

# PASSION FROM THE PRESENCE AND PROMISES OF GOD.

A Lenten Devotional



*Devotions within these pages were written by congregants of  
First Lutheran Church and St. Albans Episcopal Church.*

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# ASH WEDNESDAY

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

The Quest to Impress

“Every 24 hours the world turns over on someone who was sitting on top of it”

– Sign on the wall of MLB coach Sparky Anderson

Jesus knew well the truth of these words and warned against them at length in this passage. The quest to impress, if achieved, is fleeting. “Whenever you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, so that they may be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward.”

I can’t help but think of our digital age where any amount of attention is even more fleeting. You may have posted a popular video online that’s getting lots of views, but moments later a notification bell goes off on viewers’ devices and everyone has moved on to the next distraction. All your work for attention? Forgotten. You’ve received your reward! Sparky’s sign might read today – “Every *second* the world turns over on someone who was sitting on top of it.”

Jesus doesn’t remove our desire to get noticed, but he does give it a new target. “Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret; and your Father in secret will reward you.” He will reward you with attention that is not fleeting.

Attention that will not turn over on you moments later, but instead seeks to grant you every good thing in this life. Attention that directs you to all the heavenly treasure he’s told you to ask him for (Matthew 6:9-13) and which he gladly gives.

**Lord grant us faith that seeks your attention above all else. Amen.**

-Pastor Brian Jack

# FEBRUARY 18TH

## Deuteronomy 31:8

The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.

One day a child and his mother go to the department store. He, being 5 or 6, isn't so much intrigued by the shopping but by the maze of aisles, clothes racks, and more. It felt like a jungle to him! He stayed by his mother in obedience for the first 10 minutes or so but then the allure of this store jungle got to him. His mother was visiting with a store clerk and he made his move. He wandered in and out of the aisles, in between display racks and eventually ended back up where he thought his mother would be. Only there was a problem. She wasn't there anymore! The child got a little nervous at this point and did what any logical 5 or 6 year old boy would do- he hid amongst the trousers! After what felt like hours, though it had only been a minute or two, he heard fast feet on the tile floors and heard his mom calling his name. He sheepishly came out from under the trousers and reunited with his mother, relief and joy being felt by both of them.

Childhood is all about rites of passages and getting lost just might be one of them. The interesting thing about this boy, and really about all of us, is that we are the ones prone to wander away. We are the ones apt to lose our way. As we see in this verse, however, God is always the one who stays right there. In fact He will always be with us, even in the times we begin to wander away. His promise here was huge for the Israelites upon the transition of leadership from Moses to Joshua in this passage, and this promise is huge for us in these days. Does God feel lost to you? Perhaps he's been right there all along. It's time for us to find Him once again.

**Lord give us ears to hear when you call and know that you're right here for us. Amen.**

-Allison Antoine

# FEBRUARY 19TH

## Nahum 1:17 NIV

“The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.”

Where do YOU go in times of trouble?

In March 2020, the Covid pandemic spread across America and history was made as it affected everyone in the world. We were introduced to new words in our vocabulary like unprecedented, social distancing, air hugs and wearing masks is the new normal.

How did the pandemic change your story? What emotions did you feel during this time? Lonely, defeated, anxious, frustrated, alone, upset, worried, depressed, and scared? Where do you go to get comfort? Family and friends? This scripture reminds us God is our protector and shelter in times of trouble.

I personally felt many emotions as stated above at one point during the pandemic. My mom lives in a nursing home and had Covid, pneumonia, UTI and cardiac arrest. Doctors prepared us for the worst. She was dying. We could not be at the hospital to comfort her. I reached out to friends and family and they were great support. I gave my troubles to the Lord. I opened my bible and let his words marinate and comfort my soul. Mom is a miracle and went back to the nursing home. I know some have lost a love one. I am praying you can turn to God and trust him with your sorrow.

Next time, when you have trouble, look vertically (up) instead of horizontally (out) as the Lord is your shelter. God will fight your battles. Grab your bible and soak up his words as he will comfort you.

**Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for being such a great father and when trouble comes thank you for being our shelter.**

-Angela Berg

# FEBRUARY 20TH

## 1 Kings 19: 11-12 SILENCE IS GOLDEN

He (GOD) said “go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind, an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

This brings to mind, with some pain, my first deployment to Vietnam and after a long day of our destroyer firing in support of ground troops, we pulled out to sea at 7 knots and I was finally relieved as CIC watch officer.

After eating, I wandered to the bow of the ship as I often did to just be alone with my thoughts and the sea. That evening was beautiful and the sea was flat and the sunset was red and gold (red skies at night, sailors’ delight) as it disappeared into what looked like nothing but stars. The only sounds were that of the ship moving through the water making small waves and my thoughts turned to home and Leta. Then it happened. I was overcome with a presence, not a voice or even a whisper, just this feeling of being surrounded and my heart began to beat very hard and I started to sweat. I remember I became worried and started to turn when a small breath of wind hit my face and I felt like someone was speaking and yet I heard no sounds; just my mind telling me everything was going to be alright. I’ll tell you true; I said the Lord’s prayer and sat down on the deck and just looked at the Heavens.

Now this has happened to me several times and always at sea or on the lake when alone. I believe God speaks to many of us in our minds; after all, he created us and his love for us never ends. Just listen for the silence, God is there and it is Golden.

**Prayer: “God know that I am your servant and guide me to be a better one.”**

-One of God’s Children, Archie Barriage

# FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

## Matthew 4: 1-2

“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.”

Fasting has come into vogue recently as a diet trend. Intermittent fasting is when a dieter picks an eight-hour window in the day to eat and abstains the other sixteen. The Church begins again its own intermittent fast on Ash Wednesday. There is a temptation in fasting to think one is strong enough to sacrifice some calories and that God will delight in our efforts. But fasting is really an invitation not to strength but to realize our weakness. Our fast is based off of Jesus’ forty day stay in the wilderness which is a call back to the sojourn of the Israelites after the Exodus. This time away from the comforts of life reminds both God’s people and God’s son that we humans are utterly dependent on God for all that we have. In fasting we put away the earthly bread and drink and seek to depend on the bread of heaven and living water freely offered to those who ask for it. Our Lenten fast invites us not to a new awareness of our strength but to renew our reliance on God’s strength, love, and nurturing. As you reflect on your own fast remember that you are only giving up skim milk so that you can drink God’s fat filled whole milk. We fast from our impoverished habits so that we might more fully receive God’s promises of abundance.

**Lord free us from whatever comes between us and you, that we might know your love and serve our neighbors with a quiet mind. Amen**

-From The Congregation of St. Albans



# FEBRUARY 22ND

**Romans 10:9-10**

**Focusing on Faith**

“If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

In 2017 Protestants around the world commemorated the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. During October each year we remember Reformation Sunday to mark the time in 1517 when Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses to the Castle Church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Later this event led to the publication of Luther’s Small Catechism which is an important guide for youth in their confirmation study. Even though our churches have seen changes in music, hymnals, and liturgy, the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer remain important parts of our worship services. It is the focus of our Christian faith.

The book of Romans was composed by the apostle Paul. Through his journeys Paul traveled to preach the gospel and to show how, by having faith, God provides mercy and forgiveness. Romans helps explain salvation which is offered through Jesus Christ and what His death accomplished. Jesus came to die for our sins through his resurrection. Those who have faith and have asked God into their hearts, will confess Christ as Lord and will be saved.

Martin Luther described Paul’s letter to the Romans as the most important piece in the New Testament. They are central to the history of our Christian faith. It is important that we remember what God accomplished through Jesus and that we profess our faith. Whenever we recite the Apostles’ Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, we must focus on those familiar statements which we have learned or memorized.

**Dear God, Help us to focus on remaining faithful and to look for opportunities to enhance our faith in You. Amen.**

-Evy Robinson

# FEBRUARY 23RD

**Joshua 1:9**

## **The Promise of His Presence**

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go.”

