



Lenten
Devotional



the Episcopal Church of

St. Peter
& St. Paul

2025



INTRODUCTION TO OUR LENTEN DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

On behalf of the Brotherhood of St. Andrew I want to thank our many parishioners and friends who contributed to this year's Lenten Devotional book this year. I especially want to thank Billy Harrison, for helping line up submissions, and Greg Went for assisting in this document's production.

The Episcopal Church of St. Peter and St. Paul has been offering this ministry of introspection and hope for its parishioners since 2001. These daily guides come from many sources, including favorite *Bible* verses, the *Book of Common Prayer*, hymns and theological writings. I want to especially thank those who came through in our hour of need and offered fresh perspectives on this crucial season of the church.

We hope you find as much inspiration from reading these as we did from writing and compiling them.

Lee Woodward



ASH WEDNESDAY, March 5, 2025

Messy Faith

Romans 3:

“For all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glorious standard.” Romans 6: “The wages of sin is death.”

Romans 6:

“The wages of sin is death.”

I want to begin with a confession: I am a mess. After 20+ years of trying to follow Jesus, I keep losing him in the crowded busyness of my life. Don't get me wrong: I badly want to be a godly person day in and day out, but many days haven't worked out that way. And yes, I am a pastor. And yes, I love Jesus. But sometimes my following of him looks more like wondering around.

I can remember during my teenage years, I made hundreds of decisions to become a Christian, to re-become a Christian, to rededicate my life to God, to rededicate to my rededication. I made decisions to treat people better, to go into the ministry, to stop sinning. And looking back, I meant every one of those decisions, yet I successfully carried them out for about 2-3 days. Still, those 2-3 days laid the groundwork for the next decision. I was growing one decision at a time. This growth looked inconsistent and messy: two steps forward, one step back, up, down, in, and out. But I was growing all the same.

My guess is that you're a mess too. If you're really honest with yourself and really look back on your past, you'll see messiness. You see, we want to please God, and we want to honor him, but when we look at our yesterdays, what we see, mostly, is a broken, irregular path littered with mistakes and failures.

This is why we need services like Ash Wednesday. Ash Wednesday is a special time in the life of the church because it forces us to confront these moments. The ashes we receive on our forehead are a symbol of our own mortality and sin. Ashes in the Bible represented mourning and repentance. They reminded people that death and sin are very real. Our reality is one of brokenness. We are people who have messed up.

Yet, we know today is the beginning of the Lenten journey and this journey eventually leads to the good Friday and Easter Sunday. The good news of the gospel is that we know that these ashes are not the final word. The good news “is that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ.” God is merciful and compassionate and slow to get angry. We are a mess, but we believe in a Savior who does not forsake us but instead has entered into our messiness and saved us from it.

Ash Wednesday is here. It's the annual reminder that we are far more weak, frail, broken and marked by sin than we think. It's also the reminder that God is far more gracious, merciful, and loving than we can believe.

Dr. Brandon Dassinger

Romans 2:1

You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgement do the same things.

Paul couldn't have made this any clearer, yet for me this is the toughest of all sins to get around, especially in a culture built on personal achievement and flaunting our superiority. From our business dealings to our personal prejudices to our inane political debates, we exhibit this behavior daily at its absolute worst.

C. S. Lewis, in his classic, *Mere Christianity*, puts an even finer point on this when he says, "For pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense."

Lent reminds us to pray and meditate on the scriptures. As far as I know, that is the only remedy for the sin of pride.

Lee Woodward



Thursday, March 6, 2025

Sirach 32:14-15

He who would find God must accept discipline; he who seeks him obtains his request. He who studies the law masters it, but the hypocrite finds it a trap.

When I first began to observe Lent, I took a small amount of pride in finding loopholes in my fasts. Little ways to get out of doing what I was supposed to be doing. I would study scripture, traditions and wisdom, looking for some way to bypass the system. Looking for some way to shirk being disciplined. What I realized is that all I was really wanting to do was check off a box, take a pill or do some shortcut to be more like Jesus.

We can't cheat our way into being disciples of Christ. It's right there in the name. The word disciple comes from the word discipline. When we accept and embrace our discipleship, our discipline of following Christ, day in and day out, we find God.

Nathan Webb



Friday, March 7, 2025

Matthew 22:21

...then he said to them, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's."

During Lent in 2024, I felt God talking to me about my Lenten devotion for 2025. Usually, I don't think about such things until closer to the time when they are due. Then I am finally inspired to write something after a time of contemplation, study, and almost always several misses before I find something that comes from my heart. But something came to me over several days in Lent 2024 that I thought would be of interest to others. Here it is.

I wear a small amount of jewelry: a watch, a fraternity ring given to me in 1970 by an old girlfriend, a gold chain and cross that I purchased in Thailand in 1974, and finally the wedding ring given to me in 1979 by my wife Donna. These things I wear daily with little thought about them aside from my wedding band. But during last year's Lenten season some thoughts came to me, and I began to think about these "trinkets" and what they could mean.

Typically, I remove these items when I shower, wash dishes, perform messy jobs, and sleep. Consequently, I am returning them to my hands and neck several times a day. I began to be deliberate in this action and now actively think about what I am doing, when I do this and what it means.

I place the chain and cross around my neck first and I think about God. The cross represents what Jesus did for ME to forgive MY sins. Next, I put on my wedding ring, given to me by Donna. This represents our love for each other and our family, foremost in importance after God. Next, I wear my fraternity ring and this reminds me of friends and relationships, past and present. Lastly, I put on my watch which reminds me of the "world."

This idea came to me during Lent 2024, and I have been adhering to this newfound ritual since then. I find that this simple practice helps me to stay focused on the things that really matter, and I am reminded that all things come from God.

Perhaps this or something similar might work for you too.

God bless and keep you,

John Patton



Saturday, March 8, 2025

1 Thessalonians 5:11

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

I wanted to say thank you to everyone who takes the time to write a Devotion. As a faithful 5:30pm Saturday night worshipper, I don't always know who everyone is that writes for this yearly tradition, but I find that you all inspire me to think differently and I feel like I get to know people, even though I don't know your faces. If you've never written a devotional, I encourage you to give it a try next year— there is no right or wrong way to do this.

If you're looking to grow in your spiritual journey, writing is sometimes the best way to start. My inspiration list is gathered from all who took the time to jot down a story and share with us last year – I am grateful to all of you in sharing your journey with Christ.

- With our God, hope is always present.
- Grant me courage to face each day.
- Give to those in need.
- Reflect on the great gift that God has given us.
- Find beauty in the rain.
- Do we really follow Jesus' example? Can we do better?
- HE has a perfect plan for you.
- Build trusting relationships with God and one another.
- Have you hit a rough patch? Give it up to God.
- With God there's always enough.
- Treat everyone as you would wish to be treated.
- Stay in touch with your Maker. He wants a close, loving relationship with you.
- Life tests our faith.
- God is, was and always will be.
- Develop a spirit of thankfulness.
- Your unique gifts really matter.
- We walk by faith not by sight.
- We are the church.
- Following Jesus is a life of service, compassion and forgiveness.
- Be where your feet are.
- Why do we have to look back and not trust now?
- Try to be more mindful of God in my life.
- Say "yes" because God is doing the heavy lifting and not me.
- Share the good news.
- Don't go off on your own, walk straight along the road he has set.
- Be still and reconnect with our faith.
- Pray that we will all encourage each other.
- Give yourself grace.
- God is faithful to forgive.
- Seek first the Kingdom of God, then everything else falls into place.
- Let us open our eyes to when God answers our prayers – and say THANK YOU.

