no matter how dried up we may feel, God is a God of restoration. Transformation comes when we wait on the Spirit to blow through us, to enliven us once again, to renew us and to restore hope.

Prayer:

Breath of God, come among what feels lifeless. Where hope is dry and faith feels scattered, speak your word again. Breathe your Spirit into what we believe cannot live. Lead us across the threshold from despair into renewed life, that we may stand as your people once more. Amen.

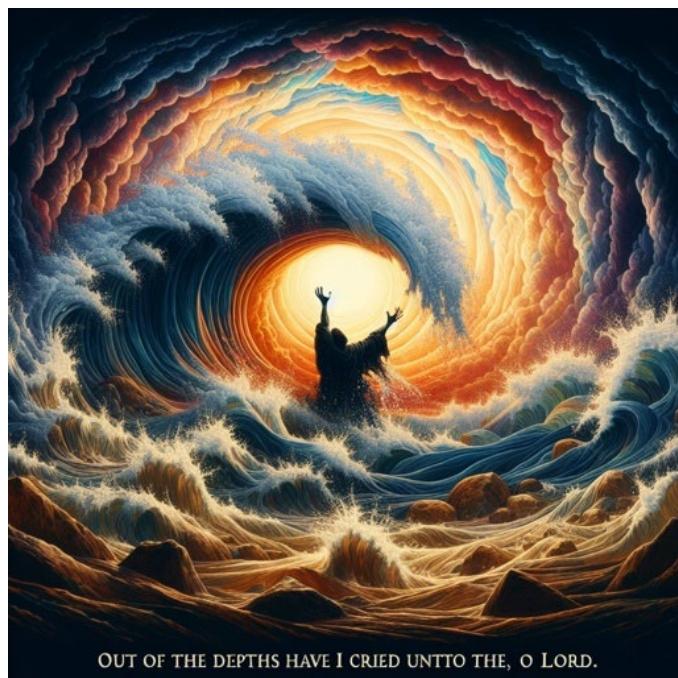


https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8FFD2tUw69k&list=RD8FFD2tUw69k&start_radio=1

Wednesday, March 18 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 130

Take a few minutes to think about what your deepest yearnings are. I'm going to be bold here and say that however noble (or self-centered) those yearnings are, they aren't your deepest yearnings. They aren't your dearest and most heartfelt longings. I make that statement because I don't think you really know what your deepest yearnings are. You aren't in touch with them, because they go deeper than you have ever dared probe before. Here in Psalm 130, the Psalmist is trying to make a fearless dive into his deepest yearning. See if it may be one of yours as well. It's right in the first verse. It reads: From the depths of my despair, I call to you, Lord. Hear my cry, O Lord; listen to my call for help! "Hear me when I'm crying, O Lord." Or, literally, "Hear my tears, O Lord." What is the sound of tears flowing down from our eyes, cascading down on our faces? What is the sound of that salty water pooling in our eyes? What is the sound of tears making their streaks and trails upon our cheeks? What is that sound? Whatever that sound is, we yearn for someone to hear it. The Psalmist says, God hears it. In all our stages of life there is pain and struggle and failure. There are tears. But it used to be people who shared those tears with trusted others. Crying was a communal thing—people cried with their families, with their friends, with community. Crying wasn't considered a sign of weakness or shame by women or by men. But our tears have become an entirely private matter. Which is destructive to the human spirit. Tears are shed in the shower, or in the shop, or on a long drive, alone. It's a deeply human emoting that is hidden away in the closet. You don't want anyone to see you or hear you. But yet, you deeply wish someone heard, someone was paying attention. You deeply yearn for someone to hold you while you cried. "Hear my crying, O Lord. Don't leave me alone in my tears..." (Journaling Prompt: Make a list of five people you would trust to cry with. Write why these five people can be trusted with your tears.)