The other night Joshua (our 5 year old son) and I were at a gas station, because he needed to use the restroom. It was a one-person bathroom, so I told him I'd wait right outside. He said, “Dad, can you come in with me? I get scared when I'm alone, but not when you're with me.”

How amazingly ironic that the passage I was given was all about our Father God promising his boy Joshua, that God would be WITH him, so he didn't have to be afraid. And God was with him when they crossed the Jordan River, when they marched around the impenetrable walls of Jericho, and when they defeated all the nations in the promised land.

In fact, of all the promises that God makes, the promise of His presence is perhaps the most powerful. Why would we fear, when God is with us?

Why would we worry about finances, if God is with us? Why would we be nervous to share our faith with others or pray or teach Sunday School if the God who placed the stars in the sky was right there with us.

In fact God reminds of this promise several times throughout Scripture at some really key points.

To Moses before freeing the Israelites (Exodus 3:12)

To Joshua before leading Israel into the promised land (Joshua 1:9)

To Israel before they are exiled (Isaiah 43:1-5)

To believers at Jesus' birth (Matthew 1:23)

To the disciples as they are given the great commission (Matthew 28:18-20)

In fact, for all we don't know about heaven, one of the few things we are promised is that God will be WITH us in such a powerful way, there won't be any fear, darkness, pain, or sin. In a way, the pure presence of God with us IS heaven. (cont.)

So where is God leading you right now? What challenges are you facing? Remember that God is WITH you right now. You need not fear.

**Lord, help us to trust that you are right beside us, and living inside us. Drive out all fear, and fill us with faith in you. In Jesus name, amen!**

-Dan Antoine

# FEBRUARY 24TH

**John 8:12**

“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”

The two words that are the focus of this devotion in the above scripture are whoever and will. The whoever is us, or those that have committed their hearts to Christ through baptism and further on, confirmation of that baptism. The word will is the promise given to us by our lord and savior...it is a definite, an absolute that we will have the light of life. So what do we do with this gift of light?

A song I like to sing at camp is “You are the Light of the World” which is sourced from Matt. 5:14. The lyrics include the words...shine where you are. This is exactly what we are to do with this gift of light. We are to let it shine in all places...the good, the bad and everywhere in between. We are to show others this gift and let them be led by its light, warmed by its glow, intrigued by its flicker and realize the power it has over darkness.

In essence we become more like Christ as we become the light of the world.

I challenge you to let your light shine no matter where you are each and every day so that others may come to know the promise given to us in this scripture.

**Father God, thank you so much for sending your Son to us to show us what exactly this light of the world is. Give us the strength and confidence to let His light of life shine through us in all facets of our lives.**

**Amen.**

-Eric Ostovic

# FEBRUARY 25TH

## Matthew 7:9-11 What makes a GOOD gift?

We (myself included) are often confused about what is truly good. God promises to give us good gifts. He also told us to ask and we shall receive. Why, then, does a brand-new motorcycle, trunk of cash, or pony not show up on my doorstep? What about when I sincerely ask God for something that I am sure is good? Have you ever prayed for wisdom? Healing for a relative or yourself? Or, if I look really far back, the affection of a certain person in algebra class? (should have been paying attention to the teacher)

I think God does answer in a couple of different ways:

Timing: God's timing is NOT our timing. The things that I thought would have been good gifts in 10th grade were probably not going to be good gifts for me and the life God has planned for me. So, when the answer is "no" or it doesn't seem to be answered at all, that may not be God giving us a loaf of bread. It may be that the fresh loaves are in the oven and if we wait a minute it will be that much better.

Preceding these verses is a chapter all about how we should live our lives and align our goals with His goals. "Seek First, the kingdom of God" and "how to pray, as shown in the Lord's Prayer" show up in chapter six. If we live our lives and shape our hearts in his image, the things that we desire and the gifts that we ask will be things that are truly good. I have found that when I reach out to request that His will be revealed, I receive blessings upon blessings.

This season, I will do my best to remember Jesus' words in Luke 22, "Not my will, but your will be done". Then, we shall receive good gifts.

**Lord in heaven, giver of all good gifts. Please open my ears, eyes, and heart so that I may align my wishes with your will.**

-Josh Carr

# FEBRUARY 26TH

**Mark 11:24**

## **The Power of Prayer**

“Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.”

When I first read this Bible verse, I thought, “Wow! Wouldn’t that be great!” But reality tells me that if I ask for a million dollars to fall out of the sky, it just isn’t going to happen...if my prayer went something more like, “please watch over and guide me and my family”...well I have received that 100% of the time. I have a special time of day that I like to pray, it’s in my Jeep right before I go into the home that I work in. It’s quiet, dark and warm and I can think and talk to God without interruption. It’s the best way I know of to start my day. I try to balance my prayers of wants with prayers of thanksgiving and not just ask God for what I feel I need. I do believe with my whole heart that God is capable of absolutely everything and knows what is best for me, beyond my own understanding. I do trust Him to take care of me and my family and friends and give us each just what we need when we need it. This Bible verse also doesn’t give me a timeline of when I will receive what I ask for. Maybe that million dollars will come, but over my whole lifetime, and I will receive it one paycheck at a time for the work that I do. I think the verse is mostly reminding me that God does have the power to give me anything that He sees fit that I need and my job is to trust that promise.

**Dear God, thank you for listening to our prayers and responding in a way that is just right for each of us. In Your name I pray, Amen**

-Julie Steinle

# FEBRUARY 27TH

**John 8:36**

**I Am Who You Say I Am**

“So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

I have been set free, indeed! But when the pastors asked me to reflect on this passage, I was forced to revisit a time in my life, from my early teenage years up to about 20 years ago, when I had no concept of what it really meant to have Christ set you free. Funny, because I have been a woman of faith my entire life. I “knew” all about God. I just had not yet allowed myself to experience God or maybe wasn’t able to see that it “was” God, at work all around me, all the time. We read about and sing songs about a living God...Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. We are just begging for things to happen when we ask this of our Father! Living means active. God’s activity is in us, through the Holy Spirit and in the world around us with glimpses of God himself that happen to people every day. Sometimes, these things aren’t so obvious, how we are put in the right place at the right time with all the right people. Divine intervention or mere coincidence? But sometime things happen that only God can do.

There are two things I pray every day of my life. The first is for God to help me be “all” He’s created me to be. The second is for God to reveal himself to me and for discernment, so I know when it’s Him. I’ve tasted and seen of the sweetest of loves, where my heart becomes free and my shame is undone. I stole this lyric from a song JJ chose for worship a few weeks back but it describes what I have experienced perfectly.

I’m barren, unable to have children. This was a heavy cross I carried for a very long season of my life. I thought that something I had done, some sin from my past was causing God’s disfavor on me. I even had a medical doctor tell me the only reason I wasn’t getting pregnant was because my heart wasn’t right with God and he wrote down the name of a self help book he thought I should read on his prescription pad. Hard words to hear for a girl that thought God’s grace couldn’t possibly be meant “for” her. She wasn’t worthy and she knew it. (cont.)

And then, one day down the road, I was set free by the words of a complete stranger, who whispered a prophetic word in my ear that could have only been sent to me from God, himself. She said, "I have a word for you from the Father. Isaiah 54:1 Sing, O barren woman, sing for the fruit you shall bear through Him is so much more pleasing to Him than any you could bear with your husband." I asked "How do you know this about me?" She said, "I know nothing about you, only what He told me to tell you." Who was I to question a thing like this? My eyes had seen, my ears had heard and my heart was opened to the truth! God made it so obvious, not only did I know that God could see me, I knew I was His own and He was recruiting me, ME, unworthy, unlikely candidate to share His gospel. And here I am, still singing. I will sing of His love, forever! Another stolen lyric. God is real. God is here. God is at work all around you, too. He sees you. He wants you to see Him. And He sent His Son for you, to set YOU free just like He did me.