Eileen Mittleider





Sunday, March 9, 2025

Isaiah 25:6-9

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken. It will be said on that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the Lord; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.”

From one of our Sunday evening Lectio Divina gatherings this past year, I was presented with this lovely scripture from the Prophet Isaiah. While I read it slowly several times, what stood out to me was the phrase, ‘we have waited’. This phrase led me to consider how our modern culture abhors waiting. In our impatience, we demand instant everything from shortcut 30-minute meals to addictive online shopping with promises of next day delivery. We experience no end of aggravation when caught in a traffic jam. And, in exasperation, we hang up on customer service calls after a short wait. We want what we want, and we want it now!

As I spent more time meditating this is the message I received from God in my prayers.

“So, Amy, Waiting is not torture. Waiting can be lovely when you know what is coming. Be calm, stick to simple planning and savor the journey ahead of you. Waiting is like taking a leisurely drive and having someone else do the hard work of driving. Waiting is like spying the morning star on an early morning walk. Waiting is like watching the songbirds cavorting in a heated birdbath pretending to be at a Nordic resort. Waiting is like stopping for coffee and cake just to talk and be with each other. You know how it will all end. I will swallow up death forever, and I will wipe away the tears from all faces. There will be love, joy and glory. So, take it slow and soak up all that I have given you while you wait for me. - Selah”

If you are looking for a spiritual practice to take up during Lent, Listening for God at Home – Lectio Divina might be the exact thing you need to hear God speak to you directly in the moment through his word. We meet every Sunday evening at 7PM online. Please call or email me to sign up.

Amy Stillwell





March 9 (continued)

John 14:27

Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation but take courage; I have overcome the world.

2 Corinthians 13:11

Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.

There are numerous biblical references to “peace” and its relationship to God and mankind. The three passages above offer simple yet profound explanations of the interaction of peace which flows in both directions between God and humanity. Peace may be viewed in one respect as the opposite of war and chaos, however, a fuller understanding arises when we consider several additional attributes: a state of individual tranquility when we are at peace; or being in a right relationship with God; or obtaining a good relationship with other people.

During each celebration of the Eucharist, we exchange greetings of peace verbally or by using a signal to show our unity as Christians. But should we not also be searching for a deeper meaning that can be achieved by being in a right relationship with God? That sense of tranquility and peace can be achieved through the gift of wisdom which influences all that we think, say and do each day. A prayer for peace and wisdom follows below:

Loving God, please grant me peace of mind and calm my troubled heart. ... Give me the strength and clarity of mind to find my purpose and walk the path you have laid out for me. I trust your Love God and know that you will heal my stress. Just as the sun rises each day against the dark of night.

Jonathan Nadybal





Monday, March 10, 2025
Barriers

When I continue to rely on my own devices
Each time I find myself in a crisis
The outcome is far from desired.
And I find that my life becomes mired

In trivial pursuits that matter not at all.
Instead of listening and hearing God's call
I build up barriers and stumble around
And once again find myself beaten down.

What in the world am I supposed to do
When I don't know what to do?
How am I to keep on going
When I don't know where I'm going?

I continue to make the same mistakes
And question why I don't have what it takes
To trust in God, believe and let go.
If I could submit to His will then I would know.

There in His truth, comfort I would find.
And with it, true peace of mind.
I'd discover in God's Word from above
All I want, all I need, I already have – His love.

John W. Patton



Although I have much to write to you, I would rather not use paper and ink; instead, I hope to come to you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete. 2 John 1:12

Modern technology is nothing short of miraculous. It never fails to astound me that I can think of something, type it on my phone and as quickly as I hit send, someone on the other side of the world can read it. I am extremely thankful that I can keep up with friends who are scattered across the globe. But no matter how convenient digital friendships and relationships might be, they are a poor substitute for sitting with someone, looking them in the eye, and truly spending time with them. As God said shortly after he fashioned Adam, "It is not good for man to be alone." Thus, he created Eve and forever established the first community. God in his majesty could have stayed in heaven. Instead, he came to us, to be born like us, live with us, be with us.

We experience the full joy of Christ when we are together. That's something that no Facetime or Zoom meeting can replace.

Nathan Webb





Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Philippians 4:6

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

The older I get, the more anxious I feel daily. With all the turmoil going on around us locally, across the US and around the world, it's no wonder. People are battling terminal illnesses, losing their jobs, dealing with financial dilemmas, etc. The list is endless.

When I was a child, I honestly don't recall worrying about much. I truly had a most beautiful childhood. Yes, things happened to people I knew, but from what I remember, it was mostly older people...so I could sort of rationalize what happened was because they were old.

Today, things happen to both young and old. It's as if age has nothing to do with it anymore! So, while I continue to combat my general anxiety, I also try to focus on my many, many blessings. If I were to make a list of both blessings and reasons to be anxious, my blessings would far exceed the latter. It's truly a daily process for me though. While some days it's easier than others, I start each morning reading my devotion as a way to remind myself of all God's greatness in the day and the beauty to come.

Kathryn Fant





(March 11 continued)

James 1:2-4, 12

² Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. ⁴ Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. ¹² Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.

These verses provide me both encouragement and frustration. Encouragement because God promises a payoff for withstanding the trials of life. Frustration because sometimes the trials are overwhelming in either number or magnitude to the point that I cease to care about any delayed reward.

I have learned to reconcile that acquiring new skills require repeated failures. These trials have a low cost of failure (mostly just a bruising of the ego), and I actually have some agency in them. The trials I'm thinking of are raising two teenagers in a difficult era, managing a home with 3 very different generations living in it, a change of ownership at work that has taken a disheartening shift in culture, and managing a static income with ever rising expenses, to name but a few. These trials have a much greater cost of failure, and I have much less control over these situations.

The path to success (or, at least, perseverance) is unclear to me. So, I do as any proper 21st century man would do...I turn to the Internet. I need some life hacks. Something practical and useful.

Help me Internet. You're my only hope.

I can summarize my initial discoveries as "just shift your mindset". *Just*. If it were only that easy. I file this in the category of well-meaning but not very useful advice. I find it also sounds like too much reliance on your own willpower: pull yourself up by your bootstraps. (Draw me a diagram of how that works?)

Digging deeper (beyond the first couple of pages of Google results) I find some more points of view on James, Chapter 1, that have more meat to them.

Practice gratitude. Now there is something that might be actionable and, mayhap, useful. It is easy for me to focus on the problems (especially as I'm an incurable problem solver) to the point of being myopic to the blessings in my life. It might be time to retake inventory of my blessings. Fire up the Excel spreadsheet!

Seek support. Wait, I think I've heard this one before. You're telling me I shouldn't go it alone? That, perhaps, I am not equipped to singlehandedly wrestle to the ground all that life throws at me? That is a novel approach. I shall have to ruminate on this one a while.

Surrender control. This one I've gotten better at as I age. I have discovered it is quite freeing to realize where I stop. When I recognize that I cannot control a situation it liberates me from expecting that I need to control the situation. Still, I could use some improvement on discerning consistently just how much I can actually control.

Focus on the bigger picture. I have an impressive ability to focus deeply for long periods of time, but, as with most gifts, they can be a double-edged sword: I also have the equally, but opposite, impressive ability to ignore things outside my preoccupation for long periods of time. I could definitely use some zooming out.

