



Lead Us from Death to Life

Devotions for Lent
by the people of First Lutheran Church
Lynn, MA

2014

Welcome to the Forty Day Journey

Lent is a journey with Jesus—and all journeys with Jesus lead somewhere good. The road, however, is sometimes long and hard. From its earliest days, the Church realized that the mystery of Easter was just too great to digest without any preparation. The joy of the resurrection was too unfathomable to just plunge into without first recognizing our need for new life.

Originally, this preparation time was geared toward converts to Christianity, who needed time to pray and study before their Baptism at the Easter Vigil. It is still a time for that today—and we have the great joy of two adults preparing for baptism at FLC this year!—but now it has expanded to include everyone. Lent is a time for *all of us* to **return to our baptisms**: to remember that we come from God and are going back to God, and that our whole lives are bathed in God’s love.

During this season, many Christians take on special faith practices such as fasting, prayer, and giving to the poor. This devotional booklet is a way to help us do some of that together. By carving out a few minutes in each of the next forty days, you will be connecting yourself not only to God, but also to your sisters and brothers at church, who have written these devotions from their hearts.

You are invited to follow the order of daily prayer on the following pages, either as an individual or as a family, as you make your way through this booklet. You will be amazed at how the ritual of daily prayer gives meaning and shape to your days, and helps you notice God in the ordinary stuff of life.

Through our prayer, worship, and service to others during this holy season, may we heed the words of Paul, who reminds us:

Now is the acceptable time;
Now is the day of salvation.

2 Corinthians 6:2



An Order for Daily Prayer in Lent

Find a quiet place and light a candle.

Trace the sign of the cross—the sign of God’s love for you, given in baptism—as you say:

God the Father, † Son, and Holy Spirit be with me. Amen.

Then pray one of the following psalms:

Monday, Wednesday, Friday

O God, you are my God; eagerly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. Therefore I have gazed upon you in your holy place, that I might behold your power and your glory. For your steadfast love is better than life itself; my lips shall give you praise. So will I bless you as long as I live and lift up my hands in your name. My spirit is content, as with the richest of foods, and my mouth praises you with joyful lips, when I remember you upon my bed, and meditate on you in the night watches. For you have been my helper, and under the shadow of your wings I will rejoice. My whole being clings to you; your right hand holds me fast.

Psalm 63

Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday

Come, let us sing to the LORD; let us shout for joy to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before God's presence with thanksgiving and raise a loud shout to the LORD with psalms. For you, LORD, are a great God, and a great ruler above all gods. In your hand are the caverns of the earth; the heights of the hills are also yours. The sea is yours, for you made it, and your hands have molded the dry land. Come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For the LORD is our God, and we are the people of God's pasture and the sheep of God's hand.

Psalm 95

Read the scripture passage and devotion for the day.

Spend a few minutes in silence.

What do you hear God saying to you?

Offer those feelings and questions to God.

Hold the person who wrote the devotion before God as well.

Thank God for this time together.

Conclude with the Lord's Prayer:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those
who trespass against us;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom,
and the power, and the glory,
forever and ever. Amen.**

Trace the cross over your body again, as a sign of God's blessing, as you say:

**God who made me, † forgives me, and loves me,
be my strength this day. Amen.**

Thursday, March 6

*Yet even now, says the Lord,
return to me with all your heart.
Joel 2:12*

There is a quiet rhythm in the early morning hour before the sun rises. The coffee is brewing and the aroma fills the house, tugging me awake. The demands of everyday responsibilities, raising a family, running a household, working full-time, caring for aging parents, keeping up to date on Facebook, errands, shopping, dishes, cleaning, cooking and laundry is a never ending race. Walking the dog—good for both of us, becomes another chore to do.

How easy it is to forget God in the haste of my life. I am really efficient at multi-tasking and being busy. But in this race to do more, do it better and in less time, the season of Lent gives me permission to finally slow down. Jesus promises to be with me even when I am pulled by the daily grind. His love gives me permission to stop, smell my cup of coffee this morning, and rejoice in the everyday miracle of my hectic, imperfect life. Lent allows me to slow down, and stop running on empty. Even now, I will return to Him with all my heart and find peaceful rest.

Deb Wilson

Friday, March 7 | COMMEMORATION OF PERPETUA AND FELICITY, MARTYRS

If God is for us, who can be against us?"
Romans 8:3

Abraham Lincoln during his greatest crisis was asked during the Civil War about whose side that God was on. He answered, "Sir, my concern is not whether God is on our side; my greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right!"

Every time that I hear that quote, I think of Romans 8:3, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" Wow, who would have thought that such a 10 word sentence can be so powerful? To me, it just reeks of confidence that there is no greater glory in doing the right thing.

We all know how the civil war turned out but at the time, nothing was for certain. Looking back at history, there are numerous instances of courageous people striving to do the right thing despite all the obstacles that were placed before them. From civil rights to women's rights and even to basic human rights. Faith was the bottom line.

"Having faith in God did not mean sitting back and doing nothing. It meant believing you would find success if you did your best honestly and energetically." – Ken Follett from "Pillars of the Earth"

Patty Henkenmeier

In the year 202 the emperor forbade conversions to Christianity. Perpetua, a noblewoman, Felicity, a slave, and other companions were all preparing to be baptized at Carthage in North Africa. They were imprisoned and sentenced to death. Perpetua's father, who was not a Christian, visited her in prison and begged her to lay aside her Christian convictions in order to spare her life and spare the family from scorn. In response, Perpetua told her father, "We know that we are not placed in our own power but in that of God."

Saturday, March 8

*For he will command his angels concerning you
to guard you in all your ways.
Psalm 91*

The Appalachian Trail goes over the mountains from Georgia to Maine. My daughter, who has hiked the Trail, tells of walking along the rough terrain with her 40 pound pack, alone, discouraged and wondering if this was the right thing to do, when she came across the first of one of many coolers bobbing in a small brook. It contained a note of encouragement and an assortment of goodies...soda, fruit, candy bars. She says that when she came across these surprise gifts in the most remote places, she was up lifted and feeling not alone but that someone was supporting her on her journey. It gave her the motivation to go on. The hikers call these people "Trail Angels." You never see a Trail Angel and, if you did, they would not look for thanks. But to the hikers they are their angels

God has commanded angels to guard us in all our ways: unseen, encouraging and caring for us as we walk along the trail of life.

