

# Our Daily Walk with Jesus

## 2012 Lenten Devotional



Just a closer walk with Thee,  
Grant it, Jesus, is my plea,  
Daily walking close to Thee,  
Let it be, dear Lord, let it be.

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Cover: The detail of the stained glass window on the cover is located in Phillips Chapel in the Campbell Building. The window's theme, "Christ Blessing the Children," depicts the figure of Christ, surrounded by a group of children, giving them his blessing. Some of us walk with Jesus eagerly and others, like the child almost hidden behind Jesus, are more hesitant. The window was given in honor of Mr. and Mrs. William P. Lipscomb, in 1960, when it was relocated from Columbia Heights Christian Church. In this same period of time, National City Christian Church printed its first issue of "Thoughts for Lent," our very first Lenten devotional written by members of National City Christian Church.

## Welcome

### Our Daily Walk With Jesus

In this world when so many voices are competing for our attention – breaking news on cable TV and radio, cell phones ringing through the day, email filling up the inbox, Facebook friends and twitter feeds broadcasting most every move, thought, and photo of our lives – our souls thirst for quiet moments and connections that are meaningful and real.

Thousands of years before electronic tablets like iPads were grabbing the attention of the masses, the One Lord produced two tablets for the faithful multitudes of Israel. On it were instructions for meaningful connections with one another and how to live in a connected relationship with God. “Honor the Sabbath, keep it holy” was one of the instructions. In less than 140 characters, this ancient wisdom set forth the way to a closer walk with God...and one another. Once a week, you and I need to set aside some time for God and community worship. Without such a commitment, the clamoring voices competing for our attention can take up all our time and energy and leave us wandering without aim or purpose.

During the season of Lent, millions of faithful persons from around the world seek a daily walk with Jesus. In this time, we not only dedicate our Sundays to the Lord, but we also seek a daily walk in Christ. I hope that you will set aside some time each day for the next 40 days for such a walk. If necessary, put it on your calendar. Keep your divine appointment. Read the daily scriptures. Ask God to direct your walk that day. To increase your spiritual growth, find a group of Christians to gather with weekly and talk about your spiritual journey in that week. And above all, do not neglect your weekly community worship.

These daily Lenten devotions were prepared by members and friends of National City Christian Church, just for that purpose. We are so grateful to Ms. Diana Morse who has collected and edited these meditations for our daily walk.

Come, let us begin our journey together as we enter into the next 40 days and seek a daily walk with Jesus.

Stephen W. Gentle  
Senior Pastor  
National City Christian Church

**First Week in Lent**  
**Scripture: Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21**

**Ash Wednesday, February 22**

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

During the more challenging classes of high school, I sorted my peers into different camps. Some students were just getting by, either because they didn't care or because they had been pushed to their limits. Then there were my classmates who excelled. They knew all the answers and scored well on tests. Some flaunted their success by eagerly raising their hands in class or prominently placing their graded test where everyone would notice. Others within this group enjoyed their accomplishments quietly and modestly. I could never tell if this was due to embarrassment or self-confidence.

These verses from Matthew always stir this memory. Jesus makes clear that the intentions behind our actions matter. If we practice our faith to get the attention of others we've entirely missed the point. Turning our lives over to God is fundamentally an act of humility. It is an acknowledgment that our own efforts are insufficient and our salvation depends on God's graciousness. Jesus' admonition against ostentatious displays of religious belief cautions us that pride is not a virtue within God's economy.

Ash Wednesday seems like an ironic time to be reflecting on these passages, given the number of Christians running around with ashes on their foreheads. Again, the question is one of purpose. If we wear the ashes so others will know of our piety then we've become the hypocrites Jesus warned us about. If the ashes remind us of our sinfulness and ultimate dependence on God, then the message has sunk in.

**Prayer: Holy God, humility is a hard, but important, lesson to learn. Allow me to grow in the awareness of my own sinfulness. Reduce my eagerness to boast of what I think I've achieved on my own. Help me to trust and rely with increasing confidence in your provision for me as an individual and for all of us as your Church. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray.**

*Beau Underwood*

**Thursday, February 23**

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, is a drastic paradigm shift from the Old Testament. It starts by telling us the story of our Savior's birth and then how He lived. The most profound message is the one most often missed: how we as Christians should be responding to God.

I'm a methodical person. I like lists, order, and clear expectations. In today's society, most of us are busily living our lives. Sometimes that means we're living on autopilot and that is not what God wants when it comes to our relationship with Him. Christ taught us to openly communicate with God so that He is part of our everyday lives. Anyone can ritualistically repeat a prayer or do required mitzvahs. God is interested in our sincerity, vulnerability, and openness. We follow Christ in response to having Him within. That comes from our daily relationship with Him, which means an open dialogue.

Jesus was also called Immanuel, which means "God is within us." The Holy Spirit exists in each one of God's precious children. He loves us that much! When we're feeling far from Him, it's not He who moved because He is still there.

God makes many promises in Matthew. He promises us that He will provide for our needs. He promises that with faith only as big as a “mustard seed,” nothing will be impossible. We need to keep our promise, which is to make a daily commitment to becoming more like His Son.

Praise the Fisher of Men!

**Prayer: Father, thank you for providing everything we need. Please give us strength when we’re struggling by gently reminding us of your ever presence. Although we can never earn your grace, it is the most amazing gift of all. Please help us become more like your Son in our endeavor to give you glory.**

*Jessica Max*

### **Friday, February 24**

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

Mathew 6:5 admonishes us to pray in private, and my personal prayers are in private. Recognition as an elder brings my prayer life into the public arena, and is welcomed.

Several years ago, I stopped by my wife’s bowling league, dressed in a suit and tie. One of the bowlers said “Here is Pastor Kruse,” and I replied “No, this is Elder Kruse.” Shortly, the president of the league approached me with a request. “Would I give the prayer at the end-of-season banquet? Yes, of course I would. At that banquet, the president of Shirley’s other league approached me with the same request.

We should neither do our private prayers in public, nor avoid public prayer, for the public prayer brings recognition to our church and God. In both bowling groups, we have been asked for more information about National City Christian Church. Although

they live too far away to be likely to attend, they may have friends who are closer.

The assumptions and expectations of biblical times were quite different than now. The man of the house was the master, and his decisions were followed by the family, though with some notable exceptions. Today, successful families are teams that share in the decisions that are important. Our family carefully joins in decisions such as gifts to our church, weighing both the past contributions to, and the present needs of, our church. The right hand and left hand are in agreement on such decisions, but outside our family, we do remain mostly silent on our charitable giving.

**Prayer: Oh Lord, the choices are so broad before us. Guide us that we will not be invisible Christians, nor be Christians in name only. Keep us aware of the opportunities to be a positive force in the communities we live and work in. Inspire us as well to choose appropriately the support that we share with the Church, quietly yet generously. Help us to follow the guidance of Jesus in our lives today. We make this prayer in Jesus’ name.**

*Norman Kruse*

### **Saturday, February 25**

*Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

*“when you give to the needy, do not let your right hand know what your left hand is doing...” Matthew 6:3*

Too many times our “need” for recognition causes us to stumble.

However, my mind drifts back to several memories I have of deaconesses going beyond the call of duty. One time a group went to help clean the house of one of our shut-ins. She had cancer and a “zillion” cats. The house reeked of cats. There was even one dead cat on the basement floor that needed to be disposed of. Another time,

another deaconess would help a shut-in with her bath by almost climbing in the tub with her. When it was our turn to serve the meal and spend the evening with the women at the homeless shelter on N Street on Christmas Eve, an older deaconess and her husband volunteered so that the younger ones could be home with their families.

These were just a few examples that I have observed in which no recognition was asked for or given. Our acts of kindness should not be merit badges. Their reward came from God: "For where your treasure is, your heart will be there also." Matthew 6:21

**Prayer: O Lord, give us humble hearts and a desire to serve you through our acts of kindness.**

*Kathleen Swihart*

### **Sunday, February 26**

*If You Will Trust in God to Guide You*  
Chalice Hymnal No. 565

On this first Sunday in Lent, Georg Neumark's tune for "If You Will Trust in God to Guide You" will be my prayer companion for the day. I will sing it in worship. The haunting minor tones will have a life of their own, returning to me throughout the day.