**Father God, help us be quiet enough to hear you and aware enough to see you at work around us and in us so that we can be set free.**

And a song to ponder, I Am Who You Say I Am.

-Karen Currier

# SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

## Matthew 4:3-4

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.'"

Early on in the pandemic many rediscovered the practice of making their own bread. Specifically, sourdough bread came into vogue. Baking bread is challenging and rewarding. One can have the best ingredients, the best conditions, the best skills but so much of bread making happens in the time out of our hands. The baker brings together the yeast, flour, water and salt in a few minutes. The gluten strains form through the bakers kneading. But the real test happens in the time it takes for the bread to rise. The baker can put the dough in the best position to rise but some loaves just don't turn out. A lot of it is out of our hands. Such is life. We might think we can control what happens if we just do our part right but sometimes the dough just doesn't rise. Jesus reminds us that our own efforts will always be insufficient. However, God will always give us what we need if we have our hands out and our ears open.

**Holy Spirit open our ears and our hearts to receive the life we can't make, but have been given freely by the costly work of Jesus Christ.**

**Amen.**

-From The Congregation of St. Albans



# MARCH 1ST

**Philippians 4:6-7**

**Perfect Peace**

When the Bible speaks about God's peace, it's inner peace that transcends all outward chaos. It's a gift. It's perfect peace!

A man was looking for the perfect picture of peace, so he announced an art contest and invited artists to produce a masterpiece of peace. The challenge stirred the imagination of artists everywhere and paintings arrived from near and far. Finally the day arrived to reveal the art and the judges uncovered one peaceful scene after another while viewers clapped and cheered. Soon there were only two pictures left to be shown. As the cover was removed from one, a hush fell on the crowd. A glass smooth lake reflecting beautiful green birches under the soft colorful evening sky. Along the grassy shore a flock of sheep grazed undisturbed. Surely this was the winner.

But then, the second painting was uncovered. The crowd gasped in surprise! Could this be peace? A tumultuous waterfall cascaded down a rocky ledge. The crowd could almost feel its cold piercing spray. Stormy gray clouds threatened to explode with lightning, wind and rain. In the middle of the thundering noises and bitter chill, a spindly tree clung to the rocks at the edge of the falls. One of its branches reached out in front of the torrential waters as if foolishly seeking to experience its full power. A little bird had built a nest in the elbow of that branch, content and undisturbed by the stormy surroundings. She rested on her eggs. With her eyes closed and her wings ready to cover her little ones, she manifested peace that transcends all turmoil.

When the Bible speaks about peace, it's the same. It's inner peace, that transcends all outward chaos. The gift of perfect peace!

**Dear Lord...We turn our worries over to you and we are grateful for your peace. Give us the strength and clarity to find our purpose and walk the path you have laid out for us. AMEN**

-Kim K. Wermersen

# MARCH 2ND

2 Corinthians 12:9-10

## Weakness is the New Strong

How many of you actually feel stronger in your insecurities, insults, and hardships? I know that that is not the first feeling I get for sure! But the more I think about it, the more and more I can see the work that God does through me in those times.

I am a natural worrier. I get scared. I don't like to be vulnerable. 3 ½ years ago our son had open heart surgery. Every day leading up to the surgery I was a nervous wreck. What if we didn't like the surgeon? What if something went wrong? Why are they stopping his heart for so long? Why does it have to be him? I was so scared that it was clouding everything else out of my head.

Surgery day arrived. We held our son, said a prayer, and then cried after they took him away to the operating room. When we joined the rest of our family in the waiting room, I was surprisingly calm.

When the surgeon came out three hours later and said everything went well, I hugged him and thanked him. Later on, my dad asked me how I was so calm through the whole thing. He had noticed a difference in my behavior. I told him that it could only have been God. It wasn't anything to do with my strength.

I prayed and thanked God for working through the surgeons. I thanked Him for working through me to show others that especially in our most vulnerable moments, His strength is revealed.

“For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

**Thank you Lord for the strength you show in my vulnerability. Amen.**

-Cari Jack

# MARCH 3RD

Isaiah 61:1

**We are a light shining for others to see...WHO ME??**

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners...

Whether we know it or accept it, as Christians living our lives according to God's plan, we are beacons of light shining for the world to see. We can deny that or use it to the best of our ability. It has taken me a long time to understand that by our everyday treatment of others we are shining The Spirit of the Lord all day long every day. The kindness shown to another at the store, driving, on the phone, or in the driveway at church can MAKE their day and show them the light shining in your heart. In these crazy times the smile to a passing car might be the only personal interaction they have that day. As my mother used to say it takes more facial muscles to frown than to smile. Let THE SPIRIT of the Lord shine through your beautiful smile every day.

**Lord, as a disciple of yours thank you for the opportunity to spread your good news through our smiles to the world. Amen**

-Cindy Redmond

# MARCH 4TH

## Proverbs 3:5-6

### Trust in Him

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Trust in the Lord. That seems like a very simple thing to do, but is it? On any given day one might worry about something, which could lead to anxiety, which then could lead to panic! You know the type. Maybe that's you? Have you ever worried about the weather when you're about to drive somewhere? Ever worried about the way you look or maybe how you feel? Anyone ever searched webMD? Ever worry about dying? Your family? The list could go on and on and the reasons for worry could be anything! Others who don't worry always seem to have a good answer, don't they? Just drive slow; you'll be okay, or you look great! You don't need to worry, they're fine, or I'll pray for you.

Sound familiar?

Of course, you can ignore those people and continue on with self-destructive behavior, but that doesn't fix anything, does it? Do you ever wonder if those "non-worriers" have a secret that you just don't know about? The answer is yes. THEY have trust in the Lord. That simple thing, is actually pretty simple! Now don't diminish your feelings of worry; embrace them and know that when those feelings seem so big, God's peace and understanding is even bigger.

So challenge yourself this Lenten Season to look beyond your worry and pray. Don't let anxiety and panic consume your thoughts; instead think about the grace and mercy that was given to you through Jesus Christ, our Lord. It may sound difficult, but trust that even though YOU may not know the answers, HE does. You'll see that a life with God, will actually begin to put your worry in place.

**Dear Lord, thank you for understanding our worries and giving us hope in uncertain times. Amen.**

-Jen Crane Salvner

# MARCH 5TH

## Jeremiah 29:11

'For I know the plans I have for you', declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.'

If just words were counted, the book of Jeremiah is the longest book in the Bible. The first 25 chapters deal with the failure of the Israelites to worship only one God. Because of their disobedience they have been wandering around the desert aimlessly. They are desperately seeking redemption so they can finally enter the Promised Land.

It will not happen quickly. The verse before this says, "This is what the Lord says: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place." How discouraging that must have been for the tribe of Israel. Yes, their prayers would be answered, but only after 70 long years. We, too, are disheartened with some of life's curve balls: a job loss, a failed marriage, the death of a loved one, a pandemic. While suffering, we are stunned or disbelieving, unable to acknowledge what has happened. How natural to blame others, even to blame God, for our trials. We want the bad times to stop right now.

No one understands our sorrows more than God. Can you imagine the anguish He felt as He willingly gave His Only Son for our salvation? Years ago I heard a pastor on a radio program say, "If we believe Christmas is a "New Beginning" (birth of a baby), then we must think of Lent and Easter as "The Great Promise." With all the darkness of Lent, Easter's glory assures us God is with us always. He does not leave us or quit holding our hands. He has a plan for us, a plan with hope.

**Praying today for acceptance of God's plans for those who suffer.**

-Mary Rasmussen

# MARCH 6TH

## Luke 18: 16-18 FROM THE MOUTHS

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

Children are my passion. The first 12 years of my 42 year teaching career I taught Kindergarten in Milford.

