

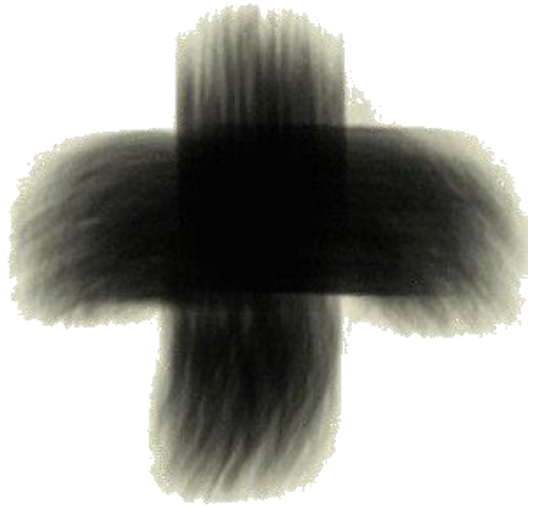


**Lenten Family Devotional**  
**Zion Lutheran Church**  
**Albion, Nebraska**  
**2025**



March 5

# DUST



*You are dust,  
and to dust you shall return.*  
(Genesis 3:19b)

When we see dust on the surfaces of our homes, we usually try to get rid of it. Dust, after all, is worthless and makes things look unkempt. As children we delighted in making mud pies out of the dust of the ground. It was mixed with water to just the right consistency to form a nice-looking piece of cake or a cookie. They were our own creations, which dried out and eventually returned to dust.

When God created humankind, He used the worthless dust of the earth. He created man in His own image, breathing into him the breath of life, thereby creating a living, breathing, fully loved creation. When our life on earth is ended, our bodies will return to worthless dust, but our souls will return to reside with our loving Creator for eternity.

How do you see your life as being God's creation?

*Gracious God,  
You formed us from the earth  
for which you entrusted us to tend and receive sustenance.  
You formed us in your image to love and honor you and each other.  
May you continue to be our source of life and unending love.  
May we continue to respond to you by sharing that love. Amen*

March 6

*You then, my child,  
be strong in the grace  
that is in Christ Jesus.  
(2 Timothy 2:1)*



In second Timothy, Paul is encouraging Timothy to rely on God's grace to endure hardships and to faithfully carry out his ministry. Do it with grace that is free and underserved, given by God. Kindness, understanding and forgiveness. Timothy is to rely on grace to share the gospel through discipleship, even if it is difficult. Discipleship, through face-to-face conversations, was the way communication happened in biblical times. What about today? Have you thought about the grace you have received and the grace you give? Have you used it for ministry?

In our ever-changing world, ministry is not just face-to-face conversations. We have multiple ways to communicate with each other, and it seems that face-to-face conversations are not the top choice of many. I'm guilty of sending a text message rather than making a phone call. Sharing a link or photo of something that impacts me or makes me think. It is convenient, saves time, lets you prepare the message and think about it before sending it. It is also important that you show people kindness, understanding and forgiveness face-to-face. I'm reminded of that daily when working with students. Students need to see and feel your kindness, understanding and forgiveness. Multiple times. Daily. Some days are exhausting when offering this to my students. But have you thought about it? Is this how God feels about us? Continually offering us grace. Multiple times. Daily. I am so thankful He does and I want to remind each of you to accept the grace of God and offer grace to those you encounter each day.

*Gracious God, I am so thankful  
for your kindness, understanding and forgiveness every day.  
Please help me to share your grace with others  
as freely as you give it to me. Amen.*

MARCH 7

# LIFE



*I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.  
(John 10:10b)*

When we first moved to the farm, my husband asked for my assistance in the barn. We needed to pull a calf. A city girl, this was my first experience with the miracle of birth. A new life — a treasured memory.

Prior to this scripture in John, Jesus describes himself as the shepherd and the door to life. He contrasts himself with thieves who steal, kill, and destroy. Jesus, on the other hand, offers life abundantly. The apostles may not have fully understood what Jesus was saying. Yet, in the days that followed, his meaning would come to life.

Life is a miracle and the life Jesus promises will be abundant.

What comes to your mind when you hear the word life?

*Thank you, God, for the life you've given us.  
Amen.*

MARCH 8

# PROMISE



*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*

*(Matthew 28:20b)*

“Do you promise?” “I promise.” How many times have we heard someone promise, only to have that promise broken? How many times have we broken a promise, even when we fully intended to keep it? We promise a child that we’ll go to the ice cream store after supper, but then our evening gets interrupted or runs too late. We promise that we’ll grill out, but then it rains. We promise that we’ll take care of a matter, but then...well, we forget. Or, we promise that we’ll love someone forever, or stay married forever, or care for someone forever, only to have a relationship break down with all the frailties of life.

Human promises are as broken as we are. We try our best, or not. We keep our promises, or not. Sometimes, then, we learn to not trust promises. But God’s promises are not frail, or weak, or forgotten, or rescheduled. God’s promises are sure and certain. They are as steady and consistent as the sunrise, the ocean tides, even the winds in Nebraska! And God promises to be with us, always.

Sometimes, it doesn’t seem as if God is around. Illness strikes suddenly. Fires and floods wipe away whole communities. People die when they shouldn’t. And in those times we may look around and wonder where God went, why God wasn’t there when we needed God to keep those promises. We wonder if God really keeps God’s own promises.

But it’s especially in those moments when we don’t see God that God is with us, always, to the end of the ages. We can close our eyes, reach out our hand, and God will grab it and hang on tight. Even when we don’t think God’s with us, God is right there ready to hold us. God, in those darkest hours, can give us the strength and love that we need to make it through even one more hour.

Next time you need God around, take a deep breath, close your eyes, hold out your hand, and know God is walking with you, even when you can’t quite see it yet.

*Oh God, we don’t keep our promises well, to each other or even to you.*

*But we know you keep all your promises to us.*

*Be with us, even when we don’t fully believe your promises.*

*Be with us, even when we can’t find you.*

*Be with us, even when we think we don’t deserve you.*

*Be with us, to the end of the ages, wrapping us in your love and strength.*

*Amen.*

MARCH 9



*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.  
Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me,  
for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.  
For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.  
(Matthew 11:28-30)*

As I look back at different times in my life where it seemed like “my world was caving in,” I can truly see that God was right there beside me. He was helping me navigate through those tough situations. Did I see this at the time? Honestly, no, but He was definitely there.

I forget that I do not have to carry my burdens all by myself. I need to remember that God is always there by my side to help me through those days and times in my life. I just need to trust and pray to God for help and guidance.

As you look back to different times in your life when it felt like your “world was caving in,” do you see that God was with you? How do you experience God by your side every day?

*Dear God,  
Thank you for always being there by my side  
especially when I feel that my “world is caving in.”  
Amen.*

MARCH 10



# FEAR

*Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be  
afraid, for I am your God;  
I will strengthen you, I will help you,  
I will uphold you  
with my victorious right hand.  
(Isaiah 41:10)*

This verse is deeply meaningful to me, as it highlights God’s powerful presence and unwavering strength, reminding me that I’m never alone when facing life’s challenges. Fear is a natural response to uncertainty and difficulty, but this verse reassures me that I don’t need to be afraid because God is right beside me. Whether I’m navigating a personal decision, a challenge, or moments of doubt, it’s incredibly comforting to know that His presence is always with me.