Shirley Benson

Sunday, March 9

First Sunday in Lent

**Our faith community gathers
for worship at 10:30 AM**

Today's gospel tells of Jesus' temptation in the desert. His forty-day fast becomes the basis of our Lenten journey. With Jesus, we pray that we may be able to resist the temptations that come to us here and now. Come to worship, to receive the Spirit's strength to live out the promises of your baptism.



Monday, March 10 | COMMEMORATION OF HARRIET TUBMAN AND SOJOURNER TRUTH

Jesus wept.

John 11:35

People see Jesus as this larger-than-life, untouchable being. What they forget is that he was human. He was human for us, so that we might experience his beauty and love and light. “Jesus wept.” Jesus was vulnerable. He showed his vulnerability to us, and in doing so he made it so that we might be more comfortable doing the same in return. Jesus wept in front of us so that we could feel comfortable weeping in front of him. This means so much to me, because I've always felt alienated by the idea of an untouchable, aloof God. The fact that he would send his son to show us how much he cares moves me.

Jari Knowlton Simard

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in Maryland, and remained a slave until about age 30 when, fearing she would be sold and moved farther south, she escaped with the help of the Underground Railroad. After that, she helped about 300 others to escape until slavery was abolished. After the Civil War, her home in Auburn, New York, became a center for women's rights and served the aged and poor.

Sojourner Truth, too, was born a slave, in New York state. Her birth name was Isabella. After slavery was abolished in New York in 1827, she was freed and while working as a housekeeper, became deeply involved in Christianity. A number of years later, she discerned a call to become a preacher. Taking the name Sojourner Truth, she set out on an evangelistic journey, where people found her testimony to be deeply moving. In later life, she also became a popular speaker against slavery and for women's rights.

Tuesday, March 11

In everything I did, I showed you that by hard work we must help the weak. Remembering the words that Lord Jesus himself said "It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Acts 20:35

As I watch the women of the Chattering Crafters knit their squares for Centerboard, I am reminded of the blessing these will be to the recipients.

Some of the women have been knitting for years; others just learning. They work hard to make sure their squares measure 9x9 inches. These will be joined together to form blankets as housewarming gifts to those who are leaving the shelters and going to their own places.

As they wrap themselves in these blankets, they will be reminded of God's love and care. What a blessing for those of us that work on these squares to know that we are helping someone get back on their feet. With one little square, added to others, we have proven that one act of kindness added to another equals a blessing.

Dear Heavenly Father, help us to care for one another in everything that we do. We have been given so much that we need to share with those less fortunate. Amen.

Betty Emerson

Wednesday, March 12 | COMMEMORATION OF GREGORY THE GREAT, BISHOP

*For we walk by faith, not by sight.
2 Corinthians 5:7*

One of the side effects of being a church musician is that most bible passages that I read or hear tend to remind me of a hymn, and, more often than not, the occasions that we would sing that hymn in church. This passage (not surprisingly), always makes me think of the hymn *We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight*, which we usually sing on the Second Sunday of Easter.

The Gospel reading on that day is always the account of Jesus appearing in the midst of the disciples who are hiding in fear in a locked room after the resurrection. This is also the reading in which Thomas earns, fairly or not, his nickname “Doubting Thomas.” (Incidentally, one of the things that I love about the accounts of the disciples in the Bible is how humanly they are depicted – they are impatient, petty, cowardly, jealous, impulsive, angry).

Even though I can certainly claim all of those shortcomings, Thomas has always been the apostle with whom I most identify. His words are recorded in only two scenes in scripture, and each time his responses are almost identical with what I would say on that occasion. If my closest friends came and told me that someone we all knew to dead had appeared before them, I can very easily imagine myself saying something quite similar to *Unless I put my finger in the marks of the nails and my hand in his side...*

The fact that I do have faith and believe in these things that I have not seen or experienced is something that I consider to be a minor miracle every day. Without sounding like too much of a “church nerd,” it constantly reminds me of the beginning of Luther’s explanation to the third article of the creed in the Small Catechism: *I believe that I cannot, by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him.*

In the rest of that explanation, Luther tells us how important the church, word and sacrament are in the nurturing and development of that faith – which is why the church is and has always been an important part of my life – and why the last two stanzas of *We Walk by Faith* (#635) is a prayer that is often on my mind.

*Help then O Lord, our unbelief; and may our faith abound
To call on you when you are near and seek where you are found:
That, when our life of faith is done, in realms of clearer light
We may behold you as you are, with full and endless sight.*

David Greatrix

Gregory was born into a politically influential family. At one time he held political office, and at another time he lived as a monk, all before he was elected to the papacy. Gregory's work was extensive. He influenced public worship through the establishment of a lectionary and prayers to correlate with the readings. He established a school to train church musicians, and Gregorian chant is named in his honor. He wrote a treatise underscoring what is required of a parish pastor serving a congregation. He sent missionaries to preach to the Anglo-Saxons who had invaded England. And at one time he organized distribution of grain during a shortage of food in Rome.

Thursday, March 13

*Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels
without knowing it.
Hebrews 13:2*

All of my closest friends started as strangers. Some stranger than others. They can say the same about me.

I don't pretend know what wonders or difficulties lie inside a person's soul. All I know is that by treating each person with respect and honesty, we allow them to flourish and grow.

I am not able to judge the heart of a stranger, but I am able to treat them with the courtesy and fairness deserving of all of God's children. When we welcome a stranger, we welcome the Lord. Don't forget, you are the stranger to the other person.

John Benedict

Friday, March 14

Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.
Luke 23:34

Being the oldest child in the family growing up had its perks, but there were definitely disadvantages too. My sister would inevitably get into my toys or my school projects and add her own artwork or rearrange what I had painstakingly worked on. Somehow, it would be my fault for leaving my stuff out where she could get after it. My mom would try to explain that she did not understand what she was doing was wrong. She was my sister and I needed to forgive her. It was terribly hard to forgive her scribbles on homework as an eight or nine year old obsessive perfectionist, but eventually I would. Not gracefully or without drama, but eventually I would forgive.

Jesus, from the cross, shows his unfathomable ability to forgive and love us. While we struggle to forgive mere slights real or imagined, he asks forgiveness of the very ones that have killed him. Not with grudges or slights or drama of any kind. He knows our failures, yet forgives and loves us anyway. Like a loving adult forgiving a small child who inadvertently breaks something, he forgives us not for our immaturity but for our humanity.