Back in the 50’s and 60’s Kdg. Children went half days. So I had a morning group and an afternoon group. One of the special things I did was emphasized important people in History. This day was Abraham Lincoln’s birthday. I asked them if they knew who’s birthday it was. I was thinking maybe it was mentioned at home and someone would know. They quietly checked with one another to see if anyone brought treats. No one had so finally I said. “It’s Abraham Lincoln’s birthday today.” Little Timmy said, “Oh he must come in the afternoon.

“ Needless to say it took awhile to gain my composure.

How innocent from a 5 year old. If we as Christians could speak with such innocents!

When I was 3 years old I started Sunday School in our little Country Church. The first song I learned was: Jesus loves the little children of the world. Red and Yellow, Black and White, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world.

**Dear Lord, In this season of Lent to receive your Kingdom I must enter with the hope, trust and humility of a small child.**

-Marjorie Roelofsen

# THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT

Psalm 145:9

**“You have MY WORD”**

“The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.”

A friend once said to me that it seemed presumptuous to expect God to listen to his prayers. After all, God had many more important matters to look after! If I am honest with myself, I admit that I have often thought the same thing, even if I didn't say it out loud! Perhaps I hesitate to admit that I need God's help and prefer to “do it myself.” Hmm, pride?? Perhaps I am too busy to thank God for blessings? Surely God already knows I am grateful! ???

In the season of Lent, we remember that we need our loving Savior. The mystic, St. Bernard of Clairvaux, almost 1,000 years ago said that it is good to be aware of our faults and our need for God's forgiveness. But, he said, it is also good to focus on God's great mercy and love for us!

As the Psalm says, “The Lord is good to ALL! He has compassion on ALL he has made!” No part of God's creation is unimportant to God! Each one of us is precious to God! There is nothing that can get between us and God's love. Ask anything. Say anything. Be anything!  
God is listening!

**Let us pray: God, I am your precious child. Help me to live confidently in your steadfast love and grow ever closer to You! Amen.**

-Mark Stelzer

# MARCH 8TH

John 3:16

## For the Love of a Child

“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.”

As a parent, I sincerely cannot think of a greater love on earth than the instant love that you have for your child. For me, it only took that one first look into my newborn baby's eyes and there wasn't any going back. My heart was forever bound to be helplessly in love with this child. And the scariest part of that was that I was given the responsibility to protect this child from any harm, any danger, any obstacle that would threaten their happiness and safety...it was now my job to guide them around life's hurdles, to keep them safe and teach them the tools of kindness and love to find their own way around this world.

When reading this bible verse, I think about how I can't even come close to understanding the absolute sacrifice that God made for us. He gave His only Son to die on a cross to save us from our sins and grant us eternal life with Him in heaven. I just can't fathom this depth of love. However, it reminds me that even though I can't understand everything God has planned for me in this life, I know I can trust Him to guide me through life's obstacles. I know this because He has shown us how much He loves us. It's a kind of love that I can put all my trust in even though I can't comprehend its lack of boundaries. It is overwhelming and without end. That makes me, a child of God, feel safe and secure and well-taken care of.

**Dear God, Please help me to love others as you first loved me and feel safe and protected in your arms of healing and love. Amen.**

-Jennifer Johnson



# MARCH 9TH

**1 Chronicles 16:34**

**Give thanks! God is Good! His Love/Mercy endures forever!**

“Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love/mercy endures forever.”

**Our calling:** Give thanks! I was listening to the Today Show last January after the breach of the capital. The speaker, Jay Shetty, said, “This may seem like a strange time to be thankful.” What is happening in your world right now? Is this an easy time to “Give thanks”? or Not? This verse does not address how we are feeling about giving thanks, it just says, “Give thanks!” The speaker went on to say, “It has been proven that when we are Giving Thanks, we can’t do anything else.” We can’t worry, fret, be angry, be sad or have any other emotion. Perhaps that is why we are told to “Rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, rejoice.” Philippians 4:4  
Rejoicing is Giving Thanks!

**Who God is:** God is Good! Jesus said, “If you have seen me you have seen the Father.” Thus, God’s goodness was ultimately revealed in Christ Jesus through Jesus’ good and perfect righteousness. When “The Anonymous Chronicler” wrote this passage, this priestly person didn’t know Jesus, but they knew from Jewish history that God was Good and they trusted in God’s goodness despite their current circumstances. We can too!

**His Love/Mercy endures forever:** “No matter what the reason for our failures, we need to eventually move to the place where we forgive ourselves...We also need to ask forgiveness of God and of others...then we turn with trust to the One who readily and endlessly extends the cup of mercy to us...Look at your flawed life today and let God come into it.”

**“Breathprayer: Breathing in: Held in your mercy.... Breathing out: ... held in your love”.**

(p. 78 The Cup of Our Life by Joyce Rupp)

-Kathy Stelzer

# MARCH 10TH

Psalm 34:10

## Call on the Lord

“The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.”

From early in childhood, David, the son of Jesse, loved and trusted the Lord. As a boy David cared for his family’s sheep in the hillsides of Israel.

In this setting he sometimes dealt with lions first-hand. In 1 Samuel 17:35 David says he rescued his sheep from the jaws of a lion by hitting the lion so it’d drop its prey. He’d then seize the lion by its hair and strike it dead. He believed that God protected him during these close and dangerous encounters. The lions of Asia were large - on average 400 pounds, 4 feet tall - and they were plentiful during Biblical times. At the top of the food pyramid, they were able to kill and eat most anything, including people. Yet David risked his own life to save his sheep and credited God for delivering him from the paw of the lion. As powerful as lions are, they are also susceptible to hunger and the other ailments that plague life. David would have seen this as a young shepherd. Likewise, he grew up steeped in faith stories that showed all things powerful grow weak, including pharaohs, kings and kingdoms when they fail to rely on the Lord. David trusted the Lord was with him when he hurled the stone from his slingshot into the forehead of the Philistine Goliath.

The giant fell to the ground dead.

Whether struggling with the claws and teeth of a lion or facing the sword of Goliath on the battlefield, God was there shielding David. Psalm 34 is a song David wrote about God delivering the faithful from harm. David called on the Lord during his times of suffering. The Lord provided. The Almighty will also give us refuge from the lions and battles that present in our lives. Trust in the Lord. Seek peace. Do good. Call on the Lord. He will hear you.

**Dear Lord, grant me faith to believe that when I need help, I can call on you, and you will provide for me. In Jesus’ name, Amen.**

-Kris Rowley

# MARCH 11TH

**John 14:1-3**

## **Won't You be My Neighbor?**

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”

Moving is STRESSFUL. We have moved once without kids (but with morning sickness), with a toddler under foot, and once with three kids to manage. The last time dad went ahead and began working and mom and kids stayed to show the old house and pack. We made that house our home for over twenty years. It was full of love and security. Unexpectedly, we got an offer on that house last March. We showed it one day and sold it the next. It was not in our plans to move at that moment but God had provided this opportunity. The pandemic was in its early days and the kids from out of town could not come home to pack. We donated, sold items and filled a dumpster and a storage unit. We quickly found a place that allowed dogs and God provided us with good moving helpers. These were all stressful moves but the common thread woven between them was our faith that God was leading us to make these changes. He went before us. He walked beside us. He carried us through. We felt that God had prepared these homes for our family and He blessed us with wonderful memories and good neighbors. As He filled our homes with love and gave us peace in our moves, He continues to fill our hearts with a peace about the future. We trust that God is preparing a place for our next move but also for our eternal home. We look forward to living with Him in heaven one day and we really hope you'll be living next door.

**Pray for the homeless and the lost. Ask God to provide a place of peace and security to all who need those things in their lives and reserve a place in His kingdom for all who seek Him.**

-Laurie Colt

# MARCH 12TH

**Mark 12:31**

**As Yourself.**

The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."