Living in fear can bring anxiety and hinder my peace, but I’ve made the decision not to let fear control my life. God affirms His identity as the one who has my back — He’s not a distant force, but my God, in full control. He promises to strengthen and help me in times of need. As a wife and mother, my daily life is full of decisions and thoughts of “am I doing the right thing?” Through prayer and my faith in God, I am confident that I am doing ok. For I know that God’s grace and love is with me. And knowing God’s right-hand is upholding me brings me immense comfort, especially when life feels unpredictable.

Can you think of a time in your life when you’ve been discouraged, but found strength in remembering God’s power and love?

*Dear heavenly Father,  
thank you for your continued guidance and strength  
as we navigate the uncertainties of life.  
Continue to help those overcome fear with your peace.  
Remind them you are their strength in times of need.  
In this we pray, Amen.*



# FORGIVENESS

MARCH 11

*And forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
(Matthew 6:12)*



In my opinion, forgiveness is one of the most difficult Christian concepts to fully grasp. The fact that God so freely offers me forgiveness for all my sins, is one of the most comforting gifts of my life. Yet on the other hand, my inability to freely offer forgiveness to others is a struggle that haunts me. The act of forgiveness sounds like it should be a simple, ingrained act, and yet I can't even fully fathom what it means. Does forgiveness also involve forgetfulness? Is true forgiveness a free pass to continued hurt? Do I have to say exactly what I am forgiving, or is it an all-encompassing blanket? If I don't forgive, does God forgive me for my weakness? I'm certain that there are others, who like me, struggle with the act of forgiveness. God knew this would be a human trait, and gave us this simple reminder in the Lord's prayer. A reminder that we have been forgiven by no act of our own. I pray I can find it within myself to let go of the anger and ill will, and finally work towards forgiveness. I want to be free of the burden I have been carrying. I want to do as we are asked, and finally forgive.

Forgiveness is hard to give, and easy to receive.

Who do you need to forgive? What is one step you can take right now to start the process?

*Heavenly Father,  
please help me let go of my anger, and move towards forgiveness.  
Give me strength to resist old habits, old thoughts,  
and anything that hinders my progress forward.  
Lord, I thank you for the forgiveness you have showed me,  
and I ask for your continued love and grace in my life. Amen.*

## MARCH 12

*While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head.* (Mark 14:3)



When we hear the word broken, the first idea that often comes to our mind is a negative thought. Usually we think of something that is broken as no longer being beautiful or useful. However, the passage from Mark reminds us that sometimes the most beautiful of things come out of brokenness. The woman must break open the jar so the exquisite costly ointment of nard could be released. If the woman didn't break the jar, the room would not have been filled with the lovely aroma, and the exquisite ointment could not have been applied.

This passage also reminds me of the Japanese art of fixing pottery with gold known as kintsugi, which means to join with gold. In kintsugi the artisan uses a mixture of lacquer, tree sap, and powdered gold to mend broken pieces of pottery together. By fixing the pottery this way, it highlights the cracks with gold. Kintsugi embraces the flaws and imperfections in the once broken pottery that now creates a stronger and more beautiful piece of art.

Kintsugi is a great reminder that we have a great potter in God, who looks at our brokenness and sees beauty. God mends us and binds our broken pieces together through Jesus Christ. In the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God embraced our flaws and imperfections and made them beautiful and whole. Therefore, don't be ashamed of your brokenness, as you have a loving merciful God who has embraced your brokenness and makes it exquisite.

Where can you find beauty in God's creation today?

*Loving God,  
may we be reminded each day that our brokenness is not the end,  
but the beginning of something more beautiful.  
You are the greatest Potter, shaping us, mending us, and making us whole  
in ways we could never imagine. You take our cracks and scars  
and fill them with Your love, Your grace, and Your healing power. Amen.*

MARCH 13

# MERCIFUL



In the society in which we live today, we tend to look down on people whom we see asking for money at the side of the street. We might think to ourselves, get a job, quit drinking away all your money or buying drugs. Don't be trying to scam me for my hard-earned money.

Every year Lutheran World Relief gives many quilts, school and health kits and other means of support to many people around the world who have few to no possessions. Life is a constant struggle for some people. LWR doesn't do it for the gratitude; they do it to show love and compassion to those less fortunate. The Bible says, "love your enemies, do good and lend, expecting nothing in return." This is what it means to be merciful.

What do you do that is merciful?

*Merciful God,  
Your love and compassion have no end.  
Guide us to show mercy to others less fortunate than us,  
expecting nothing in return.  
We pray for those agencies who continue to be merciful. Amen.*

MARCH 14

# H O P E

*May the God of hope fill you  
with all joy and peace in believing,  
so that you may abound in hope  
by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

*(Romans 15:13)*

Hope.

Most have heard the idiom ‘Hope springs eternal.’

Does it?

With trust in God, yes!

However, trusting God can be difficult at times. Especially when things are not going the way we would like them to be. As troubles and disappointments pile up, trust can be hard. Often, when things in our life appear dark we don’t know where to turn or who to trust.

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans ... “I pray that God, the source of hope, will fill you completely with joy and peace because you trust in him.” No, life isn’t easy. However, in the midst of difficult circumstances, we can have hope by trusting God for joy and peace. When we put our trust in God we can go through the toughest situations with this joy and peace, knowing we will come out on the other side.

“Then you will overflow with confident hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.”

*Lord, life can be difficult and frustrating.*

*At times it feels as if our world is collapsing around us.*

*These are the times we need you most.*

*These are the times we turn to you and trust you,  
believing that you, with that trust, will provide us joy and peace ...  
and eternal hope.*

*Thank you Lord for these blessings when we put our trust in you.*

*Amen.*



MARCH 16

# EMPTY



<sup>5</sup>Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
<sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,  
<sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form, <sup>8</sup>he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of death — even death on a cross.  
(Philippians 2:5-8)

God gave us Jesus as an example. He didn't come to tell us how to live - he showed us. He did not demand and express doubt that folks could ever be good. His example was like a talent - he was perfect but never boasted or bragged, saying, "Hey, this is the way I do it - it's the right way!" He was a natural.

It reminds me of Peter Pan. Peter drove Captain Hook crazy for one reason - Peter had good form. He didn't think or debate about what was good or right, he just innocently did it. Hook went to his watery grave hoping that Peter would finally do something that could be construed as "bad form", and if so, he could die a happy man.

Peter Pan is like Christ - we (or most of us) are like Captain Hook, struggling and maybe empty, searching for a clear way to navigate life. But, I do think there are folks among us who have that "Christ-like" talent. They know what is right, and without thinking, they do it. They're naturals. I'm sure God has made sure we have these people in our midst to show us that there is hope for us "normal" folks.

*Father, we thank you for the examples you sent us.  
Help us to see and understand how Jesus lived  
as inspiration for all the ages of Christians that have followed him.  
Help us to be more like him.  
Amen*

MARCH 17

# HOLY



*We have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.  
(John 6:69)*

God has called us to be holy by His Definition of the Word. As a musician, the hymn “Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God Almighty” provides me with the words to define God’s holiness: singing the praises of a wonderful, merciful and powerful Lord God. He is perfect in power, in love and purity.

John 6:69, is part of a statement made by Simon Peter, speaking for all of the disciples, and saying they believe in and know the works of Jesus. He is confessing that Jesus is the most sacred and powerful God. These words continue to speak for us today.

The words from the hymn continue to resonate: “Mighty is He. He is God in three persons. Blessed Trinity. All of His works will praise His name, the earth, sky and sea.”

What do we need to do to achieve holiness? We are to bear the fruits of the spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control.