Linda Donahue

Saturday, March 15

*The rich and the poor have this in common:
the Lord is the maker of them all.
Proverbs 22:2*

The words of this proverb are simple and to the point: God's love is all inclusive.

We all spend our daily lives among friends and acquaintances that we feel comfortable with and know well. Those "other people" that we see and run into along our way aren't like me. They're from different cultural and economic backgrounds and don't seem to share the same values that I do. Sometimes their actions can seem questionable or even offensive.

We're human and unfortunately we tend to make comparisons and judgments of others.

What this verse reminds us is to remember that God is love. It doesn't matter if someone is rich or poor, addicted or sober, straight or gay, homeless or living comfortably. God made us all and loves everyone equally. Circumstances make differences between people, but the common truth that we all share is that we are all children of God.

Our congregation has always been known for our warmth and welcoming. The fact that we are designated as a *Reconciling in Christ* congregation publicly affirms our commitment to accepting everyone as brothers and sisters in Christ, not only within the walls of our church building, but also daily outside of 280 Broadway.

A line from our Mission Statement further reflects the words of this proverb: "We are inclusive of all God's people knowing that God has made us one and has called us in baptism to lives of faithful witness and service."

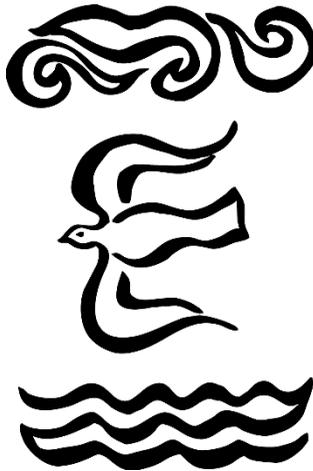
Phil Mednis

Sunday, March 16

Second Sunday in Lent

**Our faith community gathers
for worship at 10:30 AM**

In today's gospel Jesus tells Nicodemus that he must be born of water and Spirit. At the baptismal font we are given a new birth as daughters and sons of God. Just as God made a covenant with Abraham, in baptism God promises to raise us up with Christ to new life. From worship we are sent forth to proclaim God's love for all the world. Come: join the people of God in prayer and praise, word and sacrament.



Monday, March 17 | COMMEMORATION OF ST. PATRICK, MISSIONARY TO IRELAND

*So we are ambassadors for Christ, since
God is making his appeal through us.
2 Corinthians 5:20*

To me, this passage means that we, as Christians, are to spread God's love and word. When we baptize someone we promise that we will look after that child as a congregation and that we will teach him or her God's word. An ambassador is someone who spreads good will, and as a Christian, it feels good to share my belief with others.

Kim Holmes

At sixteen, Patrick was kidnapped by Irish pirates and sold into slavery in Ireland. He himself admitted that up to this point he cared little for God. He escaped after six years, returned to his family in southwest Britain, and began to prepare for ordained ministry. He later returned to Ireland, this time to serve as a bishop and missionary. He made his base in the north of Ireland and from there made many missionary journeys with much success. In his autobiography he denounced the slave trade, perhaps from his own experience as a slave.

Tuesday, March 18

*So do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring
worries of its own. Today's trouble is enough for today.*

Matthew 6:34

Hello, my name is Elysia, and I am a worrier. My parent's joke I inherited it from my grandfather, but that these things must skip a generation. As a child, my worries were very innocent; I worried about missing the school bus, not doing well on exams, and learning to drive. Eventually I learned that if I missed the bus, I could walk home and my mom would drive me to school, I would just have to study harder next time if I didn't get an A, and as I learned from my best friend who was several months older, they let you take the driving exam as many times as it takes for you to pass (4 in her case).

Now that I'm older, the stakes are much higher – not all of my worries have an acceptable alternative anymore if the worst comes to pass. If I don't do well at work, then I will be fired. If I'm fired and don't find a job, I won't be able to pay my mortgage. And it's not like this is an unheard of scenario – so many people, including people at First Lutheran, have been through this and much worse due to the economic downturn.

The advice in Matthew is sometimes the only thing that can stop my troubled thoughts from spiraling out of control. At work this means taking things one step at a time – if I have an inbox full of 200 e-mails, I will put 100% of my energy on answering one, and not worry about the 199 that are sitting unopened.

Instead of dreading the yearly goals that have been set for me and worrying that I will not be able to meet expectations, I am happy that my boss has such faith that I can accomplish them. But the biggest comfort to me is that Sunday is a day where I truly have no worries. Monday and its worries can wait until tomorrow, but at First Lutheran all I have to do is be in the moment and hear God's comforting Word.

Dear God, help us to cast our cares and anxiety on you, so we will not shoulder our burdens alone. Help us to find the blessings in our life today and hope, not worry, for our tomorrows.

Elysia Alleman

Wednesday, March 19 | FEAST OF ST. JOSEPH, GUARDIAN OF OUR LORD

*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you,
for this sums up the law and the prophets.*

Matthew 7:12

In my life I have always been a caregiver. From being the big sister, to being the neighborhood babysitter, to a wife and mother and now a grandmother. I have always given total love to each part of my life and been rewarded with being loved back which has been very rewarding.

Betty Johnson

Joseph is the foster father of Jesus, who bravely trusted the angel's word and brought up Mary's son—and God's son—as his own. The gospels are silent about much of Joseph's life. We know that he was a carpenter or builder by trade. The gospel of Luke shows him acting in accordance with both civil and religious law by returning to Bethlehem for the census and by presenting the child Jesus in the temple on the fortieth day after his birth. The Gospel of Matthew tells of Joseph's trust in God, who led him through visionary dreams. Because Joseph is not mentioned after the story of a young Jesus teaching in the temple, it is assumed that he died before Jesus reached adulthood.

Thursday, March 20

*In my Father's house there are many mansions:
if it were not so I would have told you.
I go to prepare a place for you.
John 14:2*

For a couple of months now, our family has been struggling with loved ones being ill, with difficult dying days, a fatal accident, and imminently the death of these precious dads. The human sense of being left by those we loved has been deep sadness, loneliness, and the lack of an anchor in our lives since these were all strong and capable men.

And again, because we are human, the faith we have just doesn't seem strong enough to satisfy us all, that these very dear ones, for sure, have been taken into the kingdom of God – or as we read, “into our Father's house with many mansions.” It helps when we can soothe our broken hearts with the assurance that where they are now, there is no more sadness, no more pain, no more confusion or loneliness or inadequate feelings. This is reassuring! I want to realize that death can be beautiful – in His heavenly home.