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8pCbtLeXzc&list=RDI8pCbtLeXzc&start_radio=1

Thursday, March 19 by David Pack

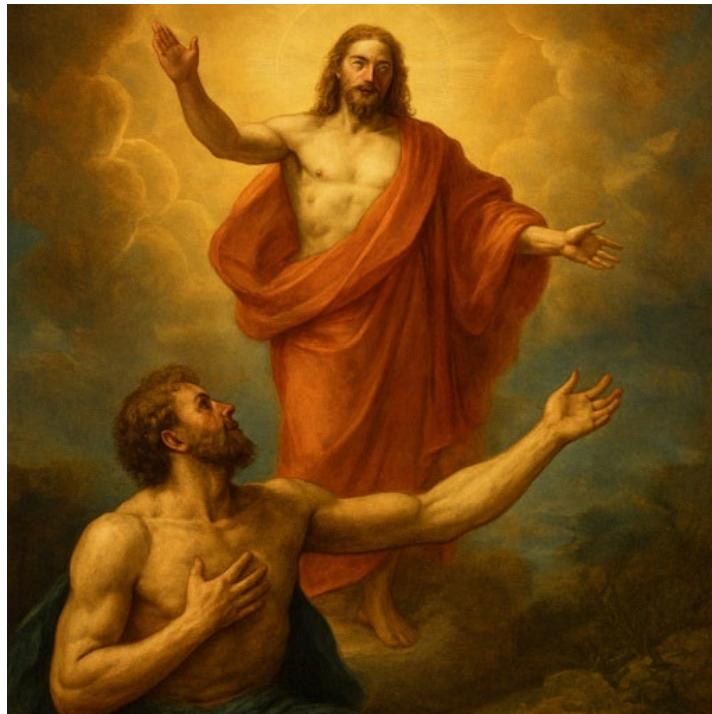
Romans 8: 6-9

The attitude that comes from selfishness leads to death, but the attitude that comes from the Spirit leads to life and peace. So, the attitude that comes from selfishness is hostile to God. It doesn't submit to God's Law, because it can't. People who are self-centered aren't able to please God. But you aren't self-centered. Instead, you are in the Spirit, if in fact God's Spirit lives in you. If anyone doesn't have the Spirit of Christ, they don't belong to him (CEB)

The text for today's Lenten devotional is Romans 8: 6-11, as seen above, excluding verses 10-11.

Think about these words: "People who are self-centered aren't able to please God." And then the suggestion that "If in fact God's Spirit lives in you, you are in the Spirit," that is, you won't be self-centered. Where do you see yourself? I see myself migrating between these two realities. Our society has a strong self-centered inclination that one needs to resist.

The text above is from the Common English Bible (CEB). When I looked at my 1957 Revised Standard Version Bible received from Grace Presbyterian Church in Wichita when I went on from the elementary grades, I was surprised to see that the CEB references to "selfishness" were instead references to "flesh." That seems like quite a shift in the Greek translation. Where do you see yourself now?



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4nITQhuAkPU&list=RD4nITQhuAkPU&start_radio=1

Friday, March 20 by Nelson Townsend

John 11

Today's reading is the raising of Lazarus from the dead. I noticed that Jesus is questioned three times. Once by Martha, a second time by Mary, and a third time by those gathered.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died," from the sisters.

"Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" from those who had come to comfort them.

Jesus' response each time is different. To Martha (the helper and doer) he says, "I am the resurrection and the life." This is one of the seven "I am" statements that Jesus makes in John. And Jesus doesn't just say it, he's going to do it!

With Mary (the listener), he doesn't say much, but he weeps and is "deeply moved." He comforts her by sharing in her grief.

For the onlookers, despite the doubts surrounding him, Jesus calls to Lazarus, and miraculously, he emerges from the tomb! Because of this, "many... who had come to visit Mary, and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him."

This story reminds us that bad things are going to happen, and we may not get the response we want from God. I'm always struck by Jesus waiting two days before he goes to see Lazarus!

God loves us despite our doubts. It's part of being human. God loves us despite our small minds and small expectations. Do we want to see the glory of God? Or are we, like Martha, worried about the stench from the grave?

The most amazing thing is that God loves us no matter what. And God's greatest gift is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Believe, and walk in the Light!

Prayer: God, when troubles come, remind us that you are the resurrection and the life. Let it be so.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hOuYRjkkT50&list=RDhOuYRjkkT50&start_radio=14

Saturday, March 21 by Emily Dixon

Isaiah 7:10–14 (NRSV)

“Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son and shall name him Immanuel.”

Wait a minute, isn’t this an Advent scripture? Don’t we hear these words while giggling at adorable shepherds, angels, and animals-of-all-kinds in the stable? Aren’t these verses what we hear while we sing carols while Jayhawks and superheroes light candles??? It is. But it’s also what we need to hear during our Lenten season, and here’s why...

The name Immanuel means God with us.

But in Isaiah, these words did not come in an environment of peace, but in a moment of deep fear and political uncertainty. While the nation was anxious, leaders were grasping for security, and people longed for something, anything, that would make them feel safe again.

But into that chaos, God did not offer a military strategy or a quick rescue, God offered presence. The answer to all that upheaval was a child growing quietly in the midst of uncertainty.

So, though we hear these holy words during our season of waiting for baby Jesus, Lent, too, invites us into this same holy tension. We are encouraged to sit honestly with the brokenness of the world and of our own lives, without rushing too quickly to the joy of Easter. Lent is a season that teaches us to resist easy answers and quick fixes, to face the wilderness with courage, and to trust that God is already at work in places that feel fragile and unfinished.

Immanuel is not the promise that suffering will disappear.

Immanuel is the promise that God will not abandon us within our suffering.

Lent gently exposes our false hopes. It reminds us that no human system can fully heal what is broken, and no earthly power can bring the wholeness our hearts truly seek.

God with us in suffering. God with us in resistance to injustice. God with us in the long, slow work of love. Lent teaches us that transformation rarely comes in dramatic flashes. More often, it unfolds quietly, like a child growing unseen in the womb, like seeds breaking open beneath the soil.

Repentance, in its truest biblical sense, is not about shame. Repentance is about turning away from fear, apathy, and despair, and turning toward love, justice, courage, and hope. We make that turn when we choose compassion over convenience, when we listen fully, when we speak up for those pushed to the margins as Jesus taught, and when we stay present in hard moments rather than withdrawing.

Immanuel is God’s assurance that we never walk this Lenten journey alone.

God is with us in the wilderness. God is with us in our questions. God is with us in our longing for a more just and peaceful world.

And perhaps our calling during Lent is not to fix everything, but to faithfully embody God's presence. To reflect Immanuel by becoming signs of hope in places of despair, courage in places of fear, and love in places of division.

Because it is through steady, courageous, and compassionate presence that resurrection slowly takes root.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-fyYNCHRg&list=RD-L-fyYNCHRg&start_radio=1

Monday, March 23 by Stephen Wing

Psalm 45

We in the United States of America are leery of kings and queens, at best. At worst, they are despised as despots and seen as self-serving dictators. They are why most of our ancestors came to this “New World”—to get away from the ironfisted and idiotic rule of kings and queens. Those pioneers came to this country to get out from under the load of a greedy system of taxation—not just having to do with money, but also social, spiritual, and emotional taxation. Freedom and democratic governance was seen as the best and only alternative to kings and queens. So, it’s not hard to understand that when we read Psalm 45, about the wonders and beauty and righteousness of the king, our gag reflex starts to kick in. At the time when Psalm 45 was written, there was a clear sense of responsibility that people understood about a king. The king was responsible to the people, yes. But first and foremost, the king was responsible to God. The Psalm makes it clear God put the king on the throne and God can take that king off the throne. Kind of like when a parent says to their child, “I brought you into this world, and I can take you out.” The king understood they were serving at the pleasure of God, that there was an ultimate authority above the king besides themselves. Which is a good thing for all of us to understand. Not about kings. But about ourselves. We are in this life at the pleasure of God. We are not the be-all and end-all. There is One who brought us into this world, and that One can take us out.

(Journaling Prompt: In our needy humanness we usually have an unwritten list of what we expect God-the-King to do for us. Flip that by making a list of what you believe to be your responsibilities to God-the-King. When the list is complete, prioritize the top five, one being the greatest responsibility and five being the lesser responsibility. Write a pledge of allegiance to God using those top five on your list.)



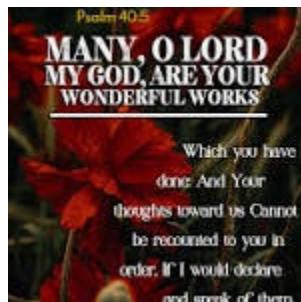
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCTFpPmQyHQ&list=RDyCTFpPmQyHQ&start_radio=1

Tuesday, March 24 by Harold Frye

Psalm 40:5 “I would never be able to tell all you have done.”

During the years I served as superintendent of instruction in a school district, the superintendent of schools held a regular Monday morning meeting of the leadership cabinet. After the small talk of what happened over the weekend and which sports teams won or lost, the superintendent asked us to report what had been accomplished in the last week. It was interesting to listen to the others, especially one person who worked hard to make his report a glowing one. We knew that what we were being told bordered on fabrication. I learned earlier that my report should be brief and should focus on activities that were aligned with the goals of the board of education. Knowing that at least one of my colleagues was burdened by multiple demands on her time, I was certain she would never be able to say all she had done.

If you were asked to list all the accomplishments of God, how long do you suppose the list might be?



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SR7aLsMTE3U&list=RDSR7aLsMTE3U&start_radio=1

Wednesday, March 25 by Harold Frye

Hebrews 10:10 “So we are made holy because Christ obeyed God and offered himself once and for all.”

Once and for all. Once: Jesus became human to die as the ultimate sacrifice. God hadn't brought another before nor would be bring another after. This was a one-time event. “And for all”: God offered the sacrifice of Jesus for everyone. The only requirement was to believe. You might interpret the phrase “Once and for all” meaning “Once and for all time.” That's not right. “For all” refers to all people. No longer would God be satisfied with sacrifices and burnt offerings of animals. He gave his Son “Once and for all.” Believe.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=emB7huKh3C8&list=RDemB7huKh3C8&start_radio=1

Thursday, March 26 by Nelson Townsend

Luke 1

Mary's encounter with Gabriel is an example of the perfect response to God's call.

I also like to think about how the narrative was created. The book of Luke is written by an investigative reporter. In Luke 1:3, he writes, "it seemed fitting to me... having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write it out for you in an orderly sequence."

So, where did this exchange come from? Luke interviewed Mary! It is her recollection of the encounter that we read in this passage! When Gabriel exclaims, "Greetings, favored one!" Mary's reaction is bewilderment and reflection. She is left wondering what will come next. It reminds me of when our kids were young, and we would ask a question like, "How would you feel if..." And they would say, "Dumbfounded!"

Gabriel goes on to explain what will happen, which is incredible news; her child will ascend to the throne of David, and His kingdom will have no end!

What are the possible reactions to this? Excitement and enthusiasm? Or skepticism, doubt, and dismissal? Or fear and reluctance?

Mary's reaction is to ask, "How will this be, since I am a virgin?"

And in that question, I hear some concern and trepidation. I hear Mary thinking, "This is not going to go over well with the neighbors!" And when Joseph heard about it, his first reaction was to call off the marriage!

I also hear a rational mind that is trying to understand the seemingly impossible. What we don't hear is any doubt in what Gabriel is saying.

In response to the "how" question, it's almost like Gabriel thinks, "Oh, yeah! I forgot to tell you!" Gabriel explains, God is going to miraculously conceive this child! And not only that, but your aunt Elizabeth has conceived a son in her old age!

This is true "mission from God" stuff! And Mary's response is, "may it be done to me according to your word."

When there are opportunities in your life to do God's work, are you listening and do you respond like Mary? When you are nudged outside your comfort zone and urged to follow Jesus, do you step out in faith?

God, when we hear your call, help us to respond as Mary did. "May it be done to me according to your word." Let it be so.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u26MgCRWtn0&list=RDu26MgCRWtn0&start_radio=1

Friday, March 27 by Harold Frye

Psalm 118:22 “The stone that the builders tossed aside has now become the most important stone.”

Since the congregation first moved into the sanctuary of Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church, I have been fascinated by the stone wall at the back of the chancel. The architect decided that this wall would not be constructed of uniform stones, but by random stones to which the mason likely did little to shape each one. Instead, it appears that stones were selected, probably from a pile of stones, for their “fit” as the next piece.

The people of the church and, yes, of all those who follow Jesus as their Savior, are different and unique. But God offers a place for each and every one, fitting them together to form a strong, purposeful, and beautiful structure. As my eyes scan the wall, I wonder which stone is the most important stone. Is it the largest one? The smoothest? The one at the base? The one that is centermost? Some might conjecture that the mortar holding the stones together is the most important. Others might say that the total wall forms the body of Christ.

So much interest in a simple stone wall.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sIMUD09jts&list=RD1sIMUD09jts&start_radio=1

Saturday, March 28 by David Pack

Matthew 21: 8-9

Now a large crowd spread their clothes on the road. Others cut palm branches off the trees and spread them on the road. The crowds in front of him and behind him shouted, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!” (CEB)

The full text for today's Lenten devotional is Matthew 21: 1- 11, the description of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem, which leads to our observance of Palm Sunday on March 29 this year.

How are the dates when we observe Palm Sunday and Easter determined? Palm Sunday is the Sunday before Easter and Easter is celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the March 21 Spring equinox. That means Easter can fall anytime between March 22 and April 25. My birthday is March 28 and in 2027 Easter will fall on March 28.

I found the Biblical text in Matthew that comes just before and after this passage particularly worthy of note. In Matthew 20: 17-19, Jesus predicts his death and resurrection to the Twelve. In Matthew 21: 12-13, Jesus goes into the temple and throws out those who were buying and selling there.

Hosanna to the Son of David! Hosanna in the highest!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fAs25pABYoM&list=RDfAs25pABYoM&start_radio=1

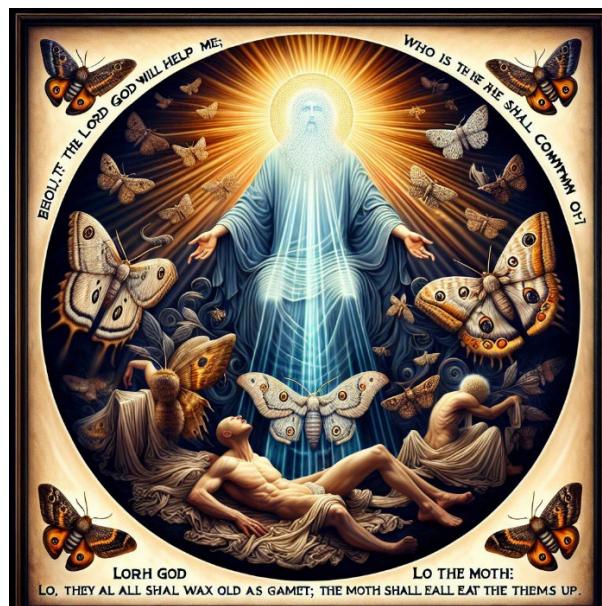
Monday, March 30 by Harold Frye

Isaiah 50:9 "Look! My accusers are a clothes bin of threadbare socks and shirts, fodder for moths!" (The Message)

My encounters with folks who are struggling with finances usually occur at the KCK Hot Lunch or on the Renewed Hope food pantry bus. When clients walk past me, I usually take notice of what they are wearing, especially t-shirts and sweatshirts. Many times, their clothing displays sports teams, schools, and such. I made the mistake one time of commenting about one client's shirt and was quickly told by the wearer that they weren't particularly a fan of that university. In fact, my conclusion was that the person had likely not ever stepped foot on that school's campus. Since that incident, I have made certain that I not comment at all, for the source of clothing was usually a thrift store or a charity.

Prophet Isaiah foretold the experience of Jesus when Pharisees attacked him for false prophecies. Even though the Pharisees adorned themselves with the finest garments, they were no better than the worst when compared to clothing.

What about people today? Do those who dress in garments from finely designed wardrobes maintain the deep love for others expected by God? Or do they, regardless of their appearance, follow Jesus?



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUX_Sm2p3Rc&list=RDgUX_Sm2p3Rc&start_radio=1

Tuesday, March 31 by Harold Frye

Psalm 31:9 "Have pity, Lord! I am hurting and almost blind. My whole body aches.

Several years ago, I went each week to the Kansas State School for the Blind with my wife. Her volunteer placement for the Junior League was to spend time with students tutoring them in reading braille. I managed to pick up a little braille myself but enjoyed spending most of my time reading bedtime stories to the youngest children. I quickly overcame my feelings of sorrow for the children's lack of sight for they were just like sighted children in all other ways.

But how could God allow some of his children to go through life without sight? I learned from the children that, when one sense is absent, other senses become stronger. Unlike the Psalmist, these children were not filled with self-pity. God gave them the strength to adapt, survive, and thrive.

I would have given anything to have brought sight to the children at the state school. I learned that they didn't need my sympathy



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PS7yujtmOak&list=RDPS7yujtmOak&start_radio=1

Wednesday, April 1 by Karen Wright

Philippians 2:5-11

This text was a favorite of my theology professor Rev. Dr. Cynthia Rigby. I remember her talking with great passion about Jesus emptying himself (kenosis) and coming to take on our human, mortal, fleshy existence. That Jesus entered all the way into what it means to be human. And that in taking on our humanity, Jesus, when exalted by God has raised us up as well. We have been raised up into new life with God because Jesus became like us.

The act of self-emptying, kenosis, is one that we are called to live out through our own humility. This does not mean becoming a doormat. This does not mean neglecting ourselves. But to enter into life with humility is to give of ourselves to those around us. To remember that the ground is level at the foot of the cross and we are all equally broken and redeemed.

Prayer:

Jesus Christ, you crossed every boundary for love's sake. Shape our minds after yours. When obedience feels costly, give us courage to follow. Lead us through the threshold of surrender, trusting that life and glory rest in your hands. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YII4o33rJdA&list=RDYII4o33rJdA&start_radio=1

Thursday, April 2 Maundy Thursday by Karen Wright

Foot washing is not something common in our lives. In biblical times, it would be a necessity as walking barefoot or in sandals on dusty paths, it was how people kept houses clean. Large jugs of water were available to wash feet and if someone performed the task, it was the lowest of the household slaves.

The church I served as Director of Christian Education in Austin, Texas had foot washing as part of the Maundy Thursday service. After reading the text from John how Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and how love acts, and how leadership serves, after communion people were invited to have their feet washed. One year, I was filling in for someone who was sick. So, I was washing feet. Filling a basin with warm water, using a sponge to gently wash a foot while speaking words of Scripture such as Romans 10:15 - "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news." And then drying the foot off.

As we began, I found myself washing the foot of a small child. I didn't think much of it until the next foot was also that of a child at the church. As I looked up at those gathered near where I was stationed, it was all children. I can't help but look back at that evening and think that Christ must have felt like the disciples were all his children. Gently and tenderly washing their feet, tending to them with love and care. Reminding them that they were each beloved and that they were called to love others as well.

Prayer:

Servant Christ, you meet us at the table and kneel before us in love. As we remember this night, help us cross from comfort into service, from fear into faithful love. Teach us to love one another as you have loved us, even when the way is hard. Amen.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=syqjaPuLnFQ&list=RDsyqjaPuLnFQ&start_radio=1

Friday, April 3 Good Friday by Harold Frye

Matthew 26:14-27:66

This rather lengthy passage relates the events beginning with the payment of 30 pieces of silver to Judas Iscariot for his role in identifying Jesus to the Roman soldiers and includes Judas regretting his actions and taking his life. The scripture passages end with the sealing of Jesus' tomb, so a reading and review of the events of Good Friday can be consequential. Judas attempted to return the 30 pieces of silver, but the temple leaders rejected taking them back and, instead, purchased a plot of land that became a cemetery known as a potter's field, the Field of Blood. We often read (even as a family tradition) the Christmas story, but don't read this powerful account of the events of Jesus' crucifixion.

If your daily devotions reading habit is other than daily, you are encouraged to recognize Good Friday by reading Matthew's account.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DgAZ6HnMXAs&list=RDDgAZ6HnMXAs&start_radio=1

Saturday, April 4 by Gene Wilson

Matthew 27:11-54

So here we are, nearly at the end of this Lenten Season. And on this particular day, many in the Christian faith believes THIS day is the deepest day of mourning of the Christian calendar. We hope you will find time to read the entire Scripture for today, because it sets the stage for WHY we mourn so deeply on this day.