For most of my life, I've read this verse as a call to action to love my neighbors. I would often skim over the 'as yourself' part because I didn't really know what that meant. It wasn't until recently that I stopped and really wondered, "What does it mean to love someone as myself?"

I think we can often forget to care for ourselves in the course of our busy lives. In this difficult year especially, how often have you maybe neglected or overlooked your own mental well-being? As Christians, we're called to care for others. I don't think this is in any way negating that call to action, but rather expanding that call to action to include ourselves. When we are intentional with how we spend our time, it can be a really beautiful thing. We can focus on caring for others, pouring ourselves out in order to care for the poor, the disenfranchised, the sick, the 'least of these'. But I wonder, how might our ministry to them change if we were intentionally filling ourselves up in the meantime so that we continue to have something to give? Caring for yourself can look a lot of different ways. Maybe it's being mindful of spending a few moments in prayer every morning or reading scripture before you go to sleep. Maybe it's setting some time out of your day to be mindful of how God is working in your life. Or, maybe it could look like taking 10 seconds to breathe deeply and be still before walking out the door to go run errands. No matter what it looks like, it's important to set some time, however long or short, to be intentionally loving and caring for yourself. So that you can go out and love your neighbors. As yourself. Jesus took breaks to pray, to rest, to be still. We're called to live and love like Christ, what might it look like for us to do the same?

**God, please guide me to care for myself in ways that equip and prepare me to care for others in the way You call us to.**

-Reagan Colt

# MARCH 13TH

## Wisdom 7: 1-6

Our Lenten journey begins with a difficult confrontation: our own death. Death inspires a primal fear. Perhaps this is why we spend so much time avoiding it. How many of us have our funeral arrangements made, wills notarized, burial hymns selected? Yet every Ash Wednesday pastors, priests, and presbyters reminds us that we are dust and to dust we shall return. Why does the road to resurrection Sunday begin with a reminder of our death? Perhaps it's because our resurrection requires our repentance. Part of this repentance is admitting our reliance on Jesus' eternal life and not our own. As funny as it may seem, we cannot live well in our Lord until we confront the fact that we are, as the Psalmist puts it "but grass in the field" destined to dry up. Part of Lent is remembering that to be a human is to be limited: limited in money, limited in time, limited in life. If we do not accept our limits we will be tempted to be something other than what God created us to be. And this what Jesus has come to do, to restore our human nature. But restoration only follows repentance; repentance of our attempts to live without limits. How have you forgotten your limits lately? How might God be inviting you to remember your limits?

**Almighty God, you raise the dead, those for whom it is clear they have come to the limit of their life. Grant us the hope that comes with knowing you work beyond our limits to keep us in a loving relationship with you. Amen.**

-From The Congregation of St. Albans

# FOURTH SUNDAY IN LENT

**Matthew 6:31-33**

## **Don't Worry**

“Therefore do not worry, saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’ For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

During these months since March, our lives have been turned upside down. Wear a mask, social distance, avoid crowds, sanitize and wash your hands while singing “Happy Birthday” twice (but you must use two different names each time).

Well, doesn't that about make us question our values and prerogatives? What came to my mind first was, “What am I about to lose?” We have answers for that question, don't we? Our friends and family, our favorite restaurants, our social gatherings, etc. all come into play. Our lives have taken on a new rhythm, and it is not fun!

The stress, the loneliness, the politics, the science... Like an old Clint Eastwood movie, “The Good The Bad and the Ugly”; it was ALL ugly!

But here it is folks, and it has been here all along: God is with us; God is with us when we lose the pathway in the dark. Don't worry!

As the boy in The Polar Express learned; Believe!

He will provide for those who search for His Kingdom. Don't worry!!  
Our rock of salvation is not what we have lost this last year;  
it is what we have gained.

**Dear Lord in our heart, Let us keep Hope and Faith, Love and Peace and  
John 3:16, our blessed assurance. Amen**

-Marshall Crane

# MARCH 15TH

**John 15:5**

**Face God**

“Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing.”

My weekday routine starts early morning with an exercise/workout routine and then I get ready for the day and head to work. I would like to narrow in on this hour of morning time before work. My exercise/workout routine during the cold months includes time on the treadmill in our basement. During this time, I do my routine check in with my social media accounts and read email too while walking briskly on the treadmill. As I reflect on the above Bible verse, it leaves me to reflect on how I spend my first hour of the morning. I am not referring to the exercise component, but rather the time spent on social media. If I would set this time intentionally to Face God, rather than Facebook, as one example, I would be honoring this Bible verse and making better use of my time. Social media can be addicting and time consuming. It has a way of pulling us in. What if I would spend as much time Facing God each day as the time I spend on my social media accounts? This could be done through devotions, reading the Bible, listening to Christian music, watching/listening to podcast sermons, etc. This would be a better use of time and truly connect me with God. Perhaps for you it's time spent on your cell phone, rather than social media. Regardless, think of what is pulling you away from God, rather than connecting you to Him. We are given only so much time on each given day. I challenge not only myself, but each of you to find a way to Face God daily and give up some time spent scrolling on our cell phones. I have no doubt that starting my day with exercise and Facing God will set my day up for success and help set the tone for the rest of the day.

**God we know the time you have given on us on Earth is not a guarantee. Please help us to Face God, rather than spend so much of our time on our cell phones. Help us to be less distracted and more intentional with our time. Help us use our time to focus on you and make our connection with you a top priority in our lives. In Jesus's name, we pray.**

**Amen**

-Susan Coulander

# MARCH 16TH

**Matthew 11:28-30**

**COME TO ME**

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”

Have you every had a problem you couldn't solve, a situation that was too scary, a hurt that was too deep? We all have. Have you ever felt that it was so bad that you had no one to turn to? I have! On occasion, I have even taken this burden with me to church. As I am sitting in the pew, suffering inside and feeling alone in the middle of the crowd, I look up on the screen to find we are going to sing my favorite song, "Come to Me". If you are not familiar with it here are a few lines:

**Come to Me I am the Comforter.**

**Come crawl up upon My knee.**

**Lay your head close against My heart.**

**Find your rest in Me!**

Then BOOM, it hits me. I'm not alone. I do have someone to turn to....my Lord and Savior. He is always there, ready to listen and ready to help. All I have to do is come to Him, tell him my problem and let him take over the burden. So now I am sitting in church singing this song with tears running down my cheeks but never feeling better in my life. A huge burden has just been lifted from my heart.

As I am writing this today, my heart is again heavy with a burden I don't know what to do with. Why? Because today is January 6, 2021 and I am watching as our U.S. Capital building is being breached. My feelings are mixed....fear, confusion, and even a little hate....but I know what to do. I'm going to talk to my Lord and give the burden to him. He might not give me the answer I want but he can give me peace knowing it is in his hands. (cont.)



So when you find yourself with some of these feelings, don't keep them inside. Listen to the words found in Matthew 11:28-30.

“Come to Me and give Me your burdens. I will help.”

**Dear Lord, Never let me forget those words. Come to Me. Amen**

-Phylis Anderson

# MARCH 17TH

**Psalm 84:11**

**The Love of the Lord**

“For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favour and honour; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”

Our Lord gives us light and is a protector for us. He wants us to be right with Him every day. He wants us to be well with Him. Everyday I tell Jesus I love Him! I am so thankful for His dying on the cross for our sins so that as sinners we would be able to be brought up to Heaven to be with Him.

Every day we should be thankful to the Lord for His blessings and loving us so much!

**Dear Father, thank you so much for the warmth and support you have provided to us in our daily lives. Amen.**

-Bonnie Baird

# MARCH 18TH

**Psalm 23:4**

## **Walking Through the Valleys**

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

In my early years my family was most fortunate to have two sets of grandparents living near us. They modeled love and caring and were a good Christian example to us. We were always happy to see them when we gathered for Holidays and birthdays. They came for baptisms, confirmations and graduations and work and play.