There is a process for all of us in these situations to struggle through—and it is OK. In fact, it is very important. I see evidence of this now, with myself and among our children. God accepts our human and faithless days of denial and anger and depression and will not, for sure, let us down. In time (sometimes it takes a long time), His grace and love and goodness will show us the way of acceptance.

Dear Father in heaven, increase our faith. Thank you for the assurance of a heavenly home when we leave this mixed-up world and live in peace and joy and love with one another. Amen.

Gretchen Stott

Friday, March 21

If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them if they gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?

Luke 9:23-25

Many years ago I was away on a Palm Sunday, as this is one of my favorite days in the Church Year, I sought out a church service. The church that I found was having a Youth Sunday, and there was a chancel drama based upon this verse. There were several actors, but these are the ones that I remember: a business man, a wealthy socialite, a shy quiet girl and a muscle builder. Each heard the call to take up the cross and follow Jesus.

- The business man collected his cross, a large expensive gold cross. It was clearly a cross for a powerful, important man.
- The Socialite had a very fancy sparkly cross, studded with expensive jewels.
- The shy quiet girl had a small inexpensive cross, worn on a chain around her neck and barely visible.
- The muscle builder had a cross that was a huge, heavy wooden cross.

As each approached the altar, Jesus asked them to describe the cross they had chosen.

- The business man talked about how important his job was and how he was a pillar of the community, and must have a cross that would show this to the world.
- The Socialite talked about how the jeweled cross augmented her beauty and was fitting for her life, and it was important that people recognize that.
- The shy quiet girl said she had chosen the unassuming cross because she was not really important and didn't deserve a fancy cross.
- The muscle builder felt it was important that his cross show his strength.

As you can imagine, Jesus was not really happy with their choices and he assigned them different crosses.

- The business man received a small cross that would fit neatly in his briefcase
- The socialite received a small, plain cross
- The shy girl received a fancy large cross, that she couldn't hide under her sweater
- The muscle builder received a delicate cross that would require careful handling, because it was so fragile

I like this story because it reminds me that we each have different crosses that fit our personalities and our lives, but Jesus asks us to step out of our comfort zone and wear a different cross – his cross. He calls us to challenge ourselves and follow him, in ways that might be uncomfortable for us. He doesn't ask us to follow him if it is not inconvenient, but to hear his individual call to us, in whatever form that might take in our lives. It is not always easy to hear that call – Jesus's call, it is easier to try to follow that call as it fits into our current life - in our own comfort zone, but that is not what Jesus wants for us. The call is to strive to change and follow Jesus—to leave ourselves behind and to live in Christ's light.

Lord, as we go through this Lenten season, help us to hear your call and to live in your light. Amen.

Diane Beckwith

Saturday, March 22 | COMMEMORATION OF JONATHAN EDWARDS, TEACHER

*You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.
Matthew 5:43-47*

Remember this day; for one has no enemies here. Only brothers and sisters who need our forgiveness kindness and love. The pitfalls may be many. The head, our Savior and Lord, will raise us with his divine forgiveness, everlasting mercy, and kindness.

Perry Maurice

Edwards was a minister in Connecticut and has been described as the greatest of the New England Puritan preachers. He is perhaps best known for his fiery sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," although the rest of his preaching had much more to say about God's love than God's wrath. His personal experience of conversion came when he felt overwhelmed with a sense of God's majesty and grandeur rather than a fear of punishment.

Sunday, March 23

Third Sunday in Lent

**Our faith community gathers
for worship at 10:30 AM**

In today's gospel the Samaritan woman asks Jesus for water, an image of our thirst for God. Jesus offers living water, a sign of God's grace flowing from the waters of baptism. Come to worship, and join all of us thirsty people, made alive in Christ.



Monday, March 24 | COMMEMORATION OF OSCAR ROMERO, BISHOP OF EL SALVADOR

Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Matthew 25:37-40

When I was a teenager, I used to love going to the Saturday afternoon mass because it was a folk music service. My favorite song was based on this verse from Matthew. I remember singing the lyrics of the chorus—"Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers that you do unto me"—accompanied by the sounds of the tambourine and guitars.

As a young adult, I spent some time thinking about what it meant to be a Christian and my thoughts led me back to this song, these words, this verse. The message of caring for and helping others has been a driving force in my life. Lent is a time of reflection and prayer and for me an opportunity to renew my faith through the act of serving those in need.

Leanne Ahearn

Oscar Romero is remembered for his advocacy on behalf of the poor in El Salvador. After being appointed as bishop he preached against the political repression in his country. He and other priests and church workers were considered traitors for their bold stand for justice, especially defending the rights of the poor. After several years of threats to his life, Romero was assassinated while presiding at the eucharist. During the 1980s thousands died in El Salvador during political unrest.

Tuesday, March 25 | FEAST OF THE ANNUNCIATION OF OUR LORD

*Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,
"Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?"
And I said, "Here am I, Send me!"
Isaiah 6:8*

This passage makes me think of when I attended Synod Assembly a few years ago. We spent a day doing service projects. The motto of the assembly was "God's work, our hands." My service project was to clean up an inner city park and put on a celebration for kids from the area. We worked hard during the clean-up. I was filthy, sweaty, and my back ached, but I felt terrific knowing my hands were doing God's work.

The part of this passage that I admire most is that when God calls, Isaiah responds eagerly and confidently. I hope to live my life the same way. When God needs hands to do his work, I can volunteer without hesitation.

Dear God, may we always be listening for your call, and may we always be willing to answer it.

Jack King

Nine months before Christmas the church celebrates the feast of the Annunciation (or the "announcement") of Jesus' birth. In Luke the angel Gabriel announces to Mary that she will give birth to the Son of God and she responds, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord."

Wednesday, March 26

*For everything there is a season and a time
for every matter under heaven.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Lent is the season for us to remember the suffering and death of our Lord Jesus and also to celebrate his eternal resurrection after the three days in the tomb. It is the time for us to admit our sinful nature and pray for forgiveness from our risen Lord. It is the time for us to look at our neighbors and follow our Lord's teaching, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

Our Lord understood that his time is near and prayed in Gethsemane to God as the obeying son accepting his fate under God's will. His disciples had difficulty understanding what Jesus has told them several time in advance. When our time is approaching we have to follow Jesus in Gethsemane and pray to the Father for the fulfillment of his will in our life.