*Dear Heavenly Father,  
may you open our eyes to your holiness.  
May our eyes be open to the hurting, desperate and broken.  
May we offer love and kindness, to those in need.  
May our ears hear the cry of the needy.  
May our hearts be changed to compassionate believers.  
Amen.*

MARCH 18

# LIGHT



*<sup>3</sup>All things came into being through him,  
and without him not one thing came into being.  
What has come into being <sup>4</sup>in him was life,  
and the life was the light of all people.  
<sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness...  
(John 1:3-5a)*

Ouch! Oh, no! I've done it again. Two hunched broken toes later, little pinky on my right foot has now been stubbed on the cardboard box setting in the hall. Of course, it's during the middle of the night bathroom trip. In the dark - - - dark, you say?!? Bedside lamp, night light, flashlight. None of these in use, and any of them, could have overcome our home's nighttime darkness. How unthinking could I be?

Thankfully, we don't have to turn on God's light to overcome the world's dark. God gave us Jesus as the light for all of us. In his love, he illuminates the pitch-black gloomy halls, crevices and corners of this world with his ever present light, love and grace.

Have you ever searched in life's gloomy blackness for the Light of the World?

*Dear Jesus,  
help us to remember that your light always shines for us  
and we don't need to flip a switch.  
Amen.*



# DARKNESS

MARCH 19

*This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you,  
that God is the light, and in him is no darkness at all.  
If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in the darkness,  
we lie and do not practice the truth.  
(John 1:5-6)*

John proclaims that God is light – not just *in* the light, he *is* the light. In God there is simply no darkness. Furthermore, when we choose to follow God we are choosing to live in truth and righteousness, rejecting the sin and deception that is cloaked in darkness. John tells us, very bluntly, that if we say we have fellowship with God while walking in the darkness, we lie and do not tell the truth. This is a call to actively live in God's presence and purity and to embrace his guiding light, which is possible because our Lord Jesus entered the world as the light of the world to overcome sin, death and darkness. The darkness is incapable of extinguishing the pure Light of God. It is only through Jesus that God's light will bring us life, and hope, and joy, and peace. That is our good news.

What part of your life may be considered darkness? Which things can you identify that you need to bring into the light of God's truth?

*Thank You Lord,  
that the light of God has shone into my heart through Jesus,  
whom I trust as my Savior.  
May your light and love shine through me –  
which is the light of Christ shining through me.  
This I pray in Jesus' name...  
Amen.*

## MARCH 20

*Peace I leave with you;  
my peace I give to you.  
I do not give to you as the world gives.  
Do not let your hearts be troubled,  
and do not let them be afraid.  
(John 14:27)*



So often it is easy to become upset at what is going on in the world. The distress and unrest try to steal our peace. When we focus on what is going wrong in the world, we can easily become upset. However, through John, Jesus tells us to respond differently.

Jesus tells us to not let our hearts and minds be troubled or to be afraid. As Christians we should not live in fear. Instead, Jesus promises us peace. We can choose to live in God's peace and not be afraid.

In this verse, 'the world' translates to the distractions thrown at us daily. Destruction, wars, famine. It also refers to material trinkets and treasures that attempt to promise us peace. These do not provide true peace, however, and leave us still in turmoil. Jesus promises hearts and minds that are undisturbed and no longer disquieted by fear.

"Peace I leave with you. *My peace* I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Don't let your hearts be troubled or fearful." We can be assured and not afraid, knowing God is in control. This is an out-of-world peace Scripture describes as "**surpassing all human understanding.**" (*Philippians 4:7*) We are assured our minds will be kept in this perfect peace when we "**steadfastly trust in God.**" (*Isaiah 26:3*)

A gift given by Jesus. All we need do is trust.

What keeps you from trusting? What keeps you from God's peace?

*Lord, forgive me for looking for peace from the material world  
rather than from you.*

*Thank you for the true peace you give us through Jesus.*

*May it rest in our minds,  
keeping our hearts from feeling troubled or afraid.*

*In Jesus' name... Amen.*

MARCH 21



Do you ever make things harder than they need to be?

John 14:6 says, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."* This is a core belief in Christianity. We need Jesus. He made a way for us to be with God forever and we need to simply believe and accept him as our savior. Sounds easy right?

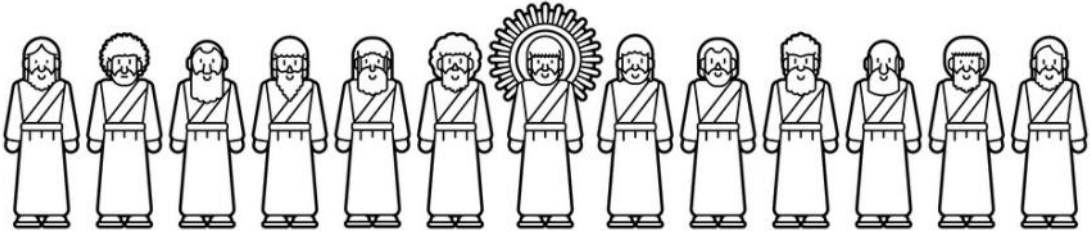
But do you ever make things harder than they need to be? I know I do. I don't like asking for help or relying on other people so instead of asking a question or making a simple phone call I decide that I can just figure it out by myself. I'll struggle all day or all week long trying to figure something out on my own when I could have solved the problem in a few seconds if I had simply asked for help. Jesus wants us to rely on him. He wants to be the way for us. He wants to help us. We need to simply ask and believe. Jesus is our link to God. He came to earth to show us the way; so instead of over complicating things and trying to figure our faith out on our own we need to look to Jesus. He knows the way because Jesus is the Way.

*Dear Lord,  
help me to believe.*

*Help me to stop over complicating things and ask for help.  
Thank you for coming to make a way for us to be with God forever.  
Amen.*

MARCH 22

# DISCIPLES



*<sup>31</sup>Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him,  
<sup>32</sup>"If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples;  
and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."  
(John 8:31-32)*

I believe this means that in order for us to be free of our sins and burdens, we must follow Jesus. To be a disciple means to try to be as Christ-like as possible. In order to do that, we must listen to God's word and follow his words closely. The Bible is our guide to being a follower of Christ and living the life that He wants us to live.

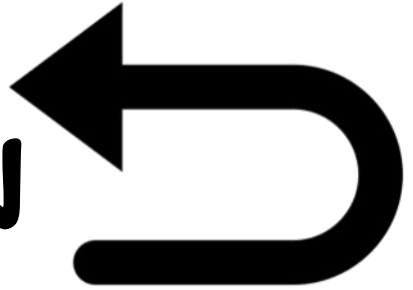
How have you followed Christ's command recently?

Dear Loving Jesus,

Thank you for sharing your words with us. Please help me find the strength I need to listen to your words and follow them. I want to be a disciple of Jesus. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to hear your words and read your words in the scripture. Amen.

MARCH 23

# RETURN



*<sup>12</sup>Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;  
<sup>13</sup>rend your hearts and not your clothing.*

*Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful,  
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing.  
(Joel 2:12-13)*

Our lives are often marked by things given away and returned, lost and found: library books, favorite accessories, tools, casserole dishes, memorabilia. Sometimes we worry needlessly and still get our treasure back. Other times we completely forget about it and are surprised when someone leaves it on our doorstep. These random lost things can preoccupy a lot of our time, whether we look for them or are simply anxious about their return.