Now in my 8th decade of life I think back to some of the highs and lows.

Those early years were mostly happy and then came a tragic event. I was 11 when Grandpa Fred died after a tractor rollover accident. It was the first time I saw my father cry and I was sad and afraid. Grandma Lydia lived almost 3 decades alone and we tried to be a support to her. My sister and I spent a week with her in the summer and she did fun things to entertain us. I stayed with Grandma a couple weeks when she broke her arm in a fall. I bathed her, dressed her and cooked for her. It was a growing experience for me to care for her, a most loving Grandma. We loved her German peppernut cookies! At the end of her life she didn't know me when I visited her at the care center. It was a deep time of sadness to walk through when she died as I had been close to her. I knew she was a believer and had gone to heaven but it was still a deep hurt.

My grandparents on my maternal side were also a loving and joyful presence in our lives. We loved trying to beat Grandpa Ed in checkers and were in awe of his talent playing guitar and banjo. When I was 14 Grandpa had a heart attack from scooping corn in a crib on our farm.

We were sad for Grandma Agnes who then had to live alone. She showed us love by making Swedish goodies like Spritz and Date Pinwheels. We helped by bringing her groceries and visiting her. When she moved to a care center in her 90s I was surprised that she reverted back to speaking her early Swedish language. (cont.)

I was happy that she knew both of my children before she died. Even though I have walked through dark valleys with the losses of my grandparents, we knew each of them had a relationship with their Heavenly Father. God walked with us and held us close during these sad times.

**Divine Shepherd, Thank You for walking with me and my ancestors in our darkest hour and for Your promise of salvation. Help me live for You today and forever. Amen.**

-Judy Olson

## **MARCH 19TH**

**Isaiah 40:31**

**HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL...OR NOT!**

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”

You don't have to look very hard to find stories of people facing extreme hardships or great tragedies. A good friend of mine has pondered more than once, “what do people who do not have faith in the LORD do? Where do they turn in times of trouble or turmoil?” If they try to go it alone, they can soon be overwhelmed, if they rely on others it can lead to disappointment. Going either of these routes can end in hopelessness. Chronic hopelessness can lead to desperation, bad decisions and dire consequences. Disciples are not immune to the sense of hopelessness but we do know we are not alone. I am so grateful that I know who to seek and where to turn in tough times.

It is up to us as followers of Jesus to share our faith and hope with those in need. If we are indeed the hands and feet of Jesus, then hope is the heart that gives us the strength and attitude to continue on through the valleys in life.

**Gracious God, thank you for the gift of hope and strength. Help me to always be aware of ways to share it with those in need.**

-Val Watters

# MARCH 20TH

John 14:27

## Troubled Soul, Peaceful Heart

"I am leaving you with a gift--peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid."

As I have struggled through this past year, I have wrestled with how to balance my fears and frustrations with my faith and hope in God's promise. I have found comfort in this verse's reminder of God's gift of peace. Jesus was advising his disciples and followers about living through the fears and turmoil to come. I think he is saying that we will have struggles in our lives. We will have fear, pain, and uncertainty to deal with just as Jesus did at times while he walked the earth. He doesn't tell us not to feel the pain or be afraid when the world gives us struggles. I think of how Jesus prayed to his Father and sought out the company of loved and trusted friends. The power of this verse is in the gift; the great gift of peace God has given us. What we need to hold onto is the peace is not of this world; God's promise of peace, eternal and all consuming, is in our hearts and minds. If we start with God's promise and keep that first, it guides the way to help us through the struggles.

**Father God, thank you for your ending love and eternal promise of peace. Help me hold that in my heart and let it always guide me through the struggles and fears of this life. Amen**

-Susan Ramhorst

# FIFTH SUNDAY IN LENT

## 2 Corinthians 9:8 God's Grace is Sufficient

“And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.”

Life is a rollercoaster but one thing I have learned is that God's grace abounds and He provides all I need. Have you been through a divorce and thought, How will I make it through? And God shows up and provides for you. Have you watched a loved one battle cancer? And God gave them peace. Have you felt alone? Then a friend calls you because you were upon their heart.

Have you prayed and prayed for your children to know Jesus? And you heard a still, small voice say I Got This, don't worry. Have you been so depressed that you don't ever want to get out of bed? And you have a friend stop by to make sure you have eaten.

God is always there watching over you and working in our lives. He wants us to stay close to Him through reading scripture and prayer. When God lays someone on your heart, I encourage you to listen and take action.

You could be fulfilling God's grace in someone else's life.

**Thank you God for your gift of grace and let me be your hands and feet to be there for others to show them your love and Grace. Amen**

-Tammy Carr

# MARCH 22ND

Psalm 36:5, 7

## What Path Do You Choose?

“Your unfailing love, O Lord, is as vast as the heavens; your faithfulness reaches beyond the clouds. How precious is your unfailing love, O God!

All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings.”

Psalm 36 is a Psalm of contrasts. Verses 5-9 including those above are filled with glorious images and promises of God’s love and faithfulness. However, in the early verses of the Psalm we get a portrait of the wicked and their ways. Admittedly the world is filled with both kinds of people.

There are wicked people who plot to destroy and make no attempt to turn from evil. In contrast there are those who walk in God’s paths

(though none of us do it perfectly) and  
reap the wondrous gifts described.

This is a choice that we make daily. What path are you on? How do you course correct when you start going down the wrong path? I suspect many of us have been there at some point. We may know and pray for others who are not enjoying God’s unfailing love.

The Stephen Ministry group is just completing a study of Max Lucado’s book *Grace: More Than We Deserve – Greater Than We Imagine*. There he writes “He [God] dispenses his goodness not with an eyedropper but a fire hydrant. Your heart is a Dixie cup, and his grace is the Mediterranean Sea. You simply can’t contain it all.” So whether we are drinking in God’s love, His faithfulness, or His grace, God’s goodness washes over us in abundance, if we love Him. We can set ourselves up as personal idols, convincing ourselves that we can live however we want without consequences to ourselves or others. Or we can choose to live in the tender care of the One who loves us unconditionally. What is your choice?

**God of abundance. Help me to choose your path and shelter me in the shadow of your wings. Amen**

-Carol DeSchepper

# MARCH 23RD

Luke 19:1-10

“Zacchaeus was a wee little man and a wee little man was he.” How embarrassing it must have been that of all the people in Jericho, the up and coming Rabbi Jesus chose Zacchaeus to visit. There is reason to believe that this sort of pathetic fellow would have been disliked if not despised by his community. Perhaps they were hoping that the little twerp would go unnoticed by the teacher who had come with authority. But, sadly for the townspeople, Jesus had found the city’s most embarrassing person. We all have a little Zacchaeus in us; a part of us that we are embarrassed or ashamed of. And as scary as it may seem, when Jesus comes to make a home in our heart he will likely want to have dinner with that very part of us we hope he’ll ignore. But what this story tells us is that there is no part of us that Jesus has not come to love. In fact, he desires most for us to surrender our “Zacchaeus’s” to him so that he might love them back into shape. Jesus has come to find the “black sheep” of our soul. What do you keep hidden from the world? How might you introduce the “Zacchaeus” of your heart to Jesus?

**Lord shed your revealing on our whole heart that we would know you’ve come to redeem and remake the parts we pride ourselves on and the parts we’d much rather keep hidden into a whole heart that is after your heart above all else. Amen.**

-From The Congregation of St. Albans

# MARCH 24TH

Psalm 37: 4

Take Joy!