I may not yet have answers, but practicing gratitude, seeking support, surrendering control, and focusing on the bigger picture seem like a good place to start. Maybe these ideas will be useful to you, too.

I pray for all of you who are grappling with your own tribulations that you may find a way through and feel the love and strength of the Lord.

John Clark



Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Luke 6, 27-36

Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting anything back.

Would it surprise you to learn that enemies are mentioned 387 times in the Bible? The word "enemy" is tricky — we don't think we have an enemy until there is strife, and then we are not always thinking clearly, especially once adrenaline gets us worked up and, perhaps, out of whack.

As a country, we just had a primary election in voting for a new president, and, like anyone driving around East Cobb, I saw polarizing signs and stickers contradicting each political spectrum. Conflicting views successfully create opposition, causing us to choose a side. I don't know about you, but I have been guilty of seeing a sign or bumper sticker and wondering what was wrong with the person making that political choice. This type of thinking creates a divide. As a human, I am, at times, prone to not understanding and forgetting to seek what our common ground might be.

Over the weekend, I was exiting a nearby home improvement store with my needed purchases. I was approached by a young man who might usually intimidate me with his large stature, who could have easily been mistaken for an enemy. I was taken aback when he greeted me with a smile and began speaking, gently asking for help for his family as they were battling homelessness. Typically, when solicited like this, I would try to excuse myself from such a conversation but found myself drawn in and listened to his plight. Amazingly, I heard a voice that told me to help him - but was his sad tale legitimate? I didn't know, but he sounded genuine, and I felt at the core of my being that I should help this challenged student and his mother. I treated him like Jesus would have. I am not comparing myself or my actions to Jesus by any means, but I must admit that I felt Him at that moment - so much so that I helped and was then compelled to stop and pray with him before we went our separate ways.

The net: net is that I didn't help him and his family to boast of my generosity - and this is the first I have expressed since that day, even to my husband. I helped him because, as a Christian, it is what we are called to do. If we cannot help and "gladden the hearts of others," what is our mission, our calling? Since that day, I have wanted to spread joy and smile at strangers, which has made me feel good about myself. It is very easy to look differently at those from other backgrounds, races, and political sides, but our real enemy is Satan. As we submit to God, He does amazing things through us and does things you would never predict. My challenge this Lent is for us to see the best in others and allow the best of Him to lead us. We can then truly feel the peace of God that passes all understanding.

Catherine G. Gasque



March 12 (continued)

Matthew 4:19

"Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of people. Immediately they left their nets and followed him.

I have always been amazed at this story of Simon Peter and Andrew followed by the recounting of James and John who also left their work immediately and followed Jesus. *Immediately*. No questions asked, no conversation about what they would be doing, no taking time to say goodbye to their families. They dropped what they were doing and followed Jesus. What would you have done?

I think if someone came up to me and said, "Follow me", I would have said, "Do you mean me? Why me? What will I be doing? This was early in the ministry of Jesus. Had they all heard about Jesus and been speculating about him? It sounded to me like this command, "Follow me" came out of the blue. Have you ever said "yes" when you were asked to do something that you felt you were unqualified for? Or that you were not sure you could do or wanted to do?

I have been involved in so many roles in our church. When I was asked to be a Stephen Ministry Leader, I hesitated. It was a big commitment. By saying yes and being involved I have grown as a Christian. I have become good friends with so many that I have worked with as a Stephen Minister and in other roles. I know it has been a gift to me from God to work with fellow Christians and to feel that I have in some small measure followed Jesus. When you find yourself thinking about stepping up to use your talents and skills for the benefit of our church, don't talk yourself out of it. By saying "yes", and by following Jesus, you will receive much more than you give. I believe it will be a blessing to you.

What will you do? During Lent, prayerfully ask God how he wants to use you and then offer your time, skills and talents. I believe you will be blessed beyond measure.

Anne Wright





Thursday, March 13, 2025

Lent... and Coping with Grief

Matthew 5:4

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

As we enter this season of Lent, a time of reflection, repentance, and spiritual renewal, we are reminded that it is also a time to face the realities of our human condition – including grief. As I’ve recently been reminded, grief is a heavy burden to carry; whether it is the loss of a loved one, the end of a season, or the pain of broken relationships, grief is a deep sorrow that touches our hearts and spirits. During Lent, as we walk the journey of Jesus’ suffering, death, and resurrection, we find a compassionate Savior who understands our pain.

Lent is a season where we confront the reality of suffering, but it’s also a season that points us toward hope. The cross, though an instrument of death, is also a symbol of transformation. Jesus’ grief on the cross was not the end of the story but the beginning of new life for all who believe. Just as He rose from the dead, we too will be comforted in our grief and will one day experience healing and resurrection.

During this Lenten season, we are invited to draw near to God in our grief. It is a time to afford ourselves the grace to grieve, to put words to our pain, and to place it before Him. We can pray openly, asking for healing, peace, and the strength to trust in God’s presence. God does not promise that grief will disappear overnight, but He does promise to be with us through it all, offering His gentle comfort...and in that, there is wondrous hope for healing.

A Prayer for Healing

Heavenly Father,

In this season of Lent, we bring our grief before you. We carry the weight of sorrow, loss, and pain in our hearts, and sometimes it feels overwhelming. Yet, we trust in your promise to comfort those who mourn. We ask for your peace to surround us and for your Holy Spirit to be our guide and strength. Help us to walk through this season with the hope that, just as Christ rose from the dead, we too will experience healing and restoration. May we find comfort in your presence and in the community of believers around us. In Jesus’ name, we pray...Amen.

Win Halkyard



March 13 (Continued)

Book of Common Prayer, Page 362

“Therefore, with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious Name; evermore praising thee, and saying . . .”

These are words we hear almost every Sunday. One often heard criticism of Episcopal worship is our reliance on our liturgy — that every Sunday we say the same thing, and, therefore, the words become rote and lose their meaning. When Kim and I were a young married couple with small kids we worshipped at St. Martin-in-the-Fields Episcopal Church, down in Brookhaven. The Rector there, Fr. Gable, did something that I’ve not experienced since. Fr Gable had the entire congregation say those lines rather than just the Celebrant. It was powerful and made a lasting impression on me.

Attend Morning Prayer (every Monday at 7 a.m. in the Garden Room) or, for that matter, Evening Prayer (six Thursdays during Lent, at 7 p.m. in the Parish Hall, beginning Feb. 27) and you may hear Cantic 21, the “Te Deum,” part of which goes like this:

“You are God: we praise you.

You are the Lord: we acclaim you:

You are the eternal Father.

All creation worships you.

To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,

Cherubim and Seraphim, sing in endless praise.

Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

The glorious company of apostles praise you.

The noble fellowship of prophets praise you.

The white-robed army of martyrs praise you.

Throughout the world the holy Church acclaims you . . .”

My point is this: When we pray to God, realize that we are not praying alone. Our faith and our prayers are bolstered and supported by angels and archangels, by Cherubim and Seraphim, by the apostles, prophets and martyrs and by the entire heavenly host, that unseen spiritual army of God that is always battling on our behalf against the forces of evil that plague the world.