But in the season of Lent, we have the opportunity to intentionally focus on how our hearts often lose their way, turning from our faith, stubbornly hanging on to our own pride and worldly possessions. How amazing for us that our God is infinitely compassionate and asks only that we return to him with a repentant spirit. We don't need to "rend our garments" – we need only to return to Him with changed hearts, and accept His grace and love. We do not need to fear retribution or late fees!

*Dear Heavenly Father, we worship and adore you.*

*We bring you our wayward hearts,*

*returning to You with hope and repentance.*

*We know our peace can be found in Your grace,*

*knowing that as You rejoice in our return to you,*

*we celebrate Your return to our humanness*

*at Easter Time and with each and every prayer.*

*We ask that You continue to hold us tight and keep us safe, Amen.*

MARCH 24

# PRAYER

*Then Jesus went with them  
to a place called Gethsemane;  
and he said to his disciples,  
"Sit here while I go over there and pray."  
(Matthew 26:36)*



Prayer. Just one word that can have a lot of meaning and power. What did Jesus' disciples know about prayer when he went to Gethsemane and said he was going to pray? What did they do while he went to pray? What were their thoughts and actions while he was praying? Did they have a conversation with one another, or remain silent while they watched him pray?

I have a feeling that prayer with Jesus looks different than how we pray today. The beauty of prayer is that there is not one right or wrong way to do it! Prayer is one way we can grow closer to God and by sharing our ups and down, triumphs and tribulations of life, we are building that relationship that he wants with us.

Take a moment to reflect on your prayers lately. Do you tend to pray out loud or silent? Do you set aside specific time each day to pray, or do you pray whenever you feel the urge to talk to God? I challenge you to be more intentional with your prayers this week and aware of your conversations with God.

*Gracious God,  
we are so thankful to be able to talk to you  
whenever we need to and wherever we are.  
Thank you for always listening to us —  
whether our prayers are on our lips  
or only in our hearts and minds. Amen.*

MARCH 25

"ELI, ELI, LEMA  
SABACHTHANI?"

# FORSAKEN



*And about three o'clock Jesus cried with a loud voice,  
"Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?"  
that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"  
(Matthew 27:46)*

It is shockingly difficult to imagine the forsakenness Jesus felt on the cross. Falsely accused, hated by humanity into which he had been born, mocked by the people, scorned by rulers, despised by the very ones he loved and rejected by the ones he came to save. Jesus bore the wrath of the Almighty God his Father, which was fully poured upon him during those three darkest hours. Close your eyes and imagine the emotional and spiritual agony Jesus endured, even beyond the indescribable physical pain. He indeed felt forsaken, separated from the Father's presence as he took the full punishment for humanity's sin. God looked away from his very Son when Jesus became our sin substitute, taking our sins and guilt upon Himself. Matthew says it was then Jesus cried out in bitter anguish, "MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAST THOU FORSAKEN ME?" Jesus endured the cross, feeling the full brunt of God's righteous wrath upon himself, for all our sins. Praise his holy name.

Can you imagine the incredible suffering Jesus bore for you? Do you attempt to live a life that honors God and reflects the love and grace He has shown you through Jesus' sacrifice?

*Lord, when I consider the enormity of what Jesus did for me at Calvary  
I cannot comprehend what it meant to be separated from you as he took  
the full force of your justified wrath at my sins on his own sinless shoulders.*

*I am so thankful for his incredible sacrifice  
and pray I show my thanks and love, not just with what I say,  
but in all the ways I live my life.*

*Lord Jesus, thank you for your willingness  
to endure such unimaginable suffering,  
even to the point of feeling forsaken by the very Father –  
all so that I could be saved. Amen.*

## MARCH 26

<sup>65</sup>*Pilate said to them,  
"You have a guard of soldiers;  
go, make it as secure as you can."*

<sup>66</sup>*So they went with the guard  
and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone.  
(Matthew 27:65-66)*



What do you think of when you think of the word secure? Locking your car or house? Keeping your family safe? Being financially secure? The meaning in the above two verses most likely means that they wanted a way to make sure that Jesus' body was staying put. They did not want anyone (the disciples) tampering with the tomb or stealing the body and they didn't want to have to deal with Jesus rising from the dead. If they secured the tomb, surely he couldn't do that, right? Well, we know how this plays out. There wasn't anything anybody could do to make that tomb secure enough. Of course this is good news for us, but Pilate and his gang probably didn't agree.

Like Pilate I think sometimes I have a false sense of security. I like to think that if I do everything right then I can make sure that nothing bad will happen to me or my family. I do things like sign my daughter up for Driver's Ed so that she will know everything she can to stay safe driving. I take vitamins, and go to my yearly check ups so that I can try to make sure that no disease will invade my body. I sometimes even do silly things like not step on cracks because WHAT IF IT BREAKS MY MOTHER'S BACK?!? Ha! Of course there is nothing wrong with taking precautions, doing driver's ed or going to the doctor, but bad things happen all the time to good people who don't deserve it and who take precautions. We can try and secure our "tombs" the best we can but it's probably a good idea to then also rely on God and pray for security and the ability to deal with problems even when our best precautions have failed us. There will always be security breaches, but there will also always be God there to help us through them.

*Dear Lord, please help keep us safe and well.  
When things don't go as planned or troubles occur  
help us to get through them with your help. Amen.*



MARCH 27

# GLORY



*And one called to another and said:  
"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory."  
(Isaiah 6:3)*

Glory is defined as: 1. high renown or honor; 2. magnificence or great beauty; 3. take great pride or pleasure in.

Watching Nebraska sunrises and sunsets captures all three of these definitions of the word glory. These colorful, amazing, beautiful skies show me that the whole earth and sky are truly full of His glory. It is during December, January, and February when the skies display the most colorful wonders of God in Nebraska. There is something about watching the colors change in the sky from pastels to bold hues that I find mesmerizing and I am in awe of this beauty. There are other evenings during the year when colors light up the horizon but it seems that when we are in the cold, dull, days of winter is when God paints His masterpieces in the sky. It is also interesting that this blaze of glory is most beautiful when there are clouds. There is color on the horizon when the sky is clear but it needs some clouds in order to become magnificent. I think God is telling us to work through the clouds of life to see His glory.

Are you shining through with positive thoughts or are the clouds and doubts showing in your life? Have you taken a moment to look at the sunrise or sunset? Are you upset with life and experience negative feelings? Seek God and take pleasure in the daily beauty around you. Look for the color and take pleasure in the moment.

*Dear Lord, I want to see your Glory.  
Help me experience the beauty and color of this day.  
Cast my fears and negativity from my life.  
Let me know your Glory surrounds me wherever my journey takes me.  
Amen.*

MARCH 28

# DENY



*Then Peter remembered what Jesus had said:  
“Before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”  
And he went out and wept bitterly.  
(Matthew 26:75)*

Deny means a state that one refuses to admit the truth or existence.

Have you ever denied doing something when you really did it? Sometimes you don't understand that you will be in less trouble for telling the truth than denying the act. Not only do you have to live with the guilt, you still have to endure the consequences or punishment when the truth comes out.

When I was VERY young my sister received a new Barbie doll for her birthday. This doll was beautiful. My sister and I went outside to play with our dolls, her NEW one and my OLD one. My sister went into the house to get more toys. While she was in the house, I was jealous of her new doll so I bit the soft foot hard enough to leave tooth marks. When she came back, she noticed right away. I told her I didn't do it; her pet cat, Inky, bit it. Well, I felt guilty for biting the doll. I felt guilty for lying, and I really felt bad explaining what happened to my mom. She didn't believe the cat had teeth that matched the bite mark on the doll's foot. And do you know what happened? My mom and sister still loved me. Just like Jesus still loves us when we deny knowing Him in our actions or words.