On this first Sunday in Lent, Georg Neumark's words will come as a gift to give words to my prayer throughout the day. "God will give strength what-e'er betide you."... "Christ, who took for you a cross, will bring you safe through every loss."... "God never will forsake in need the soul that trusts in God indeed."

On this first Sunday in Lent, I will remember the story of Georg Neumark writing this hymn. In 1641, he was on the way to the university in Konigsburg when he lost all of his possessions except his prayer book and a few coins to robbers. Also he had difficulty finding work. As he

reflected on this dark time he turned to Psalm 55:22-23 for consolation and produced this masterpiece of a Lenten hymn to accompany us on our days of dark journey.

This day my soul will kneel beside that of Georg Neumark and join him in praying, "If You Will Trust in God to Guide You."

*Peter M. Morgan*

## **Second Week of Lent**

### **Scripture: Mark 1:9-15**

### **Monday, February 27**

*Mark 1:9-15*

Palm Sunday, 2006, was a very special day in my life. It was the day that I received baptism and rededicated my life to God.

I was excited and nervous at the same time. I remembered waiting in the chapel and when the moment came and I walked down the steps into the water. Thanks goodness it was warm. There was Dr. Gentle, who asked me "Do I reaffirm Christ and rededicate my life to God?" After saying "Yes," I was submerged in the water. I'm a big guy, so I had to stoop down and lean back to help out. I opened my eyes to see what was happening and there was water around me.

As I came back from the water, I felt a warm and wonderful feeling inside of me. I looked up and saw on the wall above the baptism pool, the dove descending right above the doorway back into the chapel, a reminder that the spirit of God was with you. Overwhelmed by this feeling, back in the chapel, I couldn't help but to cry and was embraced by Dr. Gentle, who prayed, thanking God for the spirit that came down and now is with me.

I'm still moved with the same feeling that I had that day. When I read this scripture that tells the story of Christ's baptism, and reading about how the spirit descended on

him and remembering my baptism and how I felt that day, that same warm and wonderful spirit that filled my heart is with me today.

**Prayer: We remember your baptism, and we remember our baptism. Thank you for this warm and wonderful spirit that fills our hearts and encourage us to love you and to love one another, as you commanded us to do.**

*Nick Bullock*

## **Tuesday, February 28**

*"You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased." Mark 1:11*

It took me a long time to figure out that criticism never motivates anyone to change. Making people feel loved and cared about produces a much better result for all concerned. It is what motivates people to move on to greatness in fulfilling their life's purpose.

When the Spirit descended on Jesus like a dove and he heard a voice from heaven telling him how beloved he was, it strengthened him for the 40-day wilderness experience that would soon follow. It fully equipped him for anything and everything that would come along in his brief time on earth.

My parents are both gone now, but I was very blessed to be affirmed often when they would say, "We never worry about you, Paul. We know that you're happy where you live and in your work and have a lot of good friends." This to me was very similar to the blessing that Jacob and Esau fought over or even Cain and Abel. I never felt that I had to compete with my four brothers for my parents' blessing. There was and is always enough love to go around. When we know that God has an unlimited supply of love, mercy, and grace, there is nothing that can

hold us back from living a magnificently victorious life.

Maybe today you can give a blessing to someone as God's instrument so that they can hear what Jesus heard, "You are my son or daughter, my beloved one. I am well pleased with you."

**Prayer: Dear God, may we realize today how very accessible you really are and how limitless is your daily supply for all of our needs.**

*Paul Heffron*

## **Wednesday, February 29**

*Mark 1:9-11*

When my youngest son was in second grade, he had to write sentences using his weekly vocabulary words. He would take his time writing the "just right" sentence for each word. He is now a junior in high school and a gifted writer and still looks for that "just right" word in each assignment.

The writer of the Gospel of Mark also uses those "just right" words that will get us thinking a bit. In these brief verses, the writer's words encompass the life of Jesus, from birth to death. How can this be, since there is no birth story in Mark? Well, let's imagine the scene of Jesus' baptism as he "comes up out of the water" as a birth story. That was a short birth story! (Mark is the shortest gospel after all.) Here the writer uses a "just right" image to convey a truth. We are born again in our baptism. We encounter God and are made new.

The gospel writer jumps from the shortest birth story ever to a brief foreshadowing of Jesus' death. As Jesus comes up from the birth waters, he sees the "heavens torn apart." This "just right" image ties us to the death of Jesus, when the temple curtain was "torn in two." (Mark 15:38) The writer of this Gospel wants us to think that past,

present and future, new life, redemption, love all exist in this “just right” word, Jesus.

**Prayer: God, help me to encounter you during this season of Lent. Help me to find the “just right” words or deeds so that my sinful self may die and that I may be born anew in Christ’s love.**

*Miriam Gentle*

### **Thursday, March 1**

*Mark 1:9-11*

About that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee, and John baptized him in the Jordan River. As soon as Jesus came out of the water, he saw the sky open and the Holy Spirit coming down to him like a dove. A voice from heaven said “You are my own dear Son, and I am pleased with you.”

From a strictly rational viewpoint, the baptism of Jesus makes no sense. He had no sins to be forgiven. Even John the Baptist was puzzled, objecting (see Matthew 3:14) “I ought to be baptized by you.” Baptism, like some other important aspects of the Christian life, is a necessary mystery that must be accepted by faith. The importance of Jesus’ baptism is attested by the participation of three persons of the Trinity in the baptism. Jesus the son was baptized, the Father spoke of his pleasure with the Son, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove. This is an example for all Christians to follow, to repent and be baptized as Peter advised in Acts 2:38.

**Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, guide us to observe all that Jesus commanded, especially those things we do not understand. Give us faith to accept your necessary mysteries: repentance, baptism, the Eucharist, the sacrificial death of your Son, and others by the power and wisdom of your Holy Spirit. In Christ’s name we pray.**

*Rick Bahr*

### **Friday, March 2**

*Mark 1:9-15*

Jesus' time in the wilderness is something I have spent time thinking about over the course of my adult life. When I've felt isolated or alone, I wondered how it must have been for Jesus to be, by himself, struggling with the devil. But if I have read Mark correctly, my idea of Jesus' time in the wilderness isn't correct. Mark tells us he was not alone after all. I am particularly moved by this translation of Mark 1:13 from Eugene Peterson's *The Message*: “Wild animals were his companions, and angels took care of him.”

Perhaps Jesus didn't anticipate that angels would appear or that the animals would keep him company. Still, at this most crucial time in his life, he found comfort and he accepted help when it was given. This would not be the only time that Jesus would accept help. We also see him asking for help from his disciples, from his friends, even from those whom he has never met as his ministry progresses.

Why then is it so hard for me to accept help and so especially hard to ask for it? Today I politely rebuffed the slight, tattooed man who offered his help with my bag. I refused his help and regretted it. A sleeping toddler in my arms and one bag too many should have convinced me otherwise. I was surprised by his offer. And maybe I overlooked the angel right in front of me.

**Prayer: God, help me to accept not only the spiritual and heavenly help you provide daily, but also the earthly and practical support that I need as well. Grant me the humility and the wisdom to say yes to the angels among us.**

*Alyssa May*

### **Saturday, March 3**

*Mark 1:9-15*

Centuries before Jesus' story in Mark, earliest of the Gospels, Isaiah predicted it. As Mark begins, Jesus is baptized by his cousin, John the Baptist, famous for baptizing where the Jordan River flows out of the Sea of Galilee, some 65 miles from Jerusalem.

As Jesus came out of the water, the heavens opened, "the spirit descended like a dove," and a voice came from heaven saying, "you are my beloved son in whom I am well pleased..." The spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness of wild beasts for 40 days where he was tempted by Satan and waited on by angels.