A prime matter remaining from our Lord's ultimate suffering is his Last Supper with his disciples, which established the union for those who believed in him over the time since his crucifixion and resurrection. We pray that the church will remain faithful to Him eternally and reinforce his will among the believers.

Ben Szekely

Thursday, March 27

*For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice,
but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-control.
2 Timothy 1:7*

God gave us love and self-control to overpower our cowardice. God wanted us to be the better person in all battles we enter, not to let our fear get in the way of our dreams. When you want to fight back that is when your cowardice is no longer in play but your self-control needs to take charge.

I have gotten in to situations like that. When I want to fight back, but I know it is not the right decision and yet you make it anyway. Then there are other times when self-control comes over me, and I just walk away. In my head I say, "You should have said something," but in my heart I know I made the right choice.

Love is something that you will always need even if you don't want to admit it. Not only their love for themselves, or from family, or from friends, but from God. Some people say, "I am fine on my own!" or "I don't need you anymore or anybody!" but inside they know it was just feeling the moment.

When I mess up or feel like I am alone I always know that God is looking out for me, and even if I can't hear him, he is telling me everything is going to be OK. Some people forget sometimes who loves them or forget that God loves them. I know when I remember that God loves me when I feel alone, it makes me feel so much better, and happier.

Olivia Knowlton Simard

Friday, March 28

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant.
Philippians 2:5-7

He emptied himself. The image that came to mind when I pondered that phrase came from the recent Olympics. I didn't watch many of the events but one I did see was a cross country skiing race. I know from personal experience, when I was much younger, that skiing on flat or uphill terrain is very difficult, and I can't even imagine how hard it would be to try to do it faster than everyone else and to do that on snow that's more like slush. The difficulty, even for world-class athletes, was evident as skier after skier crossed the finish line and collapsed. And not just until they caught their breath and not just the fastest. All of them had physically emptied themselves in the effort.

In contrast, a phrase came to mind that I haven't heard for some time (back when I was much younger, I guess) that describes a different state of being—a person who is “full of themselves.” In its definition of the phrase, the Free Online Dictionary uses the following phrases: pleased with yourself, cocky, overconfident, too clever by half, egotistic, full of pride or conceit.

Not too difficult to see which of these minds was in Christ Jesus. A little harder for me to try to keep the same mind in me.

Mickey Benson

Saturday, March 29

Joseph said to his brothers, 'Do not be afraid! Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good.'
Genesis 50:19-20

Sometimes when things in our lives fall apart, or in the lives of those we love, we don't know quite what to say. We want to help, we mean well, but we are just so uncomfortable around things like sickness and death that our brains and mouths lock up. If we're lucky, we're able to squeeze out a word or two that we heard somewhere else before, but can't quite remember where... words like:

"Everything happens for a reason. This is all part of God's plan."

"God needed another angel in heaven, so he took your friend."

"God is trying to teach you something through this."

How does it feel when someone says these words to you? Are they comforting? Or do they make you angry? Do you ever want to say, "If God's 'plan' involves causing me so much pain and hurting my family, then *how in the world* can God be good or loving?"

When Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, no one could say that was a good thing. It was a horrible thing. It was cruel and wrong by every standard. If someone had tried to tell him it was part of God's "plan," he probably would have let some choice words fly. I think I would have too.

But in his own time, on his own terms, Joseph was able to see that while God didn't *cause* the terrible thing that happened to him, God was *with him* through it, and God was able to *transform* it into something good.

Only Joseph got to say those words. No one else, no matter how well-meaning. So it is with all who grieve and suffer. We cannot inject meaning into their suffering; that will perhaps come in time—in *their* time. But we can be *with* people in their suffering, reminding them by our presence that they are not alone, and that God's ultimate plan is healing and life.

Pr. Jon Niketh

Sunday, March 30

Fourth Sunday in Lent

**Our faith community gathers
for worship at 10:30 AM**

The gospel for this Sunday is the story of the man born blind healed by Christ. "I was blind, but now I see, declares the man." Last week the salvation that Christ offers the world was likened to water, and this coming week God's mercy is likened to light. What is the "darkness" in your life? Come to worship to celebrate the light that is Christ in you.



Monday, March 31

*Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free; and to break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?*

Isaiah 58:6-9

In this passage I believe Isaiah is commenting on the hypocrisy he sees in people who follow religious rituals such as fasting, but do not put God's word into action in their everyday lives. Today, as it was back then, people often go to church every Sunday and follow along with all the religious rituals for an hour, but then return home and forget the need to act on God's word. We can get so busy working, taking care of our families, and keeping up with our homes that we overlook the needs of others.

I feel blessed to be part of First Lutheran Church which provides us with both Sunday worship with its religious rituals as well as many opportunities to put our beliefs into actions. We have chosen to be a *Reconciling in Christ* congregation to break the bonds of injustice. We serve monthly at My Brother's Table and donate dinners at Thanksgiving to share bread with the hungry. We have collected clothing, money, and other items for our Christmas appeal to clothe the naked and help the homeless.

Dear God, help us at First Lutheran Church to continue to follow Your Word through worship and deeds. May we, as a congregation and individually, continue to seek opportunities to help the poor, hungry, and oppressed, welcome the excluded, and speak out against injustice.

Patrice Cunningham

Tuesday, April 1

*If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels,
but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a
clanging cymbal.
1 Corinthians 13:1*

If I speak as though I “know it all” or have all the answers, my voice may be loud, but my words are empty—they have no real meaning. This verse goes on to say, “Faith, hope, and love abide... but the greatest of these is love.” Love us humble, it is sincere, and it speaks the truth.

There is only one voice we can always depend upon—that is the voice of our Lord. His love is steadfast, it is always forgiving, and it endures forever. Listen to your heart, ignore the rumble of noisy gongs or clanging cymbals, and God will speak to you in a gentle and loving voice.

Jan Clooney

Wednesday, April 2

*I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.
Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.
John 13:34*

I strive for this, but loving others is not always easy. There may be struggles with family members, friends, and co-workers. Sometimes people may even have misunderstandings and disagreements with fellow church members. Complete strangers have shouted filthy insults at me at times when my children are in plain view in my car. There have been times in my life when people have taken advantage of me, have cheated me, have even stolen from me. People live and behave in ways that I may find offensive or disgusting.