Dale Dodson



Friday, March 14, 2025

Luke 19:41

"As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it"

Jesus knew of his coming suffering and death, yet he wept not for himself but for the people of Jerusalem who had lost their way. Even with all the sins we carry, Jesus continues to love us. It pains him when we turn away from him and lose sight of the peace that comes from being with him.

We often give up something for the Lenten season to represent a sacrifice of our own, but this year I also intend to bring an offering of devotion starting with regular daily prayer. I also plan to attend Monday Morning Prayer and Thursday Evening Prayer, and I invite you to do the same. I hope we can join together and pray with one another as we draw closer to Christ and recognize his deep love for us all.

Mark Allen Wilson



Colossians 3:22-24

Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. ²³ Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, ²⁴ knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

When we abide by the principles found in the third chapter of Colossians and in other passages throughout the Bible, we find that we are capable of doing greater than we can on our own or when working for another reason. We are eternally progressing. When we work or serve for Christ in all that we undertake, we live up to the God given gifts meant to impact others.

A motivation/devotional recently said not to ask what you can get from your current position in life, but rather how much you can put into it. Your potential is like a muscle that must be flexed for its best use. Otherwise, you are selling yourself short and not honoring God for whom, as it is written, we are truly working.

It is easy to sometimes lose sight of this when the stresses of everyday life invade. Rather than succumbing, stop and pray that you might realign your priorities so that you are better able to serve, work and create according to His will.

Lisa Doss





Saturday, March 15, 2025

Hebrews 11:6 New International Version

But without faith it is impossible to [walk with God and] please Him, for whoever comes [near] to God must [necessarily] believe that God exists and that He rewards those who [earnestly and diligently] seek Him.

Sometimes God sends us signs that Heaven exists. We just have to open our hearts and eyes. I was fortunate to witness a few events before my husband and my father passed.

The day before Eric died, while sedated, he extended his arms toward the ceiling. Even though dementia prevented him from speaking, his mouth moved. I thought this was so weird. I pulled an arm down by his side. Eric's friends watching were confounded as well. He put it up again. I pushed it down. This time he shook off my arm and reached toward the ceiling.

A nurse happened to pass by and stuck her head inside the door. I asked what in the world was my husband doing. She looked at him and said that he is talking to loved ones on the "other side."

A few weeks before Dad died, he napped and talked in his sleep. In his dream, he begged my mom to "let him go." Over and over, he said, "Please Mama, let me go! Please! Please!" Then he asked Jesus, "Please, Lord! Let me go! Please, Lord!" Then he must have heard a response, then answered, "Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Thank you!"

The day before my dad died, he held his arms in a circular placement with hands clasped. Then he rested his arms by his side. He repeated this motion several times as if hugging family at a homecoming.

These events were sacred to behold. I treasure these times and take great comfort in them. It tells me that Jesus' saving grace of the faithful provides a way to life eternal with Him and all our loved ones who believe.

Sharing these precious events can also be an encouragement to those who may at times doubt the reality of life beyond the grave.

We simply need to allow ourselves to be quiet and observe the messages from our Savior that He is indeed real, and He has prepared a place for us.

Watch and listen for those moments.

Linda Kepler





March 15 (Continued)

Luke 9:13 *You give them something to eat.*

John 21:17 *Feed my sheep.*

It seems that Christ used food literally and figuratively often in the gospels. Everyone knows of feeding the 5000 with loaves and fish. Then after asking Peter three times if he loved him, “feed my sheep”.

SPSP is also involved heavily as Disciples of Christ with food. We have:

Hope for the Hungry

Family Promise

Food Barrels for St Jude’s and MUST

Summer Lunches

Our Food Ministry

Some of these disciples have been cooking breakfast at MUST and the Extension, (a rehab for alcohol and drugs for men) every Friday and two other times per month. Over the years 25-30 men, women, and youth have participated. That means getting up at 4:30 in the morning and feeding Christ’s sheep. We are rewarded with smiles, thanks, and “Number 12 at the window please”. We haven’t fed 5000 in a day, but some of these folks have been serving for over 20 years and have fed 70,000 plus of their fellow man.

As Christ said in Mark 14:7... *we will always have the poor*. Some of these disciples are, should we say...aging? If we are to continue feeding “Christ’s sheep”, we are soon in need of a new generation of disciples.

How about you? Are you feeling it? Come join these disciples and see how *you too* can feed HIS sheep.

Don Loeber





Sunday, March 16, 2025

3John 1:11

Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. Mark 7:23

All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.

Evil? Where?

What is evil? Does evil really exist? Recently, when discussing evil in my U.S. Naval War College course, an Army major stated he did not believe there was such a thing as evil. He believed we are all basically good people who mean well. Respecting his perspective, I responded, "Perhaps you will recognize evil when you have been personally violated."

Evil is sometimes hard to identify or even define if we have not engaged evil in life or the evil has been normalized in relationships. Evil occurs in many ways. We like to think of evil as taking place in such as President Vladimir Putin's actions with respect to Ukraine, Boko Haram kidnapping scores of women and girls as property, and exploitation of young people on social media.

In the film *The Passion of the Christ*, the people beg for the release of Barabbas in lieu of Jesus. Most noteworthy in the scene is Satan slithering in and among the collective delusional who are oblivious to the presence of evil. Unless we have abandoned our souls to Christ, it is difficult to understand and discern the presence of evil. Evil is privation of the good.

We, too, can be oblivious to evil when caught up in the moment or when we seek to deceive the other. Jesus is the good who overcame evil and sin by his glorious resurrection. A reality check is needed to distinguish the evil within exposing our own deception of ourselves.

Tom Creely



Book of Common Prayer, 304-305

Each time someone is baptized in the Church, we all stand and renew the Baptismal Covenant. In this recitation, we declare a personal mission of that is deeply rooted in the Covenant, for in this pledge we are asked if we will continue the Apostolic teaching in fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. Will (we are asked) the good news of God in Christ be shared by our word and example? Will we see Christ in all persons, strive for justice and peace, respect each other's dignity by loving our neighbors? Will we resist evil, repent, and return to Christ when we fail?

In summary, we are pledging to be Disciples of Jesus- to make God the center of our lives and to treat our fellow men and women as equals, if not higher, than our own love for ourselves.

The principle of the Covenant we make before God will be the driving force behind our ministry of Discipleship. As with St. Andrew, the man who brought others to meet Jesus, we are positioned to be a light in the darkness of our times, to bring the gift of light, the Holy Spirit, to others through our discipleship. The opportunity we have is enormous. People are still thirsting for the freedom, peace and joy that comes from meeting- and living with- Jesus. We will share this gift.

During the Lenten season we can reflect on being a light to others, to accepting the cup of salvation.

Darron Kendrick





Monday, March 17, 2025

Joel 2:12-13

“Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

What Is Lent?

Lent is the 40-day period leading up to Easter, (excluding Sundays) that starts on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. The 40 days of Lent involve fasting, prayer, and almsgiving as a way to connect deeper with God.

Each year as we walk into Lent, I find myself wanting to do some sort of special event to honor this season – a fast, special prayers, reflecting on prior thin spaces in my life where I sensed the presence of God more than other times (such as on the island of Iona in 2008 on an adult pilgrimage with others from Saint Peter and Saint Paul). A thin space is special location where there is nothing between you and your spiritual self – no East Cobb/Atlanta traffic, no email, no computer, very little noise, a wonderful space for deep reflection on God’s presence in one’s life.