*Dear LORD,  
we are so weak and easily pressured  
into saying or acting like we do not know what you want us to do.  
Please forgive us for denying you in our lives and sometimes our hearts.  
Thank you for always loving us even when we disappoint you.  
Help us to do better and be more like you.  
Amen.*

MARCH 29

# WEPT

*Jesus wept.  
(John 11:35)*



The shortest verse in the Bible, and yet it says so much. For context, this verse occurs in the story where Jesus raises his friend, Lazarus, from the dead. Lazarus had been dead, and in the tomb for four days. His death caused many to gather and mourn, including Jesus. I'm comforted by the knowledge that Jesus took time to weep for his friend, even though he knew he held the power to call Lazarus back to life. To me, it shows that grief is not only acceptable, but actually necessary.

Anyone that knows me can attest to the fact that I can shed tears with the best of them. I've always felt so weak and embarrassed by my inability to remain stoic during emotionally charged moments. Perhaps this verse was included to show us all that tears have their time and place in our lives.

Is there a time that you held back tears because you thought it was inappropriate to express yourself?

*Dear Lord Jesus,  
thank you for all of our emotions,  
and for showing us examples of how they can help us through life.  
Amen.*



MARCH 31

# PARADISE



*Jesus replied, "Truly I tell you,  
today you will be with me in Paradise."  
(Luke 23:43)*

Paradise means heaven; it is the ultimate abode of the just, or an ideal place or state.

With all of the cold weather and snow in the past, winter people have different opinions of paradise. Some people love the snow and the activities of skiing and sledding. Other people travel to the warm and sun in order to golf, swim, or go boating. Paradise is a different vision for each of us. Personally, every sunrise and sunset, rainbow, mountain view, waterfall, and every calendar season is a piece of paradise to me. If things on earth are this beautiful, just imagine how much more wonderful heaven will be. There will be no pain, no judgement, no worries.

Can you imagine missing out on paradise? Do you believe God will have you in paradise with Him? Just remember, it is by the grace of God, and believing that God is your Savior, that we do not have to miss out on paradise. Yes, kindness is important, but God does not keep count of "brownie points." God cares about our faith and what is in our hearts.

*Dear Lord Jesus,  
thank you for giving us a sample of paradise here on earth.  
Please help us to believe you are our Savior  
and by your grace and forgiveness  
we will one day be in your real paradise...heaven.  
Help us to do your will. Amen.*

APRIL 1



*My joy is gone, grief is upon me, my heart is sick.*  
(Jeremiah 8:18)

I think it's ironic that the devotion for April Fool's Day is on grief. There may be some that say grief is for fools, but not God. God knows, better than we do, that grief is the price we pay for loving one another. Grief is what the disciples felt as they watched Jesus die a horrible death. Grief is what we all experience no matter what loss we suffer in this life.

Grief is different for everyone. My mother has been gone for 24 years, and my father for 14 years, and yet, there are still moments when grief catches me off guard. I'm not sure we ever get over a loved one's death, we simply learn to live with the loss.

As Christians, we know that death is not the end. And while that fact may take away some of the sting, it doesn't completely erase the pain we feel. Our emotions are part of our humanity; they make us who we are. I thank God for the gift of love and loss, the gift of joy and sorrow, and I thank God for every emotion in between. May we continue to find comfort and peace in knowing that death is not the end because Jesus made sure of that in his life, death, and resurrection.

How have you dealt with grief in your life? How does knowing that death is not the end but a new beginning, help you in your grief?

*Almighty God, you know what it is to lose someone you love.  
You watched as the world hung your precious Son upon the cross.  
May we place our grief and sorrow in your hands  
as you hold us tightly in your loving embrace.  
Thank you, Lord, for the gift of eternal life with Jesus  
and all those we have loved and lost along the way.  
Amen.*

APRIL 2

LOVE



<sup>7</sup>*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.*  
<sup>8</sup>*Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.*  
(1 John 4:7-8)

Let us love one another, that seems like such an easy thing to do, right? Actually it isn't; it can be very hard to love one another at certain times. Take this for an example, you and your best friend just had a big fight and are mad at each other. Chances are in that moment you probably don't love each other. It can also be the same way with God. When you pray and pray and pray for something and it doesn't work out the way you want it to, you may think God doesn't love you. But He does, for He is love itself. If someone doesn't love, they don't know God. Even though sometimes things don't work out in your favor, still love God.

*God of Goodness,  
I come into your presence so aware of my human frailty  
and yet overwhelmed by your love for me.  
I thank you that there is no human experience that I might walk through  
where your love cannot reach me.  
If I climb the highest mountain you are there  
and yet if I find myself in the darkest valley of my life, you are there.  
Teach me today to love you more.  
Help me to rest in that love  
that asks nothing more than the simple trusting heart of a child.  
In Jesus' name,  
Amen.*

APRIL 3

# KING



*Pilate also had an inscription written and put on the cross.  
It read, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."  
(John 19:19)*

After reading much of the story surrounding this passage, I wonder what Pontius Pilate truly thought of Jesus, and what was in his heart. It was clear that Pontius Pilate did not see this as a legal issue but a religious one, as Jesus had not broken any laws of the time.

So, what truly put Jesus on the cross? After much contemplating and discussion with my wife, the answer came back to each one of us. More pointedly, our sins are what put Jesus on the cross. Jesus had to go on the cross because we sin.

The word for this passage is King. Typically, I think of a King as somebody the people serve, however, Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews, is truly a King that serves his people. Jesus had done, and continues to do, more for us than we could ever do for him. All he asks in return is our heart.

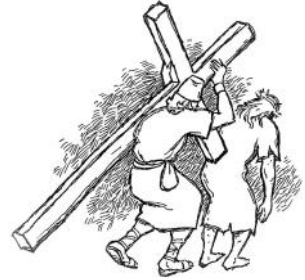
If the Son of God, our King, were to return to us today, would we put him on the cross again?

*Dear God, thank you for sending your Son to die for us,  
to pay the debt of our sins. For without that sacrifice,  
we would never know the kingdom of heaven you have prepared for us.  
Amen.*



APRIL 4

# CARRY



*They compelled a passerby, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus.  
(Mark 15:21)*

Compelled means forced to serve.

Carrying the cross was a task typically reserved for the condemned, but the Roman soldiers “compelled” or forced Simon of Cyrene to help Jesus carry the cross. How would you have felt if you were the one forced to help Jesus? Would you have cursed and wondered “why me?” Or would you have felt sorry for Jesus, the son of God, and gladly helped? In a way it could have been an honor even if it was only in your own mind. “Wow, to know you helped God’s Son, even though this was a terrible situation.”

How many times do you get called to help carry a cross, whether it is to take care of your sick child or spouse or parent? We might not think of it as a cross because we love these people, but some consider it to be a burden because that isn’t how they had their lives planned. We never know what cross some people are compelled to carry. Some are small, but some are huge. How do you react when you have a cross to carry? Do you pray to God for help, or do you try to tackle it on your own?