And yet, if I want things to be better, I believe that it is important that I do my small part in changing 'the world' for the better. Even knowing that some days will be a struggle and that I may fail, I don't allow that to deter me from trying to become a better person. So, despite all the things that have happened, or all the things that may go wrong, I do my best to actively love others--to hold my tongue, keep my temper in check, to turn the other cheek. What I'd like to learn to be able to do better is to maybe even go a step or two further and be welcoming, helpful, kind, generous, and gracious, even when I don't feel like doing that.

I believe that is the mark of a true Christian--not just someone who claims to belong to a particular church and subscribe to a particular set of beliefs. I strive to be a person who, despite my human frailty and imperfections, shows my love for God on a daily basis by attempting to follow Jesus' commandment to love others as he has loved us.

True Knowlton Simard

Thursday, April 3

So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Luke 11:9-10

This passage represents three words to me: prayer, God, and the church.

To ask means to pray to God, and when you pray to God you are asking for something such as forgiveness, help, and love.

By searching you are searching for an answer from God.

When you knock on the door you would knock on the door to the church for the church is welcoming, forgiving, and loving.

For me I ask (pray) for forgiveness and love from God. I search each day for a sign or an answer from God. When I knock on the door of the church I feel welcomed and loved.

Kate Wheeler

Friday, April 4 | COMMEMORATION OF MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., MARTYR

*Do not be overcome by evil,
but overcome evil with good.
Romans 12:21*

This means to me that we don't always have to fight back. We can say nice things to them. These "evil" people probably are hurt and just need someone to talk to. Evil cannot be overcome by evil. Only love can do that.

Laurell Knowlton Simard

Martin Luther King Jr. is remembered as an American prophet of justice among races and nations, a Christian whose faith undergirded his advocacy of vigorous yet non-violent action for racial equality. A pastor of churches in Montgomery, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia, his witness was taken to the streets in such other places as Birmingham, Alabama, where he was arrested and jailed while protesting against segregation. He preached nonviolence and demanded that love be returned for hate. Awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1964, he was killed by an assassin on April 4, 1968.

Saturday, April 5

Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak. He said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking.' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' So he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then the man said, 'You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with humans, and have prevailed.'

Genesis 32:24-28

My whole life, I've had a peculiar sense that the world is far more mysterious than what appears. My first recollection of this was while playing baseball in the neighbors' backyard. Someone hit the ball over my head and I had to chase it down. It had rolled up against the house under some hedges. As I crawled in to find the ball, I found my self in a dark and mysterious world. It seemed as though time had stopped, I heard no sounds, I sensed something deep and mysterious. I was under those shrubs for maybe one minute, but it felt like a day or two...or an eternity.

Yet, most of my life I have wrestled with God. Despite that early experience, and others since that time (floating in the ocean on my back gazing up at a round moon, or sunset in the desert sand dunes at Death Valley), I still wonder about God. Where is God? Who is God? What is God? Is God good? Is God powerful? Does God have the capacity to love, and if so, does God care about me individually or is that too self-centered a view?

I was first introduced to the story of Jacob wrestling with an angel while serving a congregation outside of Oakland, California. The pastor suggested I read it, and ask myself several questions: If you were in this story, who are you? What does it feel like to be that character? What if the angel, is not an angel, but God himself?

I've since adopted this story as deeply connected with my own life and faith. So, I'm in a lifelong wrestling match with God. The good news is that somehow, somehow, I sense that I'm being blessed in the midst of the wrestling match. Not judged, but blessed and embraced.

Bishop James Hazelwood

Sunday, April 6

Fifth Sunday in Lent

**Our faith community gathers
for worship at 10:30 AM**

The Bible readings this coming Sunday are for everyone who feels half dead, for everyone who sees death everywhere, as well as for everyone who is afraid to even think about death. Jesus reveals his power over death by raising Lazarus from the dead. The prophet Ezekiel prophesies God breathing new life into dry bones. To those in exile or living in the shadows of death, these stories proclaim God's promise of resurrection. In baptism we die with Christ that we might also be raised with him to new life. At the Easter Vigil we will welcome new sisters and brothers at the baptismal font, as we renew our baptismal promises.



Monday, April 7

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.

Romans 12:4-5

For me, this Bible verse speaks to the very nature of a community of Christ. The church or community has Jesus in common, but we are all different with our own unique gifts and talents, and we all bring something to the table that helps to make the group (or body) complete.

We are a people of different backgrounds and experiences, different family makeups. We are young and old, and everything in between. We have different jobs and functions in our everyday lives. We have lived in this area all our lives or are new to this area and this community. There are so many ways that we are different and yet that very diversity brings richness and depth to our community. We all have things that we are passionate about; our causes and pet projects and when we share those with each other, we help each other to grow and the community to grow as a whole. Like a body, we need all of the various parts to do their job and work together to move forward. Christ, which is what we all have in common, calls us to join together as one body, each contributing their own gifts and doing their part to fulfill the mission of the church and to do Jesus' work with each other in our community.

This verse reminds me of quilting. When I make a quilt – I get together lots of different fabrics – different colors and patterns. I then take that fabric – cut it into small pieces and sew it together – then I might cut it again, rearrange it and sew it all back together. When I am done, my doubts about the mix of fabrics go away – I have this beautiful quilt top – made up of all these various fabrics which don't necessarily go together, but somehow it all works – and it is beautiful.

This is sort of what we are, this community of different people, drawn together by Christ, to do the beautiful and sometimes challenging work of Christ in the world. Although we are all strong and wonderful and blessed with our individual gifts from God, we cannot do this work alone, we must join together with that common thread of Jesus to do his really important work in the world.

Diane Beckwith

Tuesday, April 8

*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is my strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?
Psalm 27:1*

Everything in my life has been a gift from God. I have had many challenges in life, from my early childhood but always had God's love to help and guide me through those hard times. As I grew older, I became more understanding that God has given me so many gifts and tools to live a full life.

Brad Johnson

Wednesday, April 9 | COMMEMORATION OF DIETRICH BONHOEFFER, PASTOR AND MARTYR

*For if we have been united with him in a death like his,
we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.
Romans 6:5*

“This is the end, but for me, the beginning of life,” uttered German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer as he was taken away to be killed in a Nazi concentration camp. Bonhoeffer was part of the “Confessing Church,” a resistance movement during World War II that opposed Hitler and the Nazis while the established church of the day, either too afraid or too clueless, went right along with the regime.