The Old Testament reading from Joel 2:12-13 says, “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

A key part of this phrase to me is *return to God with all your heart* – not just with your mind, or your tasks – but your whole heart. I really like this picture. A good question is how do we know we have turned to God with all of our heart? How do you measure this?

I am not sure how you measure this. One’s heart leads to their beliefs which leads to what one thinks, which leads to what one says and does – if we have returned to God with our whole heart, then our thinking becomes more aligned with the thoughts of Jesus, and we are able to live life as Jesus did with minimal intervention.

My Lenten practice this year is to work more intentionally on returning to God with my whole heart – not just when it is convenient or easy, but only after really working on getting God deeply internalized in my heart. My lifetime mission is to have every thought I have, word I say, and thing I do, be what Jesus would think, say, or do. This is my north star, and I know I will never get there. But I do like the journey. I will only get there when I fully return my whole heart to God.

My final thought on this Lent is the same thought I have every year at this time – why not make the Lenten practices we do be part of our everyday existence and not just thought of during this time.

Thankful for God’s blessings.

Tom Martin



March 17 (Continued)

Psalm 14:1

Fools say in their heart: "There is no God."

Not an unusual state of the cultural mind in our day. How many times have I shaken my head in recent times and thought, "Their deeds are corrupt, depraved; not a good man is left" (V.1)?

In our time we may feel, as other generations have before us, that we see a growing darkness in our world and in the people who live outside our reach. But we can reach those we fear or secretly despise- not by hating or with confrontation, but by practicing our mission of prayer and developing our spiritual gifts. From these gifts we receive the fruits of the Spirit: Self-control, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Love (Galatians 5:22).

This, I believe, is why we come to church- to begin growing these fruits, and then bringing them home, and taking them into the world with us. St. Paul told us that in Christ there are no political allegiances, no cultural boundaries, nothing that defines or separates Jesus' love for us. We are human, we have tendencies and natures that will and do interfere with our returning that love purely and openly with each other at times, but we can do it. Like the old camp song says, it only takes a spark to get a fire going'.

Darron Kendrick

Tuesday, March 18, 2025

Philippians 4: 7 (NIV)

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Years ago, while teaching Sunday School when my children were young, there was a precious little boy named Cody. One morning, as we finished our lesson and circled up to say the Lord's Prayer together, sweet Cody looked up with his beautiful big blue eyes and gentle countenance and said, "that's God's favorite prayer".

My co-teacher and I just looked at each other and shrugged our shoulders. How could you respond to that? We did jump in and say that was probably quite true since Jesus taught us this prayer as a very good way to pray to our Father in heaven. I was truly touched that he had such a sincere feeling about his prayers.

I did walk away from that class thinking (and continue to think that although the Lord's Prayer was something I had learned a very long time ago and was definitely important to me, my favorite blessing is the one used to close most of our services (and begins with Philippians 4: 7)

May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God and of his son our Savior, Jesus Christ, and the blessing of God Almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you and remain with you always.

This is my favorite prayer. Somehow, hearing it as a Sunday service ends, makes me feel like I am getting that last little hug to send me out to face a new week armed with the love of God and his desire for me to do His will and show His love and mercy to those I meet.

I think of Cody and his family of three boys every now and then and sincerely hope that each of them have grown to be the good men of God that their parents began teaching so long ago.

Lynn Grant



Wednesday, March 19, 2025

2 Corinthians 9:11–12

¹¹ You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; ¹² for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God.

I have been reflecting on the Lenten Devotional that I wrote last year. The focus was all the blessings that I have received from St Peter & St Paul and the many ministries that are available for study and service. This year we have just concluded the 30th Memorial Blood Drive at St Peter & St Paul in honor of four children, Shelby, Tyson, Richard and Kimberly, all of whom died too young. My wife Charm and I started the Blood Drive to give back to the community and the Red Cross after our daughter Shelby died.

As we enter the season of Lent, a time for reflection, repentance, and self-examination, it is a moment to also consider how we can give of ourselves to others. One of the most powerful ways to embody the spirit of selflessness during this time is through acts of charity and kindness—acts that allow us to live out the teachings of Christ. This year, I reflect on the generosity of those who have donated blood at our Memorial Blood Drive.

The act of donating blood is an extraordinary gift. It's a tangible offering of oneself for the benefit of others. In the same way that Christ gave His body and blood for the salvation of humanity, blood donors offer of themselves to heal and restore others. The process may seem small—just a few minutes of time and a little physical discomfort—but the impact is immeasurable. Every drop of blood donated has the potential to save lives, to give someone a second chance, to offer hope where there was despair.

Lent is often viewed as a time of personal sacrifice, but it's also a time to recognize how we can extend our care and love beyond ourselves. The blood drive ministry at St Peter & St Paul has become a visible expression of love in action. The donors, by offering their blood, are not just fulfilling a need but embodying the spirit of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. They are following His example of loving others without expectation of anything in return.

During the season of Lent, let us remember the generous donors who contribute to saving lives. Their actions remind us that sacrifice, even in the smallest forms, can have a profound impact on those around us. May their example inspire us to give of ourselves during this Lenten season, whether it's through time, resources, or kindness, and may we all find ways to offer love in a world that is often in need of healing.

As Paul instructed the Corinthians, we are enriched by generosity and produce thanksgiving to God by our words and actions. So, bless all the donors and bless their sacrifice.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen.

Chuck Matheson



Thursday, March 20, 2025

Isaiah 41:10

"So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

When it was proposed earlier this year to get rid of FEMA and that my position was no longer guaranteed, I panicked. I was overwhelmed with fear and anxiety over what could happen. I prayed, prayed, and prayed. One day, I was looking for scripture for guidance and I found the subject verse. I began to meditate and pray over it.

Gradually, I came out of the metaphorical cave. I asked my parents to pray for me. I asked my fellow parishioners to pray for me as well. Over time, I heard God talking to me--through others--to focus on only what I could control and to leave the rest to him. Multiple people kept coming up to me with the same guidance. Together with God's guidance, and pray from myself and others, I began to feel better. The stress still exists but it's more manageable. Life is still hard, but there's no longer that paralyzing fear since I know that God is with me. It's the same for you, too. Do not fear. God is with you.

During this lent, we'll encounter challenges. You may have a hard time NOT grabbing that cup of coffee because you gave it up. You may have a hard time getting up earlier for morning prayer because you took that on. You may have fear and/or anxiety tugging at you. Remember this testimony when you feel like that. Remember, do not fear. You are a child of God. He will strengthen you and help you; he will uphold you and he will with his righteous right hand.

Carl Mickalonis





Friday, March 21, 2025

The Sermon on the Mount: A New Way

Matthew 5:1-12 (NIV)

5 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,² and he began to teach them. He said:

*³ “Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.*

*⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.*

*⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.*

*⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.*

*⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.*

*⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.*

*¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

*¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil
against you because of me.*

*¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they
persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

Jesus has given us a new way to live:

A new way to deal with hurt—by forgiving those who have hurt us.

A new way to deal with money—by sharing it.

A new way to deal with power—by service and humility.

A new way to deal with worry—by seeking first the kingdom of God.

A new way to deal with hate—by loving our enemies.

A new way to deal with fear—by trusting in His authority.

A new way to deal with sin—through honesty and repentance. [OBJ]

We can now leave behind the old ways of the world...a world consumed by retaliation, violence, deceit, and selfishness. That is not who we are anymore. He has made all things new.