The ministry of Jesus began just after the wilderness experience. He proclaimed the good news, saying "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." Thus, the beginning of what became Christianity.

Nowadays, it must be hard to imagine that time. Physical conditions were awful and the raw culture, mixed with the incredibly cruel Roman government, caused people to long for positive change, such that the cruel Romans felt they had to act. It led to the Easter experience.

Generally, that point of departure of Jesus from a primitive culture has brought us to a state where we have a more just society of love, grace, and peace. Why should we not joyfully celebrate Easter? We would do well to more deeply promote the society that began at the headwaters of the Jordan River centuries ago.

**Prayer: God, I pray that I and all of us may live the life of love, grace, and peace and be a part of imparting this Christianity to all mankind.**

*Douglas Cook*

### **Sunday, March 4**

*Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days*  
Chalice Hymnal No.180

Most hymns have a repeated melody, making them singable for everyone. We find ourselves humming a hymn long after we have sung it with the congregation. The sacred text reinforces the music, giving a distinct meaning to the message.

The hymn, "Lord Who Throughout These Forty Days" sets the mood for our Lenten season. It conveys a spiritual journey covering 40 days from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday.

As written in the Gospels, Jesus spent 40 days in the desert reflecting, fasting, and enduring temptation by Satan. Singing this sacred hymn gives us one way to meditate, reflect, and pray, keeping God first in our lives:

Lord, who throughout these forty days  
for us did fast and pray,  
Teach us with you to mourn our sins  
and close by you to stay.

As you with Satan did contend,  
and did the victory win,  
O give us strength in you to fight,  
in you to conquer sin.

Abide with us, that through this life  
of doubts and hope and pain,  
An Easter of unending joy  
we may at last attain!"

**Prayer: Dear Father, we open our hearts to you and we trust your lessons to guide us. Be with us as we read, study, and grow throughout this Lenten season.**

*Barbara Collins*

**Third Week of Lent**  
**Scripture: Mark 8:31-38**

**Monday, March 5**

*Mark 8:31-38*

Jesus' teaching in Mark 8:31-38 was a hard teaching for his disciples to accept and it is a hard teaching for us to accept. In Mark 8:27-30, Jesus had just revealed himself as the Messiah. Now he was telling his disciples that he must suffer, die, and be resurrected. A definition of a Messiah as suffering servant was not common to most people at that time. Has anyone ever attempted to teach you a lesson that you found extremely difficult to comprehend the first time it was presented? Did you give up?

The disciples found it difficult to comprehend the lesson that Jesus was teaching. Peter even rebuked Jesus. But Jesus didn't stop teaching. He told his followers that they too would have to deny themselves and take up his cross and follow him.

I am so glad that those first disciples did not stop walking with or talking to Jesus even though they did not understand all of his lessons the first time. They didn't give up. They eventually came to understand what it meant to take up his cross – to put God first and seek to build God's kingdom. They didn't have to do it, but they chose to do it. We don't have to do it, but we choose to do it.

**Prayer: On our walk with Jesus, O God, bless us to never become discouraged or give up, even when we don't understand the lesson Jesus is trying to teach us.**

*Beverly J. Goines*

**Tuesday, March 6**

*He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things...that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. Mark 8:31-32*

When the problems of daily life seem to overwhelm us, we often wonder why these things occur. Job loss, illness, and other calamities affect all of us at some time. Mistakenly, we may think that by living a Christian life, we should be insulated from suffering and hardships faced by others. However, Mark 8:32, 33 teach that Christian life is not a roadway paved with ease and wealth. Often it requires deep sacrifice, deprivation, and even persecution.

That is precisely the lesson that Jesus sought to teach Peter and the other disciples when he informed them of his impending death and later resurrection. Peter understood all of the good and glory that came with Christ, but he did not understand the need for suffering and persecution. Jesus said, "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." It is always God's plan that should be foremost in our hearts and minds, not that of man. Remember only God could bring good out of extreme evil, as with the resurrection that followed the crucifixion.

When the future looks bleak, Jesus teaches us that we must not lose faith. Many people spend all of their energy seeking pleasure and wealth in this life. The reality is that while such satisfaction is attractive, it only lasts a little while. Later these victories become hollow and empty. For, "what good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"

Jesus suffered greatly so that we could have eternal life. We need only relinquish ourselves to him and we will know what it

means to live abundantly now and to have eternal life later.

**Prayer: Dear God, please help us to willingly submit to your will so that we may know the power of your love and joy of eternal life with you. Even when we are being persecuted, help us to remember that through your love the resurrection followed the crucifixion.**

*Joyce Bailey-Wilson*

### **Wednesday, March 7**

*"...For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." Mark 8:33*

Mark's gospel concisely shows how Peter, above all others, recognizes Jesus as the Messiah. But this moment quickly turns sour by the exchange that follows. We can almost hear the adulation in Peter's voice as he makes this pronouncement and how it quickly dissolves into a tone of disbelief when Jesus tells him of the suffering that the Messiah must endure.

Aren't we a lot like Peter? We are quick to call for God's presence in our lives, but slow to shed our preconceived ideas of who God is and how God should act. We want God to share our values, to champion our causes, and right the wrongs of the world as we see them.

Our difficulty comes when we realize that God's will causes us to constantly examine our faith and how we put it into practice. God's will required the Messiah to come to earth to suffer and not to conquer; and it puts us in situations that we may not understand. When we recite the Lord's Prayer, we ask for God's kingdom to come and God's will to be done. In asking, we also must accept that these may be contrary to our human desires.

**Prayer: Dear God, as we pray for your kingdom to come and your will to be done, give us the wisdom to accept your ways over our own desires.**

*David McKinney*

### **Thursday, March 8**

*Mark 8:31-38*

I was a teenager when my mother told me, "Don't live your life for yourself; the purpose of your life is to serve."

My mother, Joy Dodson, was a Disciple of Christ missionary to the Congo from 1953-1964 (along with my father). My mother never quoted me these words of Jesus, but obviously she lived by them. And most importantly, she taught me their essence: don't live for yourself; rather serve God. She also taught me to live by Jesus' words as well as by his example.

Christ did not suffer meaninglessly; his suffering was symbolically redemptive in many ways. Jesus chose to serve God no matter how much suffering was entailed, because he put the well-being of others first.

Peter, however, was accustomed to what most human cultures teach us: to put ourselves first and to win against our enemies to prove how great we are. Peter therefore could not understand why it was not more glorious for Christ to succeed by human standards. Peter could not yet understand that it takes greater strength of character to suffer and to die in order to serve others, than it does to win any sort of political or economic victory. Peter could not understand that it takes greater strength of character to put others first, than it does to live for ourselves.

As we proceed on our Lenten journeys, let us thank God for Christ, who came to serve, even when suffering and dying, even for us, and even through us.

**Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you for showing us grace, that grace which knows no bounds, that grace which serves even when it hurts, that grace which suffers even for us, that grace which puts others first even when faced with human needs. Thank you, God, that Jesus Christ embodied that grace for us. Now strengthen us to live that grace each day in your world, for your people. In Christ's name we pray.**

*Carol Richardson*

**Friday, March 9**

*Mark 8:31-38*

What is good for the soul? How do we nourish and grow our soul? It is through our relationships with others that we provide a testimony of our love for God, thereby nourishing and feeding the soul.

This is the crux of Jesus' teaching the crowd after telling Peter that he is thinking of human concerns and not godly concerns. Jesus went on to explain that there must be a concern for mankind that is manifested in self-sacrifice.

When we focus on others and not ourselves, we demonstrate the same selfless intentions that Jesus taught. Jesus taught us the importance of studying and learning his word. Using this knowledge, we can put his teachings into action so that others may learn the power of his teachings and grow his kingdom.

Jesus teaches that his followers must persevere with their faith, despite what is happening to them as well as all around them. True believers quickly learn that it is not easy to stay on the path that Jesus put before them, but they must learn not to their own understanding but to God's.