As a pastor, I keep the memory of Bonhoeffer always close to my heart. He was basically my age when most of this was happening, and I sometimes wonder if I would have had the same courage. He reminds me that following Jesus involves so much more than simply worship and prayer, but opposing evil and injustice in the world—even with doing so is costly.

But more than anything, I see in Pastor Bonhoeffer a man who understood Easter. He saw his sufferings as a sharing in Jesus’ sufferings, and he trusted that just as death was not the end for Jesus, neither would it be the end for him. And it wasn’t. Not only was the Nazi regime ultimately exposed and overthrown, Bonhoeffer’s martyrdom has served as an inspiration to millions of Christians who find courage in his example.

Where Christ lives—beyond violence, beyond death—there lives Dietrich too. And, by the grace of God, so will we.

Christ our brother, you said “no” to an evil regime, and shared your fate with all this world’s rejected ones. Live in us, that we may stand on the side of life. Inspire all pastors to speak your word, and none other. Amen.

Pr. Jon Niketh

Thursday, April 10

*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.
Philippians 4:13*

This passage is inspiring to me. It gives me self-confidence and courage to tackle anything that comes my way. If I am in a challenging situation in life, hearing this passage helps me hold my head up high and face the problem at hand. One example that comes to mind is when I am at school. Last month, I was unfairly blamed for something I did not do. The teacher accused me of bad behavior in class but I was not involved in the disturbance. I was upset but tried to hold my head up high and defend myself. I drew strength from this passage.

This verse also can apply to the season of Lent leading up to Easter Sunday. Since Christ died on Good Friday to save us, he gives us the strength to live our lives. The pain and suffering he endured should make all of us inspired to be better Christians. The true miracle of Easter Sunday when Jesus rises from the dead is one of the most important days to Lutherans. This verse helps me appreciate what Jesus had sacrificed for all people in order for our sins to be forgiven.

Emily Ohlson

Friday, April 11

*Even though I walk through the darkest valley,
I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod
and your staff, they comfort me.
Psalm 23*

Fun fact about me... When in conversation with someone or a group, I have a habit of a song popping in my head based on a word or phrase someone has said. I don't think about doing it consciously, it just happens. It's sometimes a curse and a blessing. When I read the passage that was assigned to me, of course a song came to mind: Gloria Estefan's "Coming Out of the Dark." The first line and the chorus go like this:

*Why be afraid if I'm not alone
Though life is never easy the rest is unknown*

*Coming out of the dark, I finally see the light now
It's shining on me
Coming out of the dark I know the love that saved me
You're sharing with me*

We all have our dark places, our dark times, both in head and heart. I am no exception. But what comforts me is knowing that I have rods and staff... and lots of them; my son, my husband, and my parents to name a few. Yes, I feel incredibly blessed that I've never felt alone, no matter how dark I might be feeling. All of those I love are my light. Because of them, my staff and rods, I shine in their presence and in their love.

Indeed life is not always easy. The unknown can be scary. But I fear not, because of the staff and rods in my life. How blessed am I!?!?!?! What is just as important, is for me to be that staff or that rod for those who are mine. A sharing of sorts. A caring of sorts. A comfort I hope.

When I was in a dark time and a dark place at one point in my life, I was angry with God. How could he let not so great things happen to me? How could he just sit back and do nothing? Where was he in my anguish and sadness? Although I couldn't see it then, I know now he was always there... He was there in my staff and my rods. It was his love I felt through them. His light I saw through them. I'm not afraid of the dark, I fear no evil, he is with me... They are with me. There is light and it shines on me.

Shirley Benedict

Saturday, April 12

*Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens,
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.*
Matthew 11:28-30

In this passage, Jesus tells us that if we follow him and come to him, he will give our souls rest. I find this a source of great comfort! We are sinners and so we are always burdened with sin. No matter how imperfect we are, God will accept us and so we should often go to Him in prayer, asking for forgiveness. In doing so, the Lord will grant us mercy and will give us peace.

Jill Greatrix

Sunday, April 13

Palm Sunday

Sunday of the Passion

**Our faith community gathers
for worship at 10:30 AM**

Palms are an ancient symbol of celebration and joy. When Jesus entered the city of Jerusalem for the last time, he was greeted by throngs of children and adults, waving palm branches and shouting “Hosanna in the highest!” So too do we gather on this day, with our palm branches to welcome Jesus as our king. But the mood changes quickly as we see where this king of ours is headed: toward the cross. Almost as soon as we picked them up, we lay our palms down to hear the dramatic reading of Jesus’ passion and death for our salvation.



Monday, April 14 | MONDAY IN HOLY WEEK

And being found in human form, he humbled himself, and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Philippians 2:8-11

I can still recall during the season of Lent the congregation would chant verse 8 of Philippians 2: “Christ hath humbled himself, and become obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” As a young boy with four siblings sitting in the pew on Sunday mornings and Wednesday evenings chanting this, I must admit this chant was extremely gloomy sounding to me, if not a little scary also. I could relate to the words death on a cross, and it was sad to think about especially where Jesus was concerned, but its real meaning had no influence on me.

As I grew into my teens, I started to think that Jesus himself accepted his fate of dying for our sins on a cross as an act of love for all humankind. After all, in a few days on Easter Sunday, everything would be taken care of with Jesus rising from the grave and he would declare victory over death. We would celebrate Easter morning with chocolate peanut butter eggs and jelly beans, almost like a mini-version of Christmas morning. This seemed like a somewhat simple explanation to a young boy who really had not experienced death of a loved one up until then.

But as I grew older, the pain of dealing with the loss of loved ones who died started to make an impression on me and caused me to start thinking a little harder when this annual Lenten chant rolled around in my late teens and early twenties. It became apparent to me Paul wanted us to know God Himself humbled himself to the point of appearing to us in human form – and that form was his son Jesus.

(continued on next page)

Imagine that! The Almighty God in order to make a point with his Creation, came down to earth as a fellow human being. And the humility didn't end there. God made man in the form of his Son came here not to bring attention to Himself, but to serve us like a slave. Our God serves us like a slave! Who would have thought of that? Fortunately, St. Paul had keen insight into this as he wrote his letter to the people at Philippi.

But wait, God's humble form, and his humble acts of servitude to everyday people with various physical and emotional problems did not end there. The final act of humility came on Good Friday. Society and all of our sinful nature that goes with it, decided Jesus had to be crucified on a wooden cross – the most humiliating form of death in the Roman world at that time. This form of death was meant for the common criminals of society, and was as physically torturing as any death sentence could be. It was no accident the Romans liked this form of death so all people who could see who really was in charge and who had the power.