Dr. Brandon Dasinger



Saturday, March 22, 2025

Romans 15:13

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing.

When I first started thinking about Lent and a devotional I thought about sacrifice and preparation, prayer and alms giving. I thought about Jesus 40 days of fasting and temptation by the devil, Moses 40 days of fasting preceding the receipt of the ten commandments, Elija 40 days on Mt Horeb prior to Lord coming to him.

But that was not how I was feeling about Lent.

I was feeling excited, happy because my mind was going straight to the empty tomb, to the resurrection. The hope, the promise, the joy, the future for humanity to know that God's promise of "Heaven on Earth" is real.

Susan Chesshire



Sunday, March 23, 2025

Mark 12:29-31

²⁹ Jesus replied, "The most important commandment is this: 'Listen, O Israel! The LORD our God is the one and only LORD. ³⁰ And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.' ³¹ The second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself' No other commandment is greater than these."

These 2 verses are Jesus' response to a teacher of religious law who, after listening to Jesus answer several "trick" questions by some Pharisees and some Sadducees, asked Jesus which is the most important of all the commandments? The simplicity of the answer always brings me back to the foundation of our faith and is a good reminder for us to focus on what really matters.

I have taught Children's Sunday School for over 20 years now and occasionally must remind myself that not all children who come into our classroom are at the same level of Biblical understanding. In fact, we occasionally get kids who know almost nothing about the Bible, except some of the more well-known stories like David and Goliath, Noah's Ark, etc. Other times, I am blown away by the deep and profound discussions we get into.

Whatever the depth we get into, it's always kind of nice when we decide we need to "get back to basics" based on who's in class that day. It provides all of us, teacher and student alike, with a reset to the two most important things to remember. Love God and Love your neighbor. Referring to these verses, a smart, retired Bishop who worships with us once said..." All else is merely added commentary".

The "all else" certainly contains important guidance for all of us in our spiritual journeys, but by keeping our focus on these two basic tenets, we have a solid foundation for the trip.

Tom Gotschall



Monday, March 24, 2025

Psalm 136:1

Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever.

As many of you know, Tom and I were blessed with the birth of our first grandchild in October. Her name is Amelia Rose. As her birth approached, other grandparents told us, "... you just wait, there is nothing like a grandchild. This is a different kind of love than even the love you feel for your own children." Tom and I waited patiently and finally the moment came when we could meet her. Once we saw her and held her, we were hooked. I cannot explain it, but it is a different kind of love. When I look at her, and see each new accomplishment, I am reminded of the miracle of life, and how God plays a part in every piece of that. Each tiny part of her, and each new development, and each little sweet baby sound she makes is a gift from God. His creation of every one of us is so pure, so detailed, and so miraculous.

God's attention to detail extends far beyond each of us. Each tiny part of His Creation is an amazing miracle. Have you ever stopped and watched a spider spinning its web? Have you ever watched the sun set at the beach? Have you ever been to one of our national parks and marveled at the mystery of its beauty? God's creation extends to each tiny piece of creation but is not forgotten in its tremendous magnitude.

I often think of the love I have for my children, and now, for Amelia. It is hard to describe, but it is a love so pure, so deep and so authentic. Then I try to relate that to God's love for us and cannot comprehend the magnitude of His love since His love is far greater than anything I can feel or imagine. His love for each of us, and all of mankind, is indescribable. His love is shown daily to us in a myriad of ways-through His creation, through our relationships, and through our experiences. God is present in all those things, but so often we fail to recognize God in our lives.

As a Lenten practice, consider taking the time each day, to stop and reflect, and give thanks. During your daily quiet time, take a moment, and think of the beauty you may have seen, the people you may have encountered, or the experiences you may have had. We will all have good days and bad days, and sometimes the bad days may be really bad. My wise brother once told me that no matter how bad things may be, there is always something to be grateful for. Find God in each day and give thanks to the LORD, for HE is good. His love endures forever.

JoAnn Gotschall





Tuesday, March 25, 2025

The Remnant

If you read church history you'll see the constant repeat of Christians enmeshing themselves into political tribalism for the sake of power and wealth and control. And how these desires created massive blind spots where you then have so many Christians supporting things like the crusades, slavery, segregation, and unjust wars.

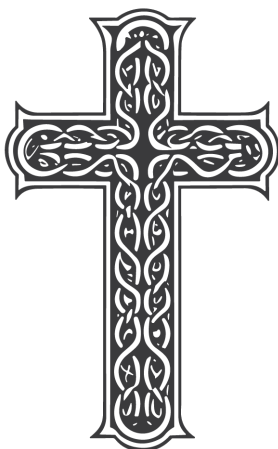
But there's always a remnant. Parts of the church that stay faithful and refuse the idols of their culture. The mystics who continue to pray, fast, serve the poor, and refuse the violent ways of this world. There is always a remnant who keep their eyes on Jesus and finish their race well.

Moral of the story: Be aware of what is discipling you. Make sure consumerism and political tribalism do not take over your values. Protect your mind and heart. Don't let your thoughts and vocabulary and imagination be controlled solely by the narratives of the culture and current day politics. See the bigger picture.

The greatest threat to the church is not conservatives or liberals. The greatest threat to the church is Christians forgetting their baptism and embracing a way of life that has nothing to do with the ways of Jesus or the fruit of the Spirit.

Make it your aim to meditate on the life of Jesus. Worship. Pray. Serve those in need. And stay away from anything that might lead you into idolatry.

Dr. Brandon Dasinger





Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father.

*In your compassion **forgive us our sins,***

known and unknown,

things done and left undone,

and so uphold us by your Spirit

that we may live and serve you in newness of life,

to the honor and glory of your name,

through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I love this petition/confession, this Prayer of Forgiveness, said together before receiving communion. During Lent we go a step further, bemoaning our manifold sins and wickedness that we have grievously committed in thought, word and deed.

In this we vow to turn around and serve God in a new way – asking for a chance to renew the conversation, recommit the connection, and through it gain an awareness of our actions. This newness of life is a really amazing gift of grace.

The great mercy in this is in things unknown. It is these unknown unknowns that trip us up because we cannot see them, cannot name them, and therefore cannot fix them. Only God can. Not sure if this excuses willful ignorance or willful innocence; but it is a mercy most humble.

PERSONAL TAKEAWAY

What I can do is look at things I have done and left undone – and try to make amends for them. Some are misunderstandings, some due to being pulled in too many directions at one time or overwhelmed, and some because of how I chose to prioritize my list of things to do. Whatever the reason or excuse I give, these things done and left undone (or said and left unsaid) hurt others and hurt me. It isn't about explaining or excusing but seeking to forgive and be forgiven. To turn around and try again, asking the Spirit to show me how to be a better me, a better disciple of Christ.

In newness of life, Amen.

Bernadette Watts



Thursday, March 27, 2025

Interruption of my Spiritual Journey

Matthew 18:19-20 NRSV

¹⁹ Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. ²⁰ For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.'

I am on a new path in reading the word and searching for a deeper understanding of what God is calling me to become, and the changes I need to make based on his revelations in the Word. This is not a roadmap of specific instructions for myself or an easy cook-book list of do's and don'ts but rather growing my ability to be moved by the Holy Spirit and suppressing my habitual wants and preferences.

This new journey started several weeks back when Ingrid and I decided to attend the 10:30 am service and after the peace I felt a need to encounter others in a more engaging way than simply greeting them with "Peace of the Lord". So, after the service ended, I turned back to introduce myself to someone I had not spoken with before, and we exchanged names and contact so we can share more of our faith story.