Lastly Jesus spoke that we must uplift our fellowman and others, thereby glorifying his kingdom. When we uplift others we nourish

our soul through our interactions with those in need. Jesus laid the foundation for our soul to be nourished and grow through the principles of love of mankind, studying his teachings, persevering through the storms of life, and uplifting others.

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of your Son, Jesus Christ, who you sent to teach us how to nourish and grow our soul so that we might live a fruitful life while working to magnify your earthly world in preparation for seeing you in your Kingdom on that judgment day.**

*Cecil Talbott*

**Saturday, March 10**

*"What good would it do to get everything you want and lose you, the real you? What could you ever trade your soul for?" Mark 8:36, The Message*

A popular bumper sticker read, "He who has the most toys wins." This is similar to today's reading: "Just what value would you (give) to all the world's things, [especially] in exchange for your soul?"

The secularist might argue that at least for the years spent in this world you could enjoy all its toys.

Consider: occupying the best suites on luxury liners the world over with a fleet of private jets at your disposal. Or living in mansions on several continents, never lacking companionship, as ostentatious wealth historically attracts the multitudes – from court counselors to court jesters.

But what would you have at the end in having entered this Faustian exchange – the whole world for your soul?

Jesus affirmatively suggests that such a tradeoff – gaining the whole world in exchange for your soul – would not be a win, but a huge loss. The toys and yes, even the vulgarities of life are tempting but if

achieved at the expense of turning from Christ and His teachings, such an exchange will prove little more than a mirage when confronted by the Master in the last days, when He returns in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. Maybe we should consider ourselves forewarned.

**Prayer: Lord, help us to see beyond the temptations of the moment, finding our footing on solid ground as we sort out the unimportant temporal from that which will last forever as we take our places in that house not built with hands, eternal in the heavens.**

*Bill and Nett Brown*

### **Sunday, March 11**

*Just a Closer Walk with Thee*  
Chalice Hymnal No. 557

I remember growing up in the Baptist faith, singing many hymns without accompaniment, “lined out” by a deacon, with no hymnals or music copies. The words became a part of us as we sang them repeatedly from hearing them sung.

Periodically when a few members attended the Baptist conventions, they brought back song sheets of the outstanding songs sung at the conventions. This is how we first received the music for “Precious Lord,” then later another song now listed as a hymn: “Just a Closer Walk With Thee.” It was first heard from soloists, small groups, even quartets, which were popular at some churches’ evening services. Its words were infectious and the tune quite easily hummed and sung. Many times the melody was accompanied by a rhythmic, repetitive pattern of the words: “Just a closer walk with thee...” sung throughout in harmony with the melody sung by a good soloist!

In the early days of singing this hymn, the “refrain” was sung as the first stanza. This is a simple song that touches one’s heart. It expresses the desire of us all as it makes our

pleas, then states the response that we desire. As we sing the hymn we generate a childlike humility before a mighty God, and we feel his holy presence. We sing a prayer that He will answer!

If we strive to walk through “paths of righteousness,” we should have a feeling of wanting to do more and more daily towards bringing forth His kingdom on earth. This involves the art of “moving”: we must move our hearts, minds, hands, and feet towards good will for all men.

As we look at our calendars of accomplishments, we should see that we have not missed a day of “walking” with our savior! And, as the hymn says: “daily walking close to thee” – (and even before the Beatles) “Let it be!”

**Prayer: Dear Lord, in our weakness, show us your love and strength, as we strive to do your will.**

*Dorothy Davis*

## **Fourth Week of Lent** **Scripture: John 2:13-22**

### **Monday, March 12**

*John 2:13-22*

Remember the parlor game of “what is the bravest thing you’ve ever done?” The most profound answers sometimes are not what one might expect, but occasionally surprising stories of stopping a wrong or standing for a right.

In ordering the money changers and sellers out of the temple, Jesus stood up to what he saw as wrongful and inappropriate. Those services and sales were useful functions to people visiting the temple, and in fact pilgrims needed both money and offerings to enter, but Jesus answered that the temple was not a rightful place for merchandise and business transactions and the squabbling that had enveloped it, and he called it out. It was

at once an act of courage and moral affirmation.

In a season of reflection, the story provides a basis not only for examination of behavior and principles, but also an opportunity to look within our personal temples. Is there something there that doesn't belong? Is it crowding out other qualities? What do we need to drive out? Bitterness? Anger? Meanness? Hurt? Greed? What can we create room for? Forgiveness? Tolerance? Love? Kindness? Understanding?

What's in your temple? Does it need a house cleaning?

**Prayer: Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Psalm 51:10**

*John Sparkman*

## **Tuesday, March 13**

*The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." John 2:18-19, NIV*

As I sit in the pew on Sunday, I can see some of the damage from our recent earthquake. This passage reminds us, however, that damage to the church does not undermine the foundations of our faith, because, in the words of the hymn, "the church's one foundation is Jesus Christ our Lord."

Jesus tells those who challenged him that he will raise up the temple in three days if it is destroyed. They cannot understand this because they know that the temple took many years and many workers to build. But Jesus is foreshadowing Easter and telling them that he is the foundation of the faith.

Jesus reminds us that the monuments we build to God are not the foundation of our faith. Of course, it is wonderful to worship in a beautiful building that expresses our

love and awe of God. I am thankful every Sunday to worship in this beautiful sanctuary, with wonderful music. But that glory carries with it the danger that we will forget that the church is not the Church, that bricks and mortar are not the foundation on which our faith rests, and that, if the temple is destroyed, God will still be with us. And that is comforting because the brick and mortar church can indeed be destroyed, but Easter teaches us that God's love is indestructible.

**Prayer: Dear God, we give thanks for the church that has been built for us by those who came before us. Help us to remain mindful that You do not reside only in the church but go with us as we go out the church doors to live Your word in the world.**

*Sara Ann Ketchum*

## **Wednesday, March 14**

*The Passover of the Jews was near. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple... John 2:13-15*

Are you not surprised – even shocked – by the serious intensity with which Jesus acted and spoke that day at the temple?

What was going on? Was it not more acceptable to offer Hebrew tokens free of idolatrous images than Roman coins? And surely blemish-free animals and doves had to be more acceptable than anything brought over a long distance that was no longer perfect at time of sacrifice.

Why did Jesus upset the money changers' tables? No evidence of corruption or graft was apparent, and they, like the animal merchants, were providing a service for God.

Jesus must have felt strongly that the temple area was no place for doing such business. Noisy commerce had usurped solemn dignity, holy adoration, the murmur of prayer and petition. How dare He? Well, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” “Impossible,” the Jews retorted. But thus began Jesus’ ministry, foreshadowing his crucifixion, resurrection, and Messianic fulfillment.

What about “temple” angers and provokes me? And how do I respond? Has righteous indignation overcome me? How can I channel my anger and provocation into positive and productive outcomes for myself and for God?

**Prayer: Gracious God, help me attain the poise and dignity which will assure my doing and saying things pleasing in your sight.**

*David Walker*

#### **Thursday, March 15**

*Jesus is angered by the money changers in the temple. He teaches how people should worship in spirit and in truth. John 2:13-22*

So often we think of Jesus as the Prince of Peace, the one who urges us to turn the other cheek, the one who is the Lamb of God.

But this is an instance where Jesus gets mad. More than that actually – it’s premeditated. He actually takes some arts and crafts time to make a whip so he can drive the money changers from the temple. He gets loud, he turns over tables.

It’s worth noting, of course, that the scripture doesn’t mention Jesus striking anyone or hurting anybody, just that he makes a ruckus and the money changers get the heck out of there. I don’t blame them. If Jesus came at me with a whip yelling “Get out!” and turned over my table, I’d run too.

What do I take from this? For me, it’s a reminder that sometimes it’s ok to get loud, to mess things up, to break some things, to get in somebody’s face, to get mad. That is, when the cause is important.

How do we know when the cause is important enough to get mad? In this story Jesus gives us a clue. Perhaps it has something to do with being willing to sacrifice the earthly material in order to save the sacred spiritual.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, let me be fearless, let me get loud, let me get mad. When I do, let it not be for revenge or malice but to empower the meek and be a force of love. When I am mad, let the power of my anger be an instrument to do your good will on Earth.**

*Eric Woodard*

#### **Friday, March 16**

*John 2:13-16*

As the Feast of the Passover approached, Jesus goes to the temple in Jerusalem, the most important place in all of Israel. He is on a mission. He encounters the men in the courtyard who are selling animals for ritualistic sacrifice and the money changers who traded the coins that the people brought for the currency that was acceptable in the temple. Jesus becomes very hostile to the people doing their business (and who are making a significant profit) and whips them and overturns their tables.

While it is not stated in the scriptures, I believe that the police were called in to deal with this event. The next day’s Jerusalem Post must have had a headline that said “Troublemaker at the Temple Arrested.”

Today, our most important place in the United States, our temple, is Wall Street. There we find the thing we worship – money. And we have a large group of money changers – hedge funds, derivatives

dealers, and other financial agents who do things that we do not understand. But they have certain properties that are quite similar to the people outside the temple in Jerusalem. They are making large amounts of money and contributing nothing to the physical output of the economy. The people who are participating in Occupy Wall Street (and Occupy DC and the other Occupy groups) are doing just as Jesus did in the temple. The New York Times headline of today reads “Troublemakers at the Wall Street Temple Arrested.”

**Prayer: God: keep us ever mindful that profits and greed are not consistent with your will and that we are directed to help the poor and homeless.**

*Steve Schacht*

### **Saturday, March 17**

*John 2:13-22*

The story of Easter is one of redemption. God comes to earth, walks among creation, and when earthly life is over, the body is redeemed, risen anew. In that act, we too are redeemed.

How does that work, exactly? Think of the time you most often hear the word “redeem.” Right now you think of the churchy bit of theological jargon, but you hear the word all the time. From recycled bottles to arcade tokens, bits of stuff are redeemed. They are turned over, and in return, something is received.

The story of Jesus and the money changers is about redemption in a certain way. The merchants of the temple traded currency, so that travelers could make their monetary offerings, and sold sacrificial animals and other offerings, sort of like the gift shops selling incense in cathedrals. They redeemed secular goods for sacred. The problem, though, was that it was not a one-to-one trade. They capitalized on their market monopoly to bilk worshippers of their

money as they performed spiritual rites. The redemption they offered was partial at best, and Jesus was affronted, enraged, by their commerce. He demanded of them full redemption.

Jesus’ message, though, was not just for the money changers. To be redeemed, we too must turn ourselves over. It is awfully easy to put our spiritual lives at the bottom of our priority lists when things get busy, set aside like so many bags of crushed soda cans and empty beer bottles till we have a chance to deal with it. We are saved by grace; there is no question. But our day-to-day lives, our minutes and decisions, must be given to God if we expect anything to be done with them. Just like those bottles sitting on your porch, you cannot, as a co-creator with God, be made into something new without surrendering the old. You must do the work to be reconciled to your enemy, to yourself, to your world. You must turn yourself over to be redeemed. In the words of one of my favorite theologians, God loves you exactly as you are and too much to let you stay that way.

**Prayer: God of Creation, be the still small voice of encouragement, reminding me to turn over what I would have you redeem. When I forget, startle me into action with the insistence of one who would cleanse the temple and raise it again. Teach me your ways, O God, and walk with me on that path as I stumble.**

*Katie Blaisdell*

### **Sunday, March 18**

*Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended*  
Chalice Hymnal No. 210

In Lent we have the courage to face the suffering in our lives. Lent is a dark journey which deals with the hard realities and does not cover them over with pasted-on smiles, shrugs, and saying too easily, “I’m OK.”

In Lent we sing our way through the darkness of the shadow of death. We sing our way toward Easter.

Johann Heerman was a pastor in Germany who knew personally the tragedy of the Thirty Years' War. He lost his home and property. He nearly lost his life. People around him were dying from the war, famine, and plague. Johann and the people around him cried out in darkness, "Why, why?" They did not deserve their suffering.

Johann gazed at Jesus, the one who bore undeserved suffering. He poured out his heart in the hymn "Ah, Holy Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended." As he contemplated the life of Christ he asked, "Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?" Then confessed, "Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee."

Johann Heerman's hymn turns us in our journeys of sorrow to gaze not only on our own trials but on the sorrow of Jesus. "I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee, think on thy pity and thy love unswerving, not my deserving."

*Peter M. Morgan*

### **Fifth Week of Lent Scripture: John 3:14-21**

#### **Monday, March 19**

*God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17*

What if we let the light in?

We all know someone who we think is tremendously talented, yet sadly he/she does not see it. Why is it we do not blossom to our full potential? Could it be that we are terrified that, when people know who we "really are," they are not going to love us? Could it be that we spend too much energy hiding our shame or controlling our rage?

Could it be that we can't grow because our defenses are so high we can't hear a compliment nor a constructive critique? Could it be that we live feeling like we're impostors, feeling unloved, and looking intensely at what we are missing, instead of what we have?

What would happen if we allow this outrageous notion that Jesus came to this world not to condemn us but to actually save us to saturate our being? What if we surrender to God's love? What if we let God shine the big lights into the dark crevices of our life? What if in the light of God we can free all that creativity we're holding hostage inside us. What if in the light of God we evict our sin and make room for new beginnings?

If you've got it all together, please disregard. But if you try it and start becoming who God has made you to be, call me!

*Noemi Mena*

#### **Tuesday, March 20**

*God did not send the son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. John 3:17*

I was first introduced to this scripture in Sunday school, but did I really grasp the true meaning of the scripture – no. Today, my life has taken on deeper spiritual meaning because of the amazing gift of love that God gave the world. He gave the gift of his only son so that we may have eternal life. To think he would give the ultimate gift – the life of his son. To think our lives meant so much to him.

To consider such amazement is far beyond my comprehension. But, I do know that as a believer in Christ, I must return such an amazing gift by exhibiting the love of God in all I do. I must demonstrate not only my faith in God, but my actions must

demonstrate my trust and belief in him. My daily walk with God must illustrate my commitment to him.

God loves us so much that he gave his son's life for us. This gift is extended to the whole world – if we choose to accept the gift.

**Prayer: I thank you for the gift of your son – Jesus Christ. May my daily walk be seen as walking in the light with Christ.**

*Loretta Tate*

### **Wednesday, March 21**

*John 3:14-21*

When the Denver Broncos' devoutly Christian NFL rookie quarterback Tim Tebow led the team to a playoff berth this season, he wore "John 3:16" under his eyes. When the Broncos upset the Steelers in the AFC wildcard game, Tebow threw for exactly 316 yards. The truth shall come to the light!

This is such a powerful Bible passage, including "John 3:16," referenced for decades by scores of athletes, entertainers, politicians, and scholars, to claim the glory and magnificence of God giving us his only son Jesus so that we may have eternal life. And yet looking deeper into this passage I see that Jesus was stern and quite harsh in his conviction that there is only one way for eternal life.

But I believe what is presented in this passage is a choice – to live in the truth and the light or remain in the darkness of the world. Is it just enough to be baptized of the spirit or do our actions, words, and deeds decide our commitment to our salvation? I sometimes find it hard to "just believe" or to "let go and let God," to ensure me that everything is going to be all right. But when I have complete faith and belief in "John 3:16," I know there is nothing that can stand in my way.

**Prayer: Dear Lord – you are so good and we are grateful for the power of the Holy Spirit to continue to work in us and through us so that we can do the best we can. Guide us and love us so that we too may be lifted up and saved.**

*Kelly Swanson*

### **Thursday, March 22**

*John 3:14-21*

When I was a child we had to memorize several Bible verses in order to earn our Bibles in the third grade. John 3:16 was one of those verses. With the faith of a child I believed that Jesus was the Son of God and I knew that my belief would grant me eternal life. In third grade that meant to me that I would see my beloved Grandpa Brown in heaven one day.

Now to read the verse in context – and to try to speak about its meaning in the context of today's challenges – provides a different opportunity. The assurance that God did not send his Son to condemn the world but to save the world provides for all of us a blessed reassurance that indeed Jesus can be ours. At the same time the words provide a mandate that our deeds reflect our faith.

Jesus' life demonstrated God's compassion for the least of us. Over and over again Jesus went to people rejected by the society of the time – to lepers, to the woman at the well, even to the tax collector. Each time he showed by his action that the way of faith is inclusive and that all are welcome in God's kingdom. Each time he showed his certainty that every soul was valued.

How does our work today demonstrate that compassion? Are our deeds worthy to be seen in the light of God's love? I, for one, cling to the pledge that Jesus came not to condemn, but to save us. Indeed, his life

provided a vivid example of faithfulness – of deeds done in God’s way – worthy of the light. That example provides a guide even today.

**Prayer: Gracious and Loving God, help us during our Lenten journey understand the light of God’s love and all that love requires of us.**

*Jane Campbell*

### **Friday, March 23**

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. John 3:16-17, RSV*

John 3:16 is arguably the most recognizable and quoted biblical passage in modern history. The scripture reference is recited from memory by grade-school children, often seen on bright yellow posters in the stands at sporting events, and most recently, emblazoned on the eye-darkener of the Denver Broncos quarterback, Tim Tebow.

I must admit there are some wonderful and truly inspired phrases in that one sentence: “God so loved,” “gave only son,” and “have eternal life.” But the phrase that has always stuck out in my reading and re-reading of this passage is “whosoever believes.”

I can get on board with a “whosoever church!” At a time when we live in a label-obsessed world – 99% versus the 1%; conservative or liberal; collaborationist or isolationist; Republican, Democrat, or even something called the Tea Party – I am glad that I worship in a “whosoever church.” There is something so refreshing to know that when God sent Jesus into the world so that the world might be saved through him, God didn’t ask believers to check off the “appropriate” box. Jesus simply proclaimed that whosoever believes will be saved.

As we journey the Lenten path, may we be reminded that our neighbor is truly our neighbor, that worship is an honor and privilege, and that “whosoever” is truly welcomed into the doors of this church and into the doors of the Kingdom.

**Prayer: Gracious God, we thank you that through Christ there is no label other than whosoever. May we worship you, our God and Creator, as though we first believed.**

*Steven Baines*

### **Saturday, March 24**

*John 3:14-21, NIV*

I used to work at a shelter for drug addicts. Many of “our” people had a fear in common: They feared summer. There was something so devastatingly revealing and humiliating about the bright light. Summer meant fewer, smaller, and thinner clothes, but our folks preferred hiding their bruises in big, thick coats; their ashamed faces behind scarves and hats. To them summer was a traitor. Summer revealed everything they tried to hide: skinny bodies, pierced blood veins, and pale skin. In summer, shortcomings, losses, disappointments, and hopelessness became visible to strangers, to friends, and to themselves. I learnt how unbearable and merciless the light can be.

You don’t have to be a drug addict to know the fear of light. Many people fear the bikini season, and spend the colder months getting ready for the summer exposure. And quite a few of us feel the sense of relief when summer fades, when fall takes over, when the light is warmer and less sharp, when it is time to withdraw to our houses.

The light can be frightening. Am I good enough? Will I be loved, accepted, or even tolerated when I become fully visible? When there is no shade to hide in? When my scars, my shame, and my shortcomings are revealed?

This week's text tells us something that is both painful and awesome: There is absolutely nothing blind about God's love. We are in His spotlight, utterly exposed. When He reaches out to you, to me, He is very much aware of whom He is dealing with. Yet His offer remains the same – complete and transforming love.

**Prayer: As You shine Your light on us, teach us to trust You. As we are exposed, Lord, show us mercy.**

*Marita Sørheim-Rensvik*

### **Sunday, March 25**

*Amazing Grace!*

Chalice Hymnal No. 546

“Amazing grace, how sweet the sound...” is the beginning of one of the most popular hymns of all time. The author of the hymn is John Newton, born in London, England, in 1725. He is the self-proclaimed wretch who once was lost but then was found, saved by amazing grace.

Although he had some early religious instruction from his mother, he is said to have had no religious convictions. However, on a homeward voyage on a slave ship while he was attempting to steer his ship through a storm, he experienced what he referred to as his “great deliverance.” He recorded in his journal that when all seemed lost and the ship appeared to begin to sink, he exclaimed, “Lord, have mercy upon us.” Later in his cabin he reflected on what he had said and began to believe that God had answered his prayer and that God's grace was with him.

For the rest of his life he observed the anniversary of May 10, 1748, as the day of his conversion, a day of humility in which he subjected his will to God. In his writing of the hymn “Amazing Grace” he describes his time of conversion. The words, “Thro' many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; 'tis grace has bro't me safe

thus far, and grace will lead me home,” depict his feelings of distress and then belief that God would save him. He continued in the slave trade after his conversion; however, he saw to it that the slaves under his care were treated humanely.

Composed probably between 1760 and 1770, “Amazing Grace” was possibly one of the hymns written for a weekly service. The following are the six stanzas that appeared in both the first edition in 1779 and 1809 edition (the one nearest the date of Newton's death). It appeared under the heading Faith's Review and Expectation, along with a reference to First Chronicles, chapter 17, verses 16 and 17.

Amazing grace! (How sweet the sound)  
That sav'd a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears reliev'd;  
How precious did that grace appear,  
The hour I first believ'd!

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,  
I have already come;  
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promis'd good to me,  
His word my hope secures;  
He will my shield and portion be,  
As long as life endures.

Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail,  
And mortal life shall cease;  
I shall possess, within the veil,  
A life of joy and peace.

The earth shall soon dissolve like snow,  
The sun forbear to shine;  
But God, who call'd me here below,  
Will be forever mine.

The origin of the melody is unknown. Most hymnals attribute it to an early American folk melody. The Bill Moyers special on “Amazing Grace” speculated that it may have originated as the tune of a song the slaves sang.

*Loretta Tate*

**Sixth Week of Lent**  
**Scripture: John 12:20-33**

**Monday, March 26**

*John 12:20-33*

I’m a physician, and sometimes I think medical training teaches us to view death as the enemy.

The best doctors, like “House” (okay, don’t get me started...), always come up with the most difficult diagnosis to save the patient at the last minute from the mysterious ailment. Treatments are heroic. People put up brave fights against fatal diseases.

Yet Jesus describes death as productive, not destructive. The grain of wheat is inconsequential, until it dies and bears fruit in abundance. Those who cling to life in this world are the losers, while those who “hate life” in this world will have eternal life and share in God’s joy. Jesus’ death clearly is the reason for his life as a human being. In life, he touched thousands of people, during a few years in human history. In his death and resurrection, he touched hundreds of millions, and continues to do so throughout millennia. Jesus not only predicts the meaning of his own death, but calls us to be servants and follow him. What, even to Calvary, Lord? That’s hard. Save me from this hour.

**Prayer: Almighty God, my soul is troubled. I am too quick to cling to the life of this world and to fear death. Teach me not to pray for salvation from discomfort or pain on this earth, but to seek to glorify your name and draw others to you. I ask**

**this in the name of Jesus, who submitted to your purpose for his earthly life, even enduring torture and lonely death. For me! Alleluia!**

*Sue Kirkman*

**Tuesday, March 27**

*John 12:20-33*

In verse 26 Jesus tells us “whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also.” Jesus is calling us not only to follow but to serve, to become servants to our faith. It is easy to follow, let someone else make the decisions for us and come up with the ideas and the plans.

Where this faith journey becomes hard is in the service end of the equation. To what end does Christ expect us to follow and to serve? The journey from manger to cross is long. Does Jesus expect us not only to follow him but to live and work as he did? Perhaps one of the greatest gifts we are given in this passage is the understanding that to serve means to be able to turn all of our trust over to the Master.

In verse 27 and 28, Christ turns his trust to God his father. That is what Jesus is asking us also, to trust and love him enough to give up control and serve him.

This reminds me of a verse from my favorite communion hymn, “Abba, Father, Father.” “Abba, Father, Father, if indeed it may, let this cup of anguish pass from me I pray. Yet if it must be suffered by me thy only son, then Abba, Father, Father let thy will be done.” Are we able to serve?

**Prayer: Abba, Father, Father, I seek your strength and guidance this week that I may follow the path of Jesus not only to the cross but that during this journey of faith that I truly live as a servant to my risen Lord and Savior.**

*Bill Knight*

### Wednesday, March 28

*“Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat falls to the ground and die, it abideth alone but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” John 12:24, KJV*

In this passage, Jesus is anticipating the tragic events of the coming days. He knows that his death is imminent. Here he tries to forewarn the disciples and share with them that these horrific events are necessary to transform the world and to bring new future to everyone in it through his crucifixion and risen Lord.

The reference to a grain of wheat is telling. Easter takes place in the spring of the year. Our world has been barren of leaves and color throughout the deep winter. Seeds, however, have dropped from the trees and plants, and are lying in the soil, waiting for rebirth of spring’s warmth and sun and rain. Spectacularly, it seems, the world is transformed into one of green leaves and colorful flowers.

Similarly, in our own lives, something new and tender and remarkable can grow out of terrible events. One thinks of the death of a loved one, a time of deep grief and overwhelming sense of loss. But, as the wheat falls to the ground and brings forth its fruit, that grief can open a door to a new awareness of those around us, increased compassion and gentleness to the special life we each offer the world.

**Prayer: In this Easter season, a time when we are so aware of loss and rebirth, help us to be attuned to those around us who need our gentleness and care.**

*Kathleen Burger-Gerada*

### Thursday, March 29

*Jesus replied, “The hour has come...Now my heart is troubled, and what should I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!” John 12:23; 27-28, (NIV)*

This scripture beautifully illustrates the duality of Jesus, which is so hard to capture and for our minds to completely understand. Fully God and fully human? We are used to seeing Jesus the wise, Jesus the healer, the Son of God, and finally through him, the Holy Spirit. Yet at the same time, Jesus was also fully man: he laughed, he fished, he loved, and here he felt fear and sorrow for himself. This is what makes Jesus so approachable and compelling, our friend and comfort when we are hurting, lonely, or afraid. Our Savior has walked in our shoes, is next to us on our path, understands our human needs and desires, indeed paid the ultimate price for lifting our sin and burdens away.

Instead of wallowing in self-pity, however, or pleading with his father, Jesus pivots, accepting again his destiny. Not only does he accept his own quickly approaching death, honoring God’s plan, but he accepts it fully knowing the manner of his death. He prays, not for his own deliverance, or a different outcome, but for God to be glorified. In the depth of his humanity, his Godliness shines through.

**Prayer: Dear Lord, in the midst of the everyday, our swirl of troubles, sorrows, and hurts, we often forget to look past ourselves and remember to pray to you, not just for deliverance or answers, but in true honor, celebration, and glory of you. Please help us to have faith in your plan, and show our love for you above all else. Glory to Your Name!**

*Kristi Dane*

## **Friday, March 30**

*John 12:20-33*

The large, well-lit interstate sign shows: I-LIFE and the directional arrow points the way God wants us to go.

However, many times I've ignored the directional arrow and have taken the off-ramp that led to bright lights, disco balls, pulsating music. Great fun. This was the fast lane and all that the "lane" entails! I was now in the fast lane and took it all in.

But my GPS malfunctioned and lost the way back to I-LIFE. Eventually, I became entangled in a legal situation. The fast lane came to an abrupt dead end in an embarrassing and scary way.

After 36 months of therapy, I realized this was a testing time where God seeks to reveal a new and better way for me. He helped me to get back on I-LIFE. This was a revelatory turn. And because of my community service at Central Union Mission, I became involved with Martha's Table.

So, lesson learned: we'll not go down that off-ramp again. The view in the rearview mirror shows where I need not go. Stay on the right road and don't be stubborn. Trust in God's path (I-LIFE).

**Prayer: Oh God, though we stray from the way you would have us go, we know your rod and staff will pull us back to the right way to go. As we go down the road of life, surround us with your love that is as warm and comforting as the wings of angels.**

*Gary Lewis*

## **Saturday, March 31**

*John 12:20-33*

Jesus says "...unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds." Jesus is speaking during the time of Passover. This saying can be interpreted as a

metaphor for the way that the Jewish people would have viewed the sacrificial lamb during the celebration of Passover. Just as the wheat was to fall and die for the purpose of producing new seed, a lamb was offered every year on behalf of the Jewish people to bring about renewal and purification. In this passage, Jesus is proclaiming himself as the ultimate sacrificial lamb for all humanity, thus making it possible for us to find new life in following Him.

In reading this passage, it is important to note that there are two groups of people. There are those who make sacrifices in order for Passover to be possible and those who reap the benefits of the sacrifices made.

The message that Jesus leaves with those that "desire to see him" is that they too should join with him: "If any man serve me, let him follow me..." What does this mean for our lives? Every opportunity for celebration is made possible because someone was willing to make a sacrifice on the behalf of others. What sacrifices can we make in our lives for those around us?

**Prayer: Jesus, grant us the strength to follow you, and give selflessly to those around us.**

*Brian and Eva Robertson*

## **Sunday, April 1**

*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*  
Chalice Hymnal No. 195

The hymn written by Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," has been called by many to be one of the greatest hymns in the English language.

Based on Galatians 6:14, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," the hymn vividly describes the importance of drawing all attention off of ourselves and focusing on the head, hands, and feet of the crucified Christ.

For me, this is a hymn in which I can see a personal progression of understanding. When I was a young boy, I loved “When I Survey...” because it had only five different notes in the melody and the harmony was easy enough for me to play on the piano. During my teenage years, I heard this hymn arranged by Gilbert Martin where each verse was sung in a key higher than the last, and by the time it got to the words “demands my soul, my life, my all,” it was sheer musical ecstasy.

But it wasn’t until my adult, analytical years, that I read the text in a very deep and detailed way. The message clearly reminded me of my need to sacrifice myself to Christ because of his far greater sacrifice for me – a sacrifice for which I could never give enough of myself in return. “Forbid it Lord that I should boast” now resonates unceasingly and helps keep me in check when I become puffed up with pride of any sort. Because of Christ’s willingness to take up his cross, suffer, and die – for me – demands that I give him my life and my all, fully and completely, in return.

**Prayer: O Christ, your love for all your children is so amazing and so divine. Help me, as I survey your wondrous cross, to love and honor you more, and commit myself and my all to you and the service of your church.**

*Charles Miller*

### **Holy Week**

#### **Scripture: Mark 15:1-15**

#### **Monday, April 2**

*Mark 15:1-15*

In reading this passage, I suspect that Pontius Pilot knew that Jesus was undeserving of a crucifixion. His initial

attempt to offer Jesus as the customary “man to be freed,” followed by his refusal to have any active involvement in Jesus’ death were signs of his contrary perspective to that of the masses. In the end, Jesus was crucified.

Every day, as I exit the Metro station each morning, there is an elderly woman singing a song that advertises newspapers that she sells to support the homeless in our city. To most Metro riders her voice is merely part of the city noise. They walk right past her without paying her any attention. To me she shows a tremendous amount of dedication to her cause; regardless of the weather, she is out there every morning singing and selling newspapers to support the homeless. I make a contribution to her weekly and to be honest the contribution is more rewarding to me than it is to her.

Now, I don’t always do what the Christian in me says to do but as we grow in Christ we should become more active proponents of what is good and right in the world. I think that each time we don’t to correct injustice, we sacrifice a bit of our own connection with the Lord.

As Christians rooted in the Bible and word of God, we should have a different perspective on the world than those that don’t yet know Jesus. However, simply knowing what to do is not nearly as powerful as actively making a change. As Christians we must be the active vehicles of change in our world.

“All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men (women) do nothing.”

Edmund Burke

*Monique and George Ashton*

### Tuesday, April 3

*“Are you the King of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “You have said so,” Jesus replied. Mark 15:2*

That’s it? At this critical moment of his ministry, the best Jesus has to offer is the equivalent of a modern teenager’s eye roll and disinterested, “Whatever.”

I can’t help feeling that we want more, need more. Because where’s the example in this for us? Is this the kind of non-defense we’re expected to offer when our faith is challenged?

A few hours earlier, Peter had denied knowing Christ, so this seems the perfect spot for a contrasting image to guide future Christians. But Jesus says almost nothing. Where, here, is the lesson for the rest of us? When we’re faced with a situation that challenges us to answer “Are you a Christian?,” how can we follow Christ’s example?

Maybe the answer isn’t in the words. As Jesus stood judgment, his words weren’t the only thing speaking for him. He had his entire life and ministry to confirm that he was the fulfillment of the ancient prophesy. The events of the coming three days would provide even stronger proof that he was, in fact, the promised Messiah.

The same is true for us. To claim our Christian identity, we can and should use words. But our words will never be as eloquent or powerful as our actions. It’s in following Jesus’ example, by living our lives as he would have us do so, that we please him most and proudly proclaim him to the world.

**Prayer: Heavenly Father, help us to boldly proclaim your Gospel everywhere, all the time. Lead us to do your will, so that our lives will shine as examples of our faith and your love.**

*Jocelyn Breeland*

### Wednesday, April 4

*Mark 15:1-15*

How do we as Christians approach the death of Jesus Christ? Do we do it with our mind or with our hearts?

Jesus was the Son of God, but also became a man, a man of feeling and pain. He knew fatigue, he knew hunger, and he certainly knew pain. Jesus left heaven, the comfort, the authority to dwell among those He had created, to bring us the promise of salvation. If we speak of His crucifixion and death without knowledge of how Jesus suffered for us, we cheapen that suffering. If His sacrifice is little more than a song topic that we sing during Easter, we diminish his sacrifice.

We need to really understand the extent of the sacrifice, the giving of his life for ours, the pain Jesus felt seeing his mother at the foot of the cross weeping for her son. The horrible pain Jesus felt when for a second God turned His back on him, and the physical pain he suffered being nailed to a cross.

Let us strive to understand what Jesus really went through for us, the true love that He had for us, and His willingness to go through so much suffering, so that we could have eternal life with Him.

**Prayer: Father, thank you for the sacrifice of your only Son, and let us always remember the sacrifice that Jesus had to endure so that we could have eternal life in heaven.**

*Tom Beacham*

### Maundy Thursday, April 5

*Mark 15:1-15*

On Maundy Thursday, we light candles before the service, and after Holy Communion, we extinguish these candles. “Shadow of Cynicism” and “Shadow of Irresponsibility” are names of two candles.

Now, hearing this, I like to imagine if I was in Pilate's position.

Pilate was asking Jesus the questions of "Who Are You?" "Why do they want me to sentence you?" "Are you a King?" In one Gospel, he asks "What is Truth?" I can't really say these are cynical questions. I think we all would ask the same questions. It was a day filled with questions. "What would you want me to do with him?" The answers from the crowd "Crucify Him!" "Why?" he asks. In a strange twist, Pilate comes from judge to defender, Jesus' only defender from death. "Why?" he asks again and again. "What evil has he done?" You see a man beside you, bound in rope, bleeding from hits with clubs and whips, broken-hearted, but a spirit still radiates from him. You see innocence, you see goodness, but the crowd in front of you, shouts "Finish Him."

What do you do? "See to it yourselves, I wash my hands clean of this." A disappointing but expected response, Pilate had nothing to gain from it. He placed the responsibility on others and did not make a tough decision. But what was he feeling, when he saw Jesus being led away from him by the guards? What was he feeling when he heard the shouts of the crowd during the walk towards the hill? What was Pilate feeling when he could hear the nails being hammered into the cross, the screams of a man that he had put to death?

**Prayer: On a day of many questions, sorrow, and mourning, help us not to be cynical or to question but to be bold and responsible for our decisions that are from you in our lives.**

*Nick Bullock*

## **Good Friday, April 6**

*Mark 15:1-15*

As Jesus stood before Pilate he made no excuses. He had no need to explain to Pilate who he is. His actions and words throughout his ministry have already set the stage.

Clearly, Pilate knows something of this man called Jesus. He must have known Jesus had a following when he offered to release Jesus at the time of the Feast since verse 10 says, "...knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him." The Jewish people not the priests would have the popular choice. From Pilate's perspective, why else would the priests envy Jesus? I cannot imagine that it was for his lifestyle.

Jesus was steadfast in his goal: salvation for all who believe, the opportunity to have a relationship with God. Are we so clear in our quest to introduce others to God? Do we state the facts when asked about following Jesus? Do we dance around avoiding being direct, unlike Jesus who simply replied, "Yes, it is as you say," when asked if he was the King of the Jews.

What am I doing day to day and along the way to be a witness to Christ's presence in my life? Must I make excuses for myself? For my behavior? My actions? My relationships? My attitude? Or is it obvious to those around me from all I do and am that I am a follower of Jesus?

**Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to live my life in such a way that I do not have to make excuses for myself. Show me where I need to clean up my act so my life can be a daily witness of your love for all humankind.**

*Teresa Swihart*

## **Holy Saturday, April 7**

*Let thy steadfast love be ready to comfort me according to thy promise... Psalm 119:76*

When I was a boy growing up, there was a vacant lot outside of town where men often came to erect really big tents. One was for the circus. It was glitzy with proper bleachers and a band. At other times the tent was for something called a “Revival.” It was rather drab: straw on the floor with long plain benches, no frills, and an old upright piano where without songbooks the song leader led us in gospel songs where we all knew the words. With all the fiery preaching and altar calls these were often more spectacular than the circus.

For me this sets the perfect tone for this day between the crucifixion and the resurrection. It is a day that is a bit stark and plain, a bit apprehensive of what tomorrow will bring. But in a moment both apprehensive and defiant we burst out in that revival favorite “...Standing, standing, standing on the promises of Christ my Savior; standing, standing, I’m standing on the promises of God. Standing on the promises that cannot fail, when the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living Word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God.”

“...by the living word we shall prevail” because we know the glory that the morning will bring and the promise that each morning thereafter that God’s spirit will be with us forever!

**Prayer: Gracious God, we claim that precious promise you have made of your eternal presence in our lives. Thank you for your glorious gift of love.**

*Beverly and John Scott Williams*

## **Resurrection Day, April 8**

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. John 20:1*

On that first Easter Sunday – Resurrection Day – Mary Magdalene was afraid and confused. The large stone that sealed the opening to the tomb of Jesus was rolled away. The tomb was now empty. So she ran away. She ran to Peter and the other disciples to tell them the terrible news. “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him,” she cried. The message of that first Easter is a message that continues to echo across the centuries: the tomb is empty!

For 40 days we have sought to walk daily with our Lord. In these meditations, friends and members of National City Christian Church have shared their faith, and their struggle to understand their faith. The path we walk together is not always easy. There are moments when we have shared each other’s heartache. Like the tomb, sometimes we experience emptiness. We don’t claim to comprehend the fullness of Easter, but at the beginning of it is an empty tomb.

Soon Mary and the disciples will learn the reason for the empty tomb. Jesus is not dead. He is alive. Christ the Lord is risen today! So as we have shared one another’s sorrow, we also share one another’s joy. For this is Easter Sunday. Join the faithful today and sing “Alleluia!” The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive. And because of this, we too, shall live!

**Prayer: O Lord, on this day of Easter celebration, hear our Alleluias as a thanks-giving offering to you. May we be your Easter people from this time forth and forevermore as we continue in our daily walk with Jesus.**

*Stephen Gentle*