“Don’t be worried with evil workers or envy the gains of people with all-wrong-upside-down ways. Soon enough they will wither like grass, like green herbs fading in summer’s heat. Believe in the Eternal, and do what is good, live in the land He provides; roam, and rest in God’s faithfulness. **Take great joy in the Eternal! His gifts are coming, and they are all your heart desires!** Commit your path to the Eternal; let Him direct you. Put your confidence in Him, and He will follow through with you.”

What words would you use if asked to describe yourself in a few quick terms? Most would list words like kind, caring, strong, happy, or smart. The more honest among us might also note being emotional, demanding, or a worrier. We have each been uniquely created and have many wonderful traits. In the best times, we contribute our positive talents to support our family and friends and to make our community and world better. In hard times, we are challenged to pause and find ways to focus on using those talents rather than becoming mired in our short-comings.

We have to see the goodness and find the joy. How do we do this?

Since our children were small, we’ve been asking them “Where is God?” to hear their creative responses and in hopes of helping them consider and decide for themselves. When they were small and just beginning their faith journeys in Sunday School & Summer Bible School, they responded with “in my heart,” which of course we loved! As they continued on, their responses to that question were “God is everywhere” or “wherever I need him.” Today, as they are facing the world as young-adults, we are deeply thankful for their awareness of God and pray they’ll continually seek him throughout their lives. The world is ever-changing and things may not always be what we’d hoped for, but with God we can take joy in knowing that goodness awaits.

**Open my eyes to see, my heart to love and my mind to know the great joy of the Lord. Amen.**

-Ann Ditsworth



# MARCH 25TH

**Psalm 139:7-12**

## **If I Make My Bed in Hell**

“If I make my bed in hell, behold, you are there...”

It seems frequently I wake up in the middle of the night. Often mulling over something I said that looking back I think to myself, “Why did I say that? What in the world was I thinking?” or mulling over something that someone else said to me. I toss and turn, I try thinking about other things, but inevitably I keep drifting back to things that I no longer have any control over (if I ever did in the first place!). I can be pretty good at making my bed a kind of hell.

The one thing I’ve found that consistently interrupts this kind of thought pattern and brings a variety of heavenly peace is something I’ve heard called the “breath prayer”. I think there are probably many of them, but the one I learned goes like this: While breathing in I pray silently “Lord Jesus Christ...” and then while breathing out I say, “have mercy on me, a sinner”. And almost always after repetition, sometimes some very long periods of repetition, I finally drift off to sleep.

I suppose you could criticize me for falling asleep in the middle of my prayer, but I’m not going to stay awake thinking about that either. Instead I’ll turn it over to Jesus trusting that even when I’ve made my bed in hell, he is there with the grace, mercy, comfort, and rest that I can find only in him.

**Prayer – (while breathing in) Lord Jesus Christ...(while breathing out) have mercy on me, a sinner.” Amen.**

-Pastor Brian Jack

# MARCH 26TH

**Isaiah 43:1**

**What's in a Name?**

“I have called you by name, you are mine.”

I think names are interesting. Often our last names are somehow tied to or reveal something about our heritage. Christensen, my maiden name, is Danish. A last name of Smith reveals to us that somewhere in that individual's genealogy was a person who worked with leather or silver or some other ware; while Shoemaker would point to someone who makes shoes.

And then, of course, we have our first names. Some of us carry family names; others the name of a friend, or even a Biblical figure. And still others bear a name that was simply liked and agreed upon by the parents.

As we enter the season of Lent, we are reminded of one of the great promises that God gives us in Isaiah 43:1....”I have called you by name, You are mine!” This is a favorite promise of mine. I love the simplicity of it. It is often written and hung on banners at baptisms in our church, because it is a promise made that day! God knows our name and he promises that in his resurrection, in our baptism and through our belief in him, we are his!

So Jesus Christ comes. And no matter what name we call Him by: Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Son of God, Mighty God, Emmanuel, Master, Light of the World, Prince of Peace or Everlasting Father, He knows us and calls us by name. What joy and comfort there is in this simple promise.

**Let us Pray:**

**May we understand the great promise given to us that our Jesus indeed knows our name! Thank you for Calling us by name and welcoming us as one of Yours! Amen.**

-Jane Kruse

# MARCH 27TH

## Romans 8:32

He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all - how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

Maybe it was how I was raised, in a Christian Home, at church every Sunday (at least until I went to college), that most of my spiritual life consisted of following rules, attempting to do the right thing. This in itself isn't all bad but I had lost touch with the concept of God's Grace. Since becoming a member of First, I've concentrated more on developing a relationship with God and trying to comprehend the love he has for me. This love is expressed in many ways, Romans 8:32 is a powerful example.

At a Via de Christo weekend I heard God has a Love Habit.

Tapping into that love every day, every hour, happy or upset, is my goal. Living day to day, not being overly concerned about tomorrow, trusting and believing God is in control and works for me in all circumstances. I still need to remind myself that this life style isn't possible to maintain on my own. I need to keep developing that special relationship with my

Savior.

**Lord, help us to comprehend as much as we can how much You love us  
and let that comprehension show in our lives.**

-Jim Hitchcock

# PALM SUNDAY

**Psalm 34:8**

**Try it, Try it and You May!**

“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him.”

Taste and see! Or in other words, go and try! This is what David is urging us to do in Psalm 34. His prayers have been answered and he has been saved. He wants all of us to turn to the Lord and see how good He is. How without Him, we will be in despair, lonely, empty and unsaved. When you spell it out like that, who wouldn't want to turn to the Lord?

But our human nature is to think that we are in control. That it all depends on what WE do, how WE do it, and what WE do with it. We tend to think everything good that happens to us is because we worked hard to get it and that everything bad that happens to us is because someone else did us wrong. It is easy to take matters into our own hands so we get what we think we want. We don't need anyone to tell us that we NEED Jesus to save us. We can save ourselves.

In the children's book "Green Eggs and Ham", Sam tries to tell the other character how good it is to eat green eggs and ham. The other character proceeds to tell him over and over that he does not like green eggs and ham but Sam is not satisfied. "Try it, try it you may! Try it and you may I say!" Finally, the other character gets so fed up with his persistence that he tries them. And he LOVES THEM! He gives in and eats them and he's completely surprised how good they are. It's like he doesn't know how he ever lived without them. This is what David wants us to do. Try looking to the Lord and we won't know how we thought we could ever live without Him.

**Prayer: For those who have trouble giving up control.**

-Cari Jack

# MARCH 29TH

## Philippians 3: 4-11

I find this portion of Paul's Letter to the Philippians quite charming. Paul is a very human apostle. The "Old Paul" still comes through even after his dramatic conversion. While the scales have fallen off his eyes, his lips cannot help but to remind us of all the ways he was exemplary. But the "New Paul" is quick to leave behind these former prides for the pride he has found in Jesus. Where once he took pride in his own life and the way he followed every letter of the law, he now takes pride in his life in Christ and the way Jesus fulfills every letter of the law. We Christians can be quick to forget that while we may be good rule followers we are not the masters of our own fate. And this is good news! Rather than be our own saviors, we are free to be humans; humans who will inevitably fall short of what God expects from those who bare his image. We who claim the faith of Paul must put to death any temptation that we can do it all perfectly. Once put to death, we are free to know the liberty of Christ's resurrection and our righteousness in him. How did you forget your humanity today?

**Jesus free us with the gospel of your death and resurrection for sinners. Shape us into the creation you intended us to be – a people who love you and love our neighbors as ourselves. Amen.**

-From The Congregation of St. Albans

# MARCH 30TH

**Matthew 28:20**

## **Knowing God's Presence**

“Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Answering the phone at the age of 22 years old to my father telling me that my mother had taken her last breath. “God be with me.”

Tears running down my cheeks, muffling sobs while driving my husband to the ER while he could barely open his eyes. Unsure I would ever see him again since I could not enter the hospital due to COVID protocol. Meanwhile, three kids are at home asking if their dad would be okay. “God be with me.”