*Dear God,  
please help strengthen us when we have a cross to carry.  
Please help us through tough times  
and to accept help when needed or offered.  
We cannot do anything on our own. We need your help.  
Thank you for sending us your Son  
to teach us just how much we need you in our lives. Amen.*

# APRIL 5 CROSS



*<sup>16</sup>Then he handed him over to them to be crucified.  
<sup>17</sup>So they took Jesus; <sup>17</sup>and carrying the cross by himself,  
he went out to what is called The Place of the Skull,  
which in Hebrew is called Golgotha. <sup>18</sup>There they crucified him.  
(John 19:16-18a)*

In these verses, Pontius Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified. Jesus carried the cross and went to the “Place of the Skull” where they crucified him. Pilate was basically saying “Here’s your king that you all kept saying was a serious threat to the Roman Empire.” Jesus was nailed to the cross and died a slow agonizing death, with common criminals on each side. Essentially, Pilate’s actions were part of God’s predetermined plan. He was pressured by Jewish religious leaders and the crowd, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Jesus’s death as a sacrifice for humanity.

In 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 1:18, it says for those of us being saved, the cross is the power of God. In Mark 8:34, Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

The cross was an instrument of the most dreadful and agonizing torture. This showed the depth of humiliation to which Christ served as our substitute. His suffering and death on the cross signifies the ultimate act of love and sacrifice, where he took the punishment of our sins.

During this Lenten season, are we able to “deny ourselves” and abstain from something we want or put aside our own desires? Are we able to pick up our cross and follow Jesus? We all sometimes feel we have a “cross to bear” in dealing with difficult situations or burdens in life. Can that ever compare to the cross that Christ had to bear for us? Hopefully, we are able to put aside our own desires and be more in touch with the sacrifice that Jesus made for us, and to rejoice in his death and resurrection, freeing us all from sin.

*Heavenly Father, help us to live with hope and love  
as Jesus sacrificed his life to save each of us from sin.*

*May we be eternally grateful for this precious gift.*

*Help guide us as we deny ourselves, carry our cross and follow you. Amen.*

APRIL 6

# CROWN



*They clothed Jesus in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him.*  
(Mark 15:17)

Most days during my elementary and junior high school years, my father dropped me and my sister off at school on his way to work. After breakfast, we would pile into his 1969 Carolina Blue Volkswagen Beetle and head down the driveway to begin our days. I don't remember much about those morning car rides except that it was incredibly cold in that tiny car on winter mornings. The "bug" wasn't luxurious or comfortable and got smaller and smaller as we got older. Looking back, it was also an unusual choice from the get-go for a 6'3" tall man who worked as a comptroller/Chief Financial Officer for a textile company, but it "got great gas mileage" (read that with a slow, Southern drawl) and Daddy drove that car until my sister and I were both in college in the mid-1980's. On the days that he was out of town or unavailable to take us to school, my Mom would take us to school and as we exited her car, she would say, "I love you. Have a great day. Remember who you are and whose you are." (And I've heard my sister say that to her own children in more recent years...we really do become our parents...)

I'm sure that as elementary children, we didn't fully understand what Mama meant when she said "remember who you are and whose you are." Maybe we heard it as more of a gentle reminder (or warning? or threat?!?) that in a small town everyone knows who you are and who your parents are and if you misbehave, parents and/or grandparents will hear about it before you get home from school. Maybe by the time we got to our confirmation classes, we had begun to make the connection that "whose we are" had a bigger connection to our baptisms into God's family; but what my sweet Mama wanted us to know was that no matter what happened during the course of a day, each of us is a beloved child of God and nothing can separate us from God's love. That thought reminds me of two of my favorite memes. (Are you asking yourself, what's a meme? Just think a bumper sticker for social media/computers.)

The first meme includes a picture of a pineapple with the words: "Be a pineapple. Stand tall. Wear a crown. Be sweet." It's a perfect nod to gracious hospitality and being kind to others while balancing a crown on your head; sort of like an Hawaiian "golden rule." The second meme pictures a child wearing a crown with the words: "On the darkest days when I feel inadequate, unloved, or unworthy, I remember whose child I am and I straighten my crown." This Lent and always, I hope you remember that you are God's child, straighten your crown, and remember that you are always enough, always loved, and always worthy!

What kind of crown are you wearing today? Is it on straight or is it slightly crooked? Who helps you remember who you are and whose you are? Who might you encounter today that needs to be reminded that God loves them, no matter what?

*Gracious God, we give you thanks for loving us unconditionally  
and for sending your beloved son, Jesus Christ,  
who wore a crown of thorns as he hung on the cross,  
so that we can live eternally in your kingdom. Amen.*

APRIL 7



NO  
PAIN



HURTS  
A LITTLE



HURTS A  
LITTLE MORE



HURTS  
EVEN MORE



HURTS A  
WHOLE LOT



HURTS  
WORST

# PAIN

*So you have pain now;  
but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice,  
and no one will take your joy from you.*

*(John 16:22)*

Here Jesus speaks of the pain the disciples will soon feel after his death, but at the same time promises them they will have joy when they see him after his resurrection. And the best news is that that joy is theirs forever.

Pain is felt in many different ways. There is physical pain which can be a symptom of over-working, injuries, illnesses, and diseases. There is also the pain from losing loved ones, being ridiculed, having thoughts of self-doubt, and feeling loneliness. I, for one, often feel the pain I can only describe as “not doing enough” - not doing enough for my family or friends, not doing enough for my community, not doing enough for my church, not doing enough to earn the grace of God. It is then that I need to acknowledge that these feelings are coming from Satan. That pain is indeed his way of controlling me.

Isn't it wonderful that all we need to do is give up our feelings of pain to God and allow the Holy Spirit to continue to remind us that Jesus paid the ultimate price to ensure that everlasting joy is ours. As hard as it is to let go of the idea that we can control the outcomes of our lives or even understand why painful things happen to good people, we just need to give ourselves over to God and trust in his gift of joy.

How difficult is it for you to turn your pain completely over to God? Do you remember to thank God for the gift of everlasting joy he freely gave through the sacrifice of Jesus?

*Gracious God, thank you for sending your son, Jesus,  
to live among us, teach us, and give his life for us.  
With the help of the Holy Spirit, I release my pain to you  
and feel the joy you have promised. Amen.*

APRIL 8

# SPICES



*When the sabbath was over, Mary Magdalene,  
and Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices,  
so that they might go and anoint him.*

*(Mark 16:1)*

What brings “spice” to your life?

My grandchildren are the “spice” of my life. They continually bring joy to my existence. Following their activities; watching their baptisms, first communions, and confirmations; I am truly blessed. They share these golden moments with me regularly. One grandchild daringly arranged my spice drawer alphabetically!

When Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices to bring them to the tomb so that they might anoint the body of Christ, it was an act of love and respect. The fact that it was done right after the Jewish observance of the Sabbath shows the urgency of their actions. Faith and devotion in the face of despair becomes the spice of life, an everlasting life through Christ's resurrection.

*Almighty God, thank you for that which brings “spice” to our lives.  
May our actions show our love and respect for you,  
and may we bring joy to you and to those around us.  
Amen.*

APRIL 9

# GARDEN



*Out of the ground the Lord GOD made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*  
(Genesis 2:9)

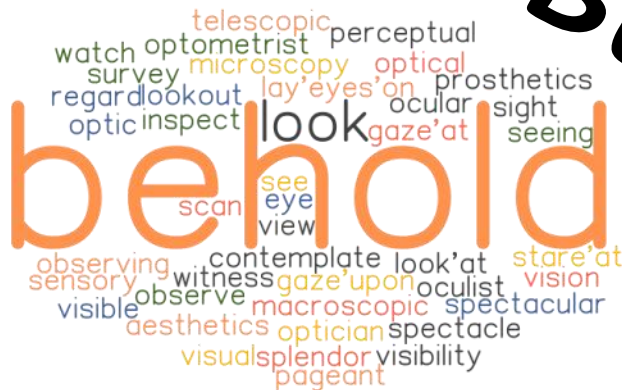
We have a garden in our backyard. We both help plant the things in the garden, like tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, onions, and green beans. We help water the plants and keep the soil rich. We put up cages so rabbits don't eat our vegetables. When the vegetables are ready we help Dad harvest them over time. We enjoy eating the food from our garden.