But God has a funny way of turning history on its head. Having been humiliated by humankind that ultimately ended with the death of his son Jesus on the cross, the miracle of the Easter resurrection happened three days later and Jesus was able to appear to his followers for another 40 days before God brought him home. The disciples could see for themselves at this point the glorious nature of Jesus' ministry here on earth and how he set an example for us all. There is no glory at being first in line, or having the largest house in the neighborhood, or having the latest model smart phone with unlimited texting and data access.

Instead, God's glory comes in our quiet everyday willingness to help our fellow human beings in their time of need. It is a quiet that no one else notices, but it is a comforting quiet and peace knowing God notices those we help. This is the Glory of God. After all, who is the best example of this in our lives?

So as I grow older and hopefully wiser, the somber tones of that Lenten chant will stay with me for the rest of my life. But the true meaning of these words continues to grow and develop on my life's faith journey.

David Gardner

The Pharisees and their scribes were complaining to his disciples, saying, 'Why do you eat and drink with tax-collectors and sinners?' Jesus answered, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick; I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners.'

Luke 5:28-32

Jesus says, "I have come to call not the righteous, but sinners." What a relief! Jesus comes for you and me just the way we are. We're the ones the Pharisees and scribes are complaining about as they see Jesus eating and drinking with you and me – every Sunday around the table of the Lord as we eat the bread and drink the wine – the body and blood of Jesus himself!

"Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick..." One sure way to witness the plight of the sick and suffering is to work in a hospital as I do as a chaplain. Just today I ran into a woman in tears in a hallway as she stood outside the room where her mother lay gravely ill. She came up to me – a total stranger whom she happened to know was a chaplain – and pleaded with me, "I don't know what to pray. I don't know what to pray." She asked me if she should pray for a miracle or would that be asking for too much. She asked me if she should pray for acceptance of what may be her mother's impending death or would that be giving up on her and God. She asked me why her prayers weren't working since she and her mother have been such faithful follower of Christ all their lives. Where was God now?

And then in the midst of her questions and tears we prayed. We lifted up to God her worry and concern and hurt and anger and pain and for a moment we were in the calm presence of God – a loving and comforting God – a God who loves both of us just the way we were. "I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners."

John W. Polk

Wednesday, April 16 | WEDNESDAY IN HOLY WEEK

*Jesus said to them, "The hour has come
for the Son of Man to be glorified."*

John 12:23

*Stay here and keep watch with me, the hour has come.
Stay here and keep watch with me. Watch and pray.*

One of the most haunting and beautiful moments of Holy Week for me will come tomorrow night, when the service concludes, the lights begin to dim, and we will sing those words to each other, telling each other that "the hour has come."

Sometimes as I kneel before the altar in those moments, grasping the Easter candle one last time before it is extinguished, I think about all the different "hours" in my own life—all the moments that I dreaded, the deadlines that loomed so close, the turning points from which there could be no going back.

Were those moments of "glory?" They didn't feel like it. They mostly gave me goosebumps and made me nauseous. Many times I wanted to just stop, or run away, or procrastinate—anything other than have to face the thing I knew I had to do.

Is that how Jesus felt too? He was human like me.

We say that when we look at Jesus' cross, we see God's glory. I think that glory is less about majesty and power and certainty and more about goosebumps. I think it's about putting everything on the line because you know that it's the only way you can keep your integrity. It's about believing that love really is stronger than death.

The hour has come for him, and for us. Over the next three days, we open ourselves to the deepest mysteries of our faith. The stories will change us. The music will transform us. The meal will heal us. The water will revive us. And we will see the Son of Man in all his glory.

Pr. Jon Niketh

Thursday, April 17

Maundy Thursday

The Last Supper

Our faith community gathers
for worship at 7:30 PM

We began Lent by confessing our sin and being marked with ashes. On this night we gather this night as Jesus' disciples to receive a **personal word of forgiveness** as from the Lord himself. We **wash each other's feet** as Jesus' taught, and celebrate the **meal** which he instituted on the night in which he was betrayed. Just as Jesus was stripped of his clothes as he was led to the cross, the night ends in darkness with the **stripping of the altar**, as all the beautiful adornments in the church are put away, preparing us for the starkness of Good Friday.



Friday, April 18

Good Friday

The Triumph of the Cross

Our faith community gathers
for worship at 7:30 PM

On the surface, it might seem like insanity to refer to the day that Jesus died as “good.” But while it is a solemn day, Good Friday is not the “funeral Jesus never had.” Christians see the cross not only as a symbol of death but as a sign of triumph—God’s victory over death. In that spirit, we pray the **Bidding Prayer**, an ancient prayer that commends everyone and everything we can think of to the loving arms of Jesus. The night concludes as a **simple, wooden cross** is brought into the sanctuary, and each worshiper is invited to come forward and “pay their respects,” so to speak: to bow before it, touch it, kneel or sit near it for a while, or **lay down some symbol of life’s burdens** at its feet.



Saturday, April 19

The Great Vigil of Easter

**Our faith community gathers for worship at 6:30 PM
together with our sisters and brothers from Malden**

This is the night! This is our Passover with Christ from darkness to light, from bondage to freedom, from death to life. Tonight is the heart of our celebration of the Three Days and the pinnacle of the church's year. The resurrection of Christ is proclaimed in word and sign, and we gather around a pillar of fire, hear ancient stories of our faith, welcome our new sisters Shyra and Melissa at the baptismal font, and share the food and drink of the promised land. Raised with Christ, we go forth into the world, aflame with the good news of the resurrection.



Sunday, April 20

The Resurrection of Our Lord

Easter Sunday

Our faith community gathers
for worship at 8:30 and 10:30 AM
Easter Breakfast and Egg Hunt between services

Death is never the end of the story for God's people. On this festival day we pull out all the stops to revel in the wonder that **Jesus Christ is risen!** We hear the astonishing story of the empty tomb, breathe in the fragrance of the Easter lilies, sing some of our favorite hymns, let the "alleluias" fly, and share in the "**feast of victory for our God**" in Holy Communion.





*Merciful God,
accompany us on our journey through these forty days.
Renew us in the gift of baptism,
that we may provide for those who are poor,
pray for those in need,
fast from self-indulgence,
and above all that we may find our treasure
in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ,
our Savior and Lord.*