The Scripture begins with Jesus being dragged before Pilate, the Roman Governor, by the Chief Priests of the Jews asking Pilate to condemn Jesus to death. But Jesus answers only one of Pilate's questions, then stands mute as Pilate continues to question Him. Remember, Jesus already knows His fate, whatever He says, so He endures the false accusations of the Chief Priests and the beatings of the Roman guards without uttering another word in His defense. Finally, Pilate tells the Chief Priests he finds no reason to call Jesus guilty of any crime against Rome and turns Jesus back to the Chief Priests to determine Jesus' fate. Because of their laws during Passover, they are forbidden to take a life that day, so they ask their Jewish subjects what they want to do with Jesus. As with any mob, they have been roiled into a frenzy and easily convince the Chief Priests to "crucify Him!" (Which, of course, was their plan all along, because Jesus had become such a threat to their continued control and power.) Now put yourself in Jesus' position for a moment and imagine the false ridicule He had to endure. The Roman Guards stripped Him of His clothes and wrapped Him in a purple blanket and forced a crown of thorns into His scalp to mock His role as "King of the Jews." Then they allowed Him to cover Himself and marched Him up the hill to Golgotha with His cross while the crowd continued to curse Him and spit on Him. There, they hung Him up on the cross between two thieves and gambled for His garments while they waited for Him to die. (I had always thought the Roman guards had hung Him on the cross with nails through his Hands and feet, but nowhere in any of the four Gospels in any of the Bibles I researched did I find that fact, so that must be a memory planted in my mind by some Hollywood movie, or in some anthem or oratorio we have sung. Later in the Bible, Doubting Thomas demands to see the scars in Jesus hands from the nails before he believes it really is Jesus, but that's not in the Scripture for today.) But the tragedy has the same outcome. Try to put yourself on that cross, gravity pulling your body weight and fluids down on your arms for three hours, stretching your tendons and muscles beyond pain while you are literally dying of thirst. Imagine calling your father, asking why is he allowing you to endure this endless suffering! Then, imagine the deep sadness of noticing your mother near the foot of your cross and calling to your disciples to take care of her after you die. Then, finally, you breathe your last. "It is finished." And the sky goes black, the earth shakes, the rocks break, and the curtain in the Temple is torn in two. When things settle down, a Roman Guard at the foot of the cross says, "Certainly, this WAS God's Son." Keep thinking today of all the humiliation and agony our Lord suffered yesterday, and why we mourn so deeply today. And remember, He did it all so WE can have eternal life!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzCwgLZ4ODA&list=RDbzCwgLZ4ODA&start_radio=1

Sunday, April 5 Easter by Don Wilson

I Corinthians 15: 9-11

Today is Easter. The day of our grand celebration of the resurrection of our Lord! It may seem odd that the scripture for today's meditation does not mention the word "Resurrection." I believe that this reading is, indirectly, very much about resurrection. The resurrection of our Lord teaches us that God is the God of radical Transformation. Resurrection is not limited to one day, or one event. The story of Paul's "resurrection experience" is told in Acts chapter 9.

I urge you to take a moment and read Acts 9:1-19. Today's reading from I Corinthians 15 includes Paul's confession of his unworthiness to be an apostle precisely because he was an enemy of Jesus Christ in his earlier days when known as Saul. One might be reminded of the ICE officers of our time as you read of Saul's viciousness. He was literally "A man on a mission" ...a mission to wipe out the young faith. Then a dramatic experience changed everything! As this passage moves along through to verse 11, we hear Paul boasting how he has outdone all others in proclaiming Christ as opening the path toward the True life. But Paul's boasting is actually crediting the grace of God.

Today we celebrate that grace which transforms lives. Paul's experience is of a life transformed. It is a source of not only inspiration, but Hope.



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=krpAnRQ-W54&list=RDkrpAnRQ-W54&start_radio=1

Season of Lent

On The Threshold:

Conversations on
the Way to the Cross

February 18 - April 5
gcpc.org/lent



Conversations that happen
at thresholds between—
night and day,
belief and doubt,
grief and hope,
fear and trust.

March 29, Palm / Passion Sunday

Worship at 9:30am

- Music by the Chancel & Exaltation! Singers,
Joy! & Celebration! children choirs.

April 2, Maundy Thursday

Worship at 7:30pm

Sacrament of Communion

- Music by the Praise Team.

April 3, Good Friday/Tenebrae Service

Worship at 7:30pm

- Music by Chancel Choir.

April 5, Easter Sunday Worship

One Great Hour of Sharing Offering

Worship services at 9am and 11am

Sacrament of Communion.

(NOTE: The flowering of the cross begins 15 minutes prior to the start of each worship service.)

- Music at 9am by the Praise Team.
- Music at 11am by Chancel Choir, Charter
Ringers, & Chancel Brass.

These devotions are sent via email daily during Lent by our church office. If you would like to receive them, email us at office@gcpc.org.

Download a PDF copy of this booklet,
get additional Lenten resources, and learn more
about events during Lent at gcpc.org/lent.



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With gratitude for where we have
been and hope for where God is
leading us, we are sent to serve
Christ in the world—extending
Christ's love, strengthening
community, and living out the
gospel through lives of grace,
justice, and compassion.

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In addition to in-person worship,
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