Our verse tells us that God made every plant and tree to grow. Without God, we would not be able to help plant and harvest our garden. We plant the seeds, but God makes it grow.

Does your family have a garden? Do you like helping to plant and harvest fresh food and vegetables?

*Dear God,  
we thank you for the food that you give us  
and the ability to grow our own food. Amen.*

APRIL 10



BEHOLD

<sup>26</sup>When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by,  
He said to His mother, “Woman, behold your son!”  
<sup>27</sup>Then He said to the disciple, “Behold your mother!”  
(John 19:26-27a)

**Behold.** Is it a word that you use very often? How do you use it? We have heard the phrase, “Lo and behold” to proclaim possibly amazement at an event that has happened, such as your child finally sitting down to do his homework. Behold, or see, it finally happened! A few years ago, I went to Grand Island to observe the total solar eclipse. It was truly a sight to behold!

But I don’t think that Jesus was telling his mother to just see the disciple that he loved, or for him to look at Mary. They were to do more than that. Mary was going to be alone and would need care and compassion after her son was crucified. Jesus was telling Mary to regard the disciple as her son. He was telling him to regard her as his mother. Verse 27 goes on to say that from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

How do you understand the word behold? Are you willing to look beyond seeing what is in front of you and discern what needs to happen next?

*Lord,  
help us to not just look at someone’s physical presence  
when they are in front of us.  
We ask for the discernment to know the needs of others  
when we look at them and take action.  
In your name we pray. Amen.*

APRIL 11

# SEASON



<sup>1</sup>*For everything there is a season,  
and a time for every matter under heaven:*  
<sup>2</sup>*a time to be born, and a time to die;*  
*a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;*  
<sup>3</sup>*a time to kill, and a time to heal;*  
*a time to break down, and a time to build up;*  
<sup>4</sup>*a time to weep, and a time to laugh;*  
*a time to mourn, and a time to dance;*  
<sup>5</sup>*a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;*  
*a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;*  
<sup>6</sup>*a time to seek, and a time to lose;*  
*a time to keep, and a time to throw away;*  
<sup>7</sup>*a time to tear, and a time to sew;*  
*a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;*  
<sup>8</sup>*a time to love, and a time to hate;*  
*a time for war, and a time for peace.*  
*(Ecclesiastes 3:1-8)*

These passages are often read at funerals. It gives us a lot to ponder.

My husband, Jim, left this world a year ago. He had lived just short of 95 years. By God's grace he was called home. There is a time to live and a time to die. It was time for me and our family to mourn. We were comforted in knowing he was in God's care.

*Heavenly Father,  
in reading the scripture, you showed us the facts of living in this world.  
Life can get messy,  
but I am assured that you will show us the way to find the right path.  
I know that whatever you do endures forever.  
May you bless us in the journey we take as you have done for us.  
In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.*



APRIL 12

**TOMORROW**



*So do not worry about tomorrow,  
for tomorrow will bring worries of its own.  
Today's trouble is enough for today...  
(Matthew 6:34)*

I am a planner, which is a good trait right? Yes and no. Having a basic plan helps me to remain calm and focused. I truly think I get more done when I have a “to do list” to mark off. Yes, I am even one of those people who might add something to their “to do list” that wasn’t there originally, just so I can mark it off. Now, if my plans change, I’m honestly pretty good at pivoting and coming up with another plan. But what drives me crazy, is to not have any plan! I’m not good at just “winging it” all the time. As I get older, I have come to realize that some of the best things in life are not planned, and that “winging it” can bring great joy. Does this still give me a little anxiety? Absolutely! But I continually challenge myself to let go and let God be in control.

Are you good at trusting and “winging it”? Do you have trouble not worrying about tomorrow?

*Dear God,  
Let me strive to remember and trust  
that “winging it” and focusing on today is enough  
and that you will help me through my tomorrows.  
Amen.*

APRIL 13

# HOSANNA!



*So they took branches of palm trees  
and went out to meet him, shouting,  
"Hosanna!*

*Blessed is the one who comes  
in the name of the Lord —  
the King of Israel!" (John 12:13)*

Who doesn't love a parade? Have you ever marched or ridden in a parade? I've marched in Halloween parades, ridden in Thanksgiving Day parades, and certainly participated in the Albion Light parade. What fun! I wonder if the Palm Sunday parade was fun for Jesus. It must have been heartwarming for him to be so welcomed into Jerusalem. To hear people shout, Hosanna! (Which was an expression of adoration, praise, or joy.) However, Jesus knew what was coming; so how might that have changed the joy of the welcome? Did it? I hope not.

Jesus knows all about us, but that doesn't change his love for us. He loves us, almost despite it, or certainly in spite of ourselves and our sinful ways! I like to think that Jesus was able to enjoy the moment, particularly in the face of his future. A future he hoped he wouldn't have to endure, but lovingly did, for each and every one of us.

May we continue to welcome Jesus into our hearts, lives, and communities with the joy of a parade.

*Blessed Lord Jesus, we offer you our praise and adoration  
for who you are and who you will always be – our Savior.*

*The one who willingly and lovingly entered Jerusalem  
knowing where it would end – on the cross for our sins.*

*May we never take your sacrifice for granted.*

*May our lives continue to reflect our love and thanksgiving.*

*Amen.*

APRIL 14

# BODY



*While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread,  
and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples,  
and said, "Take, eat; this is my body."*

*(Matthew 26:26)*

The Last Supper is one of the most familiar passages of the Bible, where Jesus shares his final meal (unbeknownst to the disciples) before his crucifixion. Some of my best memories (both as a child and adult) are sharing meals with family and friends. Birthday parties, holiday meals, even meals in the field in the bed of a pickup or at the silage pile are all favorites of mine. The preparation, the food, the conversation and the clean up all contribute to these cherished moments in my life. No doubt the same was true of the disciples, seeing that the meal was recorded in the Bible. It isn't the first time Jesus refers to his body as bread (or living bread), sharing it with his disciples and referring to it as his body, so the disciples were familiar with the analogy. When I think about Jesus' sacrifice of his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins by sharing communion with each other, many feelings come over me. I feel unworthy that he would love me so much as to go to the cross with my sins, but am grateful that nothing can separate us from his love.

What thoughts come to your mind as you prepare to share Jesus' body and blood at the table of the Lord?

*Loving God, thank you for sending your Son Jesus  
to teach us what real love is by sacrificing his body to forgive our sins  
so that we can share in his eternal life,  
praising you and giving you glory. Amen.*

APRIL 15

# BLOOD



*In the same way he took the cup also,  
after supper, saying,  
"This cup is the new covenant in my blood.  
Do this, as often as you drink it,  
in remembrance of me."  
(1 Corinthians 11:25)*

Blood... probably not something that you think about every day, but I do. As a Medical Laboratory Scientist, I work with blood all day. I run tests on it to help your doctor diagnose and treat you. I inventory and check out blood units to patients in critical need, and recently, I donated my own for the first time. With all this experience dealing with blood, I feel I now have a unique consideration about the gift that Jesus gave each of us when he shed his own to pay the price for our sins, and bring us closer to God.