Tragedy clarifies reality. How we encounter, live through and deal with tragedy is unique to each of us. However, one thing that remains consistent is that we need help to live through it. I now realize that with scarce thought I turn to God in virtually every time of need, no matter how big or small. Like a friend I talk to Him, asking for help. I pray. But even more than a friend, when I know God is with me, I know everything is just as it should be.

I was once asked how I went through the death of my mother at such a young age without having any bitterness or resentment. The answer was easy. I knew that God was not only with me, but with her until death and now for eternity! The ultimate goal achieved. I also knew God was with my husband and my family during our COVID scare. God has helped me navigate through this and through all of life with just a bit more grace and a lot more peace.

**Dear God, let us live each day with full knowledge that you are with us, beside us, helping to guide us.**

--Lisa Peters

# MARCH 31 ST

## Matthew 5: 1-11

Have you ever looked at the beatitudes and wondered what Jesus had for breakfast the morning he preached that sermon? It's hard to make sense of how the poor, mourning, meek, hungry, guileless, peace loving, tender hearted, and persecuted are blessed. Really, it seems like the whole world is set up against them. The world is a hard place, one reckons, and one must be hardened to get by. But the Beatitudes tell a different tale. Why? Most of those traits leave us vulnerable; vulnerable to the changes and chances of life but also to God. God has chosen to align not with the hard but with the soft; not with the strong but with the weak. We know that Jesus comes not on a warhorse but on a donkey; not to conquer but to die. God has become vulnerable for the vulnerable. It is not a posture the world is likely to reward but one our heavenly father promises to bless. How might you assume such a posture today?

**Jesus be a firm foundation for us that we might be free to be vulnerable with one another and care for others knowing we are cared for in you.**

**Amen.**

-From The Congregation of St. Albans

# MAUNDY THURSDAY

Isaiah 40:29

## Hope for the Weary

“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.”

When have you felt weary? Perhaps it was after pushing all through the night to reach a deadline. Maybe it was when you were training for something that required great physical effort, or after many hours of travel mixed with the adjustment to a new culture and time zone.

Was it while staying up all night with a restless child? Sitting at the bedside of a loved one who nears the end of life? Fighting your own health battle with one more round of chemo? Or maybe after months of life during a pandemic?

This leads me to think of the fatigue that Jesus must have felt as he made his way to the cross, burdened not only by the physical weight of that cross, but also with the burden of our sin. He didn't want to go through it, but he did. This ultimate gift of the forgiveness of sin and everlasting life gives power to us, the very weak and weary.

God knows and understands our fatigue, but these words from Isaiah assure us that He will give us the strength we need. We may still have to go through the challenges, but He is with us and will not forsake us.

**Dear Lord, please sustain and strengthen all who feel weary today, and fill us with confidence in Your love. Amen.**

-Ann Aalgaard



# GOOD FRIDAY

Matthew 27:46

**Jesus cried out in a loud voice,  
“My God My God, Why have you forsaken me?”**

It doesn't really seem like a promise from God does it? Jesus speaks these words as he's being crucified. As you look at the scene, being tortured to death, executed as a criminal, all his disciples having abandoned him – yes it definitely looks like a God forsaken scene. Have you ever felt like you're godforsaken? Or have you ever looked at a situation going on in your neighborhood, your nation, or in the world and said, “There's a god-forsaken place or situation”?

There's comfort in knowing that Jesus knows everything that it is to be human, including that feeling of being godforsaken. It's also a hope filled promise that I hold on to that Jesus doesn't leave us there. The words Jesus speaks are also found in the 22nd Psalm. This same Psalm says later (v. 24) For [God] has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help.

Pain, suffering, and death – and with them the sense of godforsakenness, do not get the last say. As we wait for the Easter good news of new life, today we hold fast to the promise that in Jesus, God brings us the whole way to where he wants us to be with him, even in and through the times that feel godforsaken.

**Lord, strengthen me with faith that comes from you to trust that you're carrying me through the times that feel godforsaken with the promise to hear me and help me through to new life. Amen.**

-Pastor Brian

# APRIL 3RD

Luke 23: 39-43

There is something magical about seeing a Boy Scout at work with a fire. Fires are often left to burn overnight and seemingly dead in the morning. But a Boy Scout really earn his bacon when he finds the last ember glowing among the ashes. Once found, the scout can blow life into a seemingly dead fire and bring it roaring back to life. What we might see as a lost cause, a well-seasoned scout sees as just a few breaths away from blazing. We are lucky to have such a savior in Jesus Christ. It seems like there can be no fainter ember than the thieves on either side of Jesus.

All three are moments away from dying. The earthly Jesus is about to breathe his last breath but uses it to blow on the ember, so to speak, of the thief who recognizes his Lord. Even on the cross, our Jesus blows the Holy Spirit into the desperate thief. All this is to say that we who have fallen short and feel like we might be beyond the saving help of Jesus dare not be so bold. For if Jesus can ignite the dull ember of the thief at his weakest imagine what he can do now. Jesus will always be able to blow to life even our most weakly burning embers. May we always have more faith in his ability to find and blow to life than our ability to hide and die.

**Jesus Christ you burry our sins in the grave with you and bring new life out of the tomb with you for us. Be at work through us to bring the warmth of your new life to our neighbors near and far. Amen.**

-From The Congregation of St. Albans

# EASTER SUNDAY

John 20:1-18

## Trust in the Good News

Today is Easter morning, and we hear some crazy news!! Jesus rose from the dead! Some people could not believe it then. I would guess some people might have called it fake news. Today we may also question the validity of the empty tomb. We don't have video, photos, audio or a live account of the event, but what we do have are powerful pieces of evidence which help us through faith in God, to believe that Jesus was raised from the dead.

For Mary, the question needing to be answered was where is Jesus body, because it is not in the tomb. At first what Mary did not comprehend was Jesus had risen from the dead and walked away from the tomb on his own power. When Mary goes back to the tomb and when Jesus calls out her name, her eyes are opened and she can finally see and understand the truth. Jesus had risen from the dead and was alive.

Since the site of the tomb was not in question for the people of Jerusalem at that time, the question for many still remained. What happened to Jesus since there is no a body in his tomb? The Jews claimed the disciples had stolen it. The disciples claimed Jesus to have risen from the dead and was alive. However you look at it the tomb was empty! The news we celebrate today is that death and the tomb could not hold Jesus, he has risen!

Believe the news reported in the Gospels and in Paul's writings, Jesus was raised from the dead by God through a miracle.

Believe that God is present and active still today! Believe and trust in this good news! Christ has risen, He has risen indeed!

**Lord, fill us with your Holy Spirit so that we can believe you rose from the dead! Help us also to believe in the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection from the dead and life everlasting. Amen**

-Pastor Perry

# LENTEN WORSHIP SCHEDULE

All indoor services will be live-streamed on our website ([www.3cross.org](http://www.3cross.org)) so you can worship with us in your home. We will also broadcast them on 96.3FM if you prefer to listen in your car at church.

## MID-WEEK LENTEN SERVICES

### **Ash Wednesday**

February 17th 6:30pm

### **Lenten Service**

March 10th 6:30pm

### **Lenten Service**

February 24th 6:30pm

### **Lenten Service**

March 17th 6:30pm

### **Lenten Service**

March 3rd 6:30pm

### **Lenten Service**

March 24th 6:30pm

## HOLY WEEK SERVICES

### **Palm Sunday**

March 28th

Indoor: 8:30am

Drive-In Only: 10:00am

### **Easter Saturday**

April 3rd 5:30pm

### **Maundy Thursday**

April 1st 6:30pm

### **Easter Sunday**

April 4th

Indoor: 6:30am & 8:30am

Drive-In Only: 10:00 am

### **Good Friday**

April 2nd 6:30pm

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