I am amazed how God took that very minor "opening" to interrupt my approach to Bible study and daily readings. I learned from my new brother that he has spent a number of years coming to Christ after searching for meaning and truth, and now he was searching for a community of faith where he can continue to grow and share his encounters with a life giving God.

In the Gospel of Matthew above, I have always been focused on the earlier of the two verses of living in a community of prayerful brothers and sister where I have felt great support and witnessed the power of prayer.

What I was not expecting with this new friendship in Christ has seemed guided by the presence of God when two or three are gathered together in Christ's name. Yes, both of us have from that exchange of a peace and our contact details continued to support each other in encouragement of reading, study and sharing what God is saying to us. For me it has opened my eyes to more of the detailed prophecies and covenants from God to His faithful believers from Genesis on throughout the entire Bible.

It has also propelled me to explore the Bible and the instructional notes from learned scholars to teach me more about God's promises to the Jewish nation and its people. I continue to search for the implications of the statement in John 14:6 - "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No-one can come to the Father except through me". What does that mean to Jews and to Gentiles alike given the Covenants of the Old Testament and New Testament? We human beings are so limited by our understanding of time, and space, so we need to gain an understanding that is not limited by this earthly life but takes into account an awesome God who has been faithful and loving to those who believe for millennia.

In closing:

I pray this lent I am provoked to a deeper sense of how to honor my covenant of faith and resulting actions in gratitude for the grace I have received through Christ Jesus. May I be prepared each day to grow and become more courageous in sharing my faith with others, both non-believers and believers. Amen

Peter Williams



Friday, March 28, 2025

Romans 12:9-21

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil, cling to the good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. But be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written:

I will repay says the Lord. On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.

Jesus exhorts us to "Love thy Neighbor as Thyself" and here, St. Paul gives us our template to implement this charge. Lent is a season of prayer and reflection that can allow us to reexamine how we live out our Christian lives, serving one another as our Lord and savior wants us to do.

WE must open our hearts to others and drop the barriers which prevent us from living in harmony and peace, healing this fallen world, one neighbor at a time.

Greg Tonian



Psalm 51:11-12

Do not cast me away from your presence, and do not take your holy spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and sustain in me a willing spirit.

If there is one word to use to describe salvation, it must be "joy." When we realize that almighty God, the creator of heaven and earth knows who we are, loves us and delights in us, how can we respond with anything but joy? As we read about the prophets, apostles, and saints who have gone before us, we see that even amid trials, tribulations and even complaining, they still had the joy of the Lord. That doesn't mean they didn't fuss or fight, but they knew that their gripes were miniscule compared to the God that loves them. When we receive the Holy Spirit, we too receive salvation and joy.

Nathan Webb



Saturday, March 29, 2025

**The Peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also, with you!**

We know this part of the service which occurs after The Absolution and before The Liturgy of the Table. And, if you have never read the book, “Walk in Love – Episcopal Beliefs & Practices” by Scott Gunn & Melody Wilson Shobe then I would highly recommend it because it provides some insightful information regarding The Exchange of the Peace of Jesus Christ.

The book states, “In the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus teaches about the importance of reconciliation prior to making our offerings to God. He says, “So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift” (5:23-24). Because of this teaching, the church began the custom of passing the Peace of Christ before we make our offerings to God and receive the Holy Eucharist.”

The book then makes a very valuable observation. “Too often, the passing of the peace becomes a conversational free-for-all in which friends catch up on weekend news. There is spiritual danger in the practice, because we neglect the opportunity for reconciliation at our own peril. When we pass the peace, we should make a special point first to share peace with those from whom we are estranged. A second priority is strangers or guests. Only then should we greet friends, because we have no need for reconciliation with them. In other words, the Passing of the Peace is for reconciliation, not for catching up with our buddies.”

If you know anything about me, you know that I really enjoy greeting people. But that doesn't mean greeting is handled by only a “select few”. It belongs to everyone. I acknowledge that God has given me a gift, and I am trying to use it as guided by the Holy Spirit. At times, I may get in the way of myself; however, for the most part, the effort to glorify God is achieved. This brings me to another point made in the Gunn's and Shobe's book. “It is poignant to see a first-time guest in a congregation standing awkwardly while people who know each other well chat at this moment in the liturgy. At precisely the moment when all should be reconciled, we divide into insiders and outsiders and neglect our guests. In our world of estrangement and division, we need every bit of practice at reconciliation and unity we can muster.”

Narrowing this point as it pertains to visitors, the Exchanging of the Peace is not the time to carry on a long-winded conversation because that interrupts the service. It is after services that you should locate the visitor and invite him or her to Coffee Hour in order to meet yourself and other members of the congregation. Whether they join you or not is their option, but fellowship has been extended, and that is all we can do as the rest is up to the Holy Spirit.

An example of this powerful and Holy welcome is when I was about to give up on St. Peter & St. Paul. I had visited SPSP twice and walked down to the Parish Hall for Coffee Hour where I stood by myself the entire time. After that second visit, I told myself the third time would either be “charm” or “enough”. If no one said hello that was it. I was gone. Well on the third attempt, I stood by myself in the Parish Hall and thought “this was going to be a repeat of the last two encounters”. That is until this guy walked up to me and said, “I don't think we have met. My name is Billy Harrison.” ELEVEN words that made a huge difference for me. Thanks be to God!

**The Peace of the Lord be always with you.
And also, with you!**

Larry Kelley



Sunday, March 30, 2025

Romans 2:1-3 NIV

¹*You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.*

²*Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.*

³*So when you, a mere human being, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment?*

This Lenten season is an important time for me. I will use the season to improve my focus on Christ in a living relationship with God who knows me completely. We have such a need for truth that is not our distorted version that all media wishes to use to amplify our own (or our groups') popular secular views and "truths". This is exacerbated through choices we each make, and the tendency in society for passing judgement on others.

The Bible offers us much to reflect on through the millennia as to how humans have failed to stay focused on God's truth. Humans have spent time in selfish gratification, pridefully believing they had been chosen and had special wisdom and privileged relations with God even as they turned away from God. I am reflecting on the small and big ways that I personally think of myself. Am I as critical of myself as I am of others? What do I look past in myself, without building deeper insights or knowledge of God's truth. What causes me to focus on others instead of myself. Am I selectively filtering out the realities of my personality, emphasizing enthusiasm for how I have been called to serve God, and thereby drawing in others by directing them and encouraging them away from their call. How well do I help them by hearing them share God's call to use their gifts?

This Lent may just be the level of discomfort I need to really allow my call for God's help to result in opening up new conversations and understanding of my own choices, courage and skills to share my understanding of the truth I find in Christ in my life. What changes can I witness to seeing in myself, in my choices and living a life that trusts God with all judgement and focus on sharing His Good News in my life.

I do find some of the toughest and harshest lessons in Paul's letters. I also hear encouragement, and am excited by the amazing example of Christ, and his Apostle Paul whose life was turned in a 360 degree direction. At Men's Retreat this year and in our small group Bible Study I was particularly moved by the letter to the Ephesians and how that truth of God's love and Grace is transforming.

My Prayer this lent:

Dear Heavenly Father,

Please deepen my understanding of your truth, grace and saving call on my life, so that I might move from judging others to bearing witness to your truth and how it directs me in this life. Give me courage to listen and assurance that you are my faithful God who is Almighty and will provide me strength when it is required in your ways and not limited only to human ways. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.

Peter Williams



Monday, March 31, 2025

Matthew 9:9

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and he said to him, “Follow me.” And he got up and followed him.

A tax collector could be either an independent contractor with the Roman government, who paid a fee to Rome to obtain the right to extract taxes from the people in a certain area, with an added fee for the collector and his employees; or he might have also been a toll collector for Herod Antipas. Capernaum was an area with a high traffic of people and merchants. In any case, Levi-Matthew would have been a very unpopular individual. (Wikipedia, “Calling of Matthew”)

There is no previous mention of Matthew having an encounter with Jesus. I am really amazed by this story. In a land of wide-spread poverty, Matthew holds a cushy job that he probably paid a significant fee for. Jesus says, “Follow me,” and he gets up and follows him.

Why didn’t Matthew respond, “Are you nuts? I paid a lot of money for this job.” What is our response when someone asks us to do something really easy such as come to Brotherhood of St. Andrew or Women’s Bible Study? Sometimes I think I say “Yes” too often, but my wife tells me I should be grateful that people invite me.

The alternative, she says, is that I hang around the house and drive her crazy.

Much better that I follow Jesus!

Tom Mimms





Tuesday, April 1, 2025

He leads the humble in the right way and teaches them his will. Psalm 25:9

Humility— “A modest or low view of one’s own importance. Modesty. Humbleness.”

Every night when I say my prayers, one of my petitions is to grant me the gift of humility. As a lay chaplain with Community of Hope International (COHI), I strive to follow the Rule of Benedict. The rule lists twelve steps of humility: fear of God, self-denial, obedience, perseverance, repentance, serenity, self-abasement, prudence, silence, dignity, discretion, and reverence.

Humility is something not often stressed in media today. It often seems we are encouraged to be aggressive, self-centered, impatient, judgmental, overly verbal, and irreverent. Church attendance is down. God may be seen as an “old-fashioned” concept.

As Lent is a time to reflect on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for the salvation of mankind, the importance of the virtue of humility becomes more apparent. I found the following passages of scripture on which to reflect:

Proverbs 22:4 - Obey the Lord, be humble, and you will get riches, honor, and a long life.

James 4:10 - Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.

Colossians 3:12 - You are the people of God; He loved you and chose you for his own. So then, you must clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Ephesians 4:2 - Be always humble, gentle and patient. Show your love by being tolerant with one another.

Philippians 2:3-8 - Don’t do anything from selfish ambition or from a cheap desire to boast, but be humble toward one another, always considering others better than yourselves.

Proverbs 11:2 - People who are proud will soon be disgraced. It is wiser to be modest

Romans 12:16 - Have the same concern for everyone. Do not be proud but accept humble duties. Do not think of yourselves as wise.

Luke 14:11 - For everyone who makes himself great will be humbled, and everyone who humbles himself will be made great.

Proverbs 11:2 - People who are proud will soon be disgraced. It is wiser to be modest.

Micah 6:8 - The Lord has told us what is good. What he requires of us is this: to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God.

As we pray our way through Lent, let us remember the importance of humility as we kneel at the foot of the cross.

Pamela Robinson



Wednesday, April 2, 2025

John 14:16

I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”

John 3:16

For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

As believers, we belong to Jesus. As church members, St Peter and St Paul is our destination to worship, learn, serve others, and to have fellowship with one another. But central to our membership is Jesus.

Take a look at all the crosses in our church, nave and sanctuary. What do you see? The many crosses are a reminder of Jesus, the Sacrificial Lamb, who was freely given for the sins of the whole world.

This Sacrificial Lamb wants to have a relationship with each one of us. He loves us with an inexpressible, unimaginable love. Otherwise, He would not have bothered to get on that Cross and experience the most extreme pain and humiliation known to man. He had foreknowledge that he would be abandoned by his Father. He willingly took the sins of the whole world to Hell for our sake, because He has an unfathomable love for us. He did this because he wants to live in relationship with us forever. This was his original plan, because He knew we would muck it up by committing the Original Sin.

Because of this demonstration that He loved us first, we should run to Him like a three-year old would run to an adored parent. How would you feel if your child reached out to you only when they wanted something, only to be followed by cold silence for months on end? Wouldn't that break your heart? How do we think Jesus feels when we don't connect with Him? It hurts Him deeply to be ignored, especially after all He has done for us.

It is only by Jesus' sacrifice of Himself and His Resurrection, not our sacrifice of praise, obedience, and works, that we can live with Him forever in Paradise. To believe that works alone can save us is to discount what Jesus did. The Scribes and Pharisees were model citizens of their time. But did they love Jesus and have an intimate relationship with Him? No! It should be remembered that our works are the demonstration of our fruits and devotion to Him. But they are not our only link to Him – and it is a weak link if we don't have a strong relationship with Him.

Jesus is very approachable. In addition to being King of Heaven, He is our brother and our friend. He accepts us just as we are. He doesn't expect us to be perfect. If we were, there would be no reason for Lent. Talk to Him. Share your gratitude and concerns each day. He is waiting to hear from all of us.

Linda Kepler



Thursday, April 3, 2025

Hebrews 3:1

".....fix your thoughts on Jesus.....". jumped off the page at me. We read from a few translations that stated the Bible verse phrase a little differently.

(NIV)

".....fix your thoughts on Jesus....."

(CEB)

".....think about Jesus....."

(BSB)

".....set your focus on Jesus....."

(CJB)

".....think carefully about Yeshua....."

(GW)

".....look carefully at Yeshua....."

(KJV)

".....consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession....."

SPSP Men's Holy Bible study, every Thursday at 7AM, has recently completed the study of Kings and moved to Hebrews. Last week we focused on Hebrews 3.

All of the translations made me think of how Peter was walking on water while he had his eyes fixed on Jesus but when he felt the strong wind, he took his eyes off of Jesus and began to sink.

Of course, Jesus reached out and saved Peter, reminding the apostles "You of little faith, why did you doubt?". Imagine having the faith to walk on water with our eyes and thoughts hard-and-fast on Jesus.

I tried to find other accounts of someone walking on water, but I could only find this one account of Jesus and Peter. The Bible account encourages us to keep our eyes on Jesus and not be overcome by fear, doubt, or life's challenges.

This all led me to the song "Turn your eyes upon Jesus" refrain:

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow
strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

Robert Sorrell



Friday, April 4, 2025

1 Peter 5:6-7

⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, ⁷casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.

This verse has been with me for many years—highlighted in my Bible, written on a Post-it note on my monitor at work, and something I wrestle with in my heart. However, I've recently discovered that the word "cast" suggests a more active handing over of your anxieties to God, not just passively thinking about them. In light of this information, I can see how, in the past, my contemplation of this verse was indeed passive and abstract. It was more like "wouldn't that be nice" instead of anything even resembling an active handover. So how is this done? How do we move from contemplation to action?

Well, let's start with a disclaimer: I can only tell you what has been working for me lately! Hopefully, it will spark inspiration in you.

My life revolves around severe chronic fatigue. I find myself constantly trying to figure it out and fix it instead of accepting it for what it is. I can't seem to help myself. If I have a relatively good day, what did I do differently to cause it? If I'm in a crash, what did I do wrong? Maybe this next