Right now, the United States is experiencing a blood shortage – the worst in decades. The American Red Cross is offering incentives to encourage people to donate, and yet less than 10% of the population does. We all have our own excuses as to why we can't donate, but when it comes down to it those excuses help no one. There is simply no life saving alternative when blood is needed and unavailable. Your healthcare team knows this, and God knew it too, and that is why he offered the life of his only Son to bridge the gap between God and humanity. Christ knew what his "donation" would cost, and he still didn't make excuses. He donated every drop of his blood for all of us sinners. He suffered and bled, and because of his sacrifice, we live. As Christians, we will never have to endure a blood shortage. We will never be sent away because we need too much, and we will never be separated from God. Jesus gave all, and we will forever be saved.

Because of my work in healthcare, I can now understand a little more the full implications of that sacrifice. I am reminded of it every time I hear the words of 1 Corinthians 11:25, and I am grateful for the ultimate blood donation that Jesus gave to save my life. The gift of blood donation saves lives. Sometimes it is a stranger's life, and sometimes we are the stranger needing saved.

*Thank you, Jesus, for the sacrifice of shedding your blood that we might live.  
Help us, as we are able, to shed our own blood for others. Amen.*

APRIL 16



# PRICE

*You were bought with a price.  
(1 Corinthians 7:23a)*

Jesus died for our sins. He paid a high price. Dying on the cross was the price He paid so we would be able to live with God's love forever. Jesus paid this price so we wouldn't be punished. This means, therefore, that we should remain faithful to God.

Many times, we get caught up in social media and how many material things we have and what clothes we wear. We need to continue to believe in God and put Him first instead of materialistic things. Jesus is the One who gave up his life for us so we could live with God forever.

Is there a time in your life when you have not put God first?

*Dear Jesus,  
thank you for dying on the cross to give us eternal life.  
We need to remember to put You first always.  
You are more important than any physical objects that we have.  
Thank you for everything You have done for us.  
Amen.*

APRIL 17

# BETRAY



*And while they were eating, Jesus said,  
"Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."  
(Matthew 26:21)*

As they were preparing for the Last Supper, Jesus took his place among his 12 disciples and while they were eating told them that one of them would betray him. They were shocked to hear this and all said “Surely not I, Lord?”

Judas had gone to the chief priests and asked what they would give him if he betrayed Jesus to them. They paid him thirty pieces of silver and he began to look for an opportunity to betray him. Jesus treated Judas with kindness and graciousness, even though he knew Judas would betray him.

In Psalm 55:12-14, David agonizes over betrayal by a familiar friend. The biblical highlight of these verses states it is hard enough to deal with enemies, but far harder to face the fact of betrayal by a close friend. Feeling that he can no longer trust anyone, the psalmist turns to God for help. God, he knows will never betray him.

Chances are, we have all been betrayed by someone we consider close to us. These experiences can shake our confidence and make us question our trust of others. We often find it hard to move on or continue our path after being betrayed. Jesus overcomes this betrayal by continuing on his mission, even though he was troubled by the betrayal. How do we respond to betrayal? May we all learn from reading about Judas to seek strength from God and practice forgiveness.

Have we ever been the “betrayed?” Hopefully we also learn not to be the “betrayed.” The potential benefit or momentary motivation one might see in an unusual situation would not be worth the end result and lead to sacrificed trust, friendships and relationships.

*Dear Lord, we ask that you help us to never betray you.*

*Please give us strength to follow you.*

*Help us to embrace forgiveness for those who may betray us.*

*May your Holy Spirit be our guide in times of turmoil and betrayal,  
trusting in our faith in you. Amen.*

APRIL 18

# DEATH



*If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord;  
so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.*  
(Romans 14:8)

Quoting from the “Understanding the Bible” part in my personal Bible, Martin Luther called the book of Romans, “the chief book of the New Testament.” This may have been because he found in it the answer to a question that had long tormented him. “How can I meet God’s standards of righteousness?” The answer given in Romans is that we are made righteous by faith. God gave us this promise.

We are saved by grace through faith. We do not earn it through “works.” What a blessing! Because we love the Lord and follow his words in the Bible, we serve the Lord with the gifts that God has given us. Many of our church family gifted us with their words of sympathy and understanding.

We all have received gifts from God and we use and share them in our own personal ways. No gift is too small or goes unnoticed without our church family or within our community. Being saved by grace is a comforting gift that God has given us.

*Dear Lord, you are the giver of gifts  
and you show us how we can use them to serve you.  
There are many ways to use these gifts.  
Whatever my God-given gifts, show me the way to use them for you.  
When I am called, help me to say, “Here I am Lord, send me.”  
In Jesus name we pray, Amen.*

APRIL 19

# TOMB



*And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation,  
and the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

*(John 19:42)*

Some words sound like their meaning. The word slice, for example, sounds sharp and edged like it could cut. Rotund is large and overflowing. It spills from your lips when pronounced. Tomb, the subject for today, sounds empty and cavernous. You can almost hear an echo resonating through its one syllable.

I assume this is how Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus felt when they laid Jesus in the tomb following his crucifixion. How empty and cavernous their hearts must have been to see the fragile human body of their Lord and Savior. Their faith merely an echo of what it once was. They had no knowledge that the hollowness they experienced today would shortly become their reason for celebration. That the emptiness of the tomb would be extolled just days later.

How can I keep my sights on Jesus, even when things feel empty and dark?

*Dearest Lord,  
May the promise you have made to be with us always  
stay at the forefront of our minds and hearts.  
Even when days feel dark or empty,  
we know you are by our side.  
Amen.*



APRIL 20

# LIVING



*The women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground,  
but the men said to them,  
“Why do you look for the living among the dead?”  
(Luke 24:5b)*

Often in life we search for answers in things that are no longer alive, such as in past hurts, old dreams, or in things that have failed. Like the women at the tomb, we can be puzzled, not realizing that what we seek cannot be found in past things, things that are no longer living. The answers and peace we seek are found in living presence of Christ.

When Jesus rose from the dead, He conquered death. It is in Christ that we find the fullness of hope and purpose for our living.

Where has the living God revealed hope to you today? How does following the living Lord give your life purpose?

*Living Lord,  
help us to look to You in moments of fear and uncertainty.  
May we stop searching for hope in the past or in things that are dead  
and instead find hope and direction in You.  
Amen.*

APRIL 21



# NOW WHAT?!?

*You are witnesses of these things.  
(Luke 24:48)*

Now what? These two disciples had been eagerly listening to all that this stranger had been teaching them, but now as they turn in to their village, he keeps walking. In that instant, they have two options — to do the expected and let the traveler go his way, or to take a risk and invite the stranger to stay with them. They take the risk of hospitality, and their invitation leads to them seeing Jesus and then running back to Jerusalem with the good news of the resurrection — that Jesus is alive!

How often do we have moments like that — where we could simply do the expected, or take a risk and practice real, vulnerable hospitality? It might involve bringing someone into our home. It might simply be the difference between not really noticing a visitor sitting in the corner of the church and intentionally going over to welcome her. One never really knows what might happen, but in the interaction that follows, there's always the possibility of experiencing Jesus, alive, right there in the form of another person.

Now what? How might you take a risk to extend welcome to someone?

*Living God,  
when the disciples came to a 'Now what?' moment,  
you surprised them with the new life of the resurrection.  
Help us to find new life by practicing radical welcome always.  
Amen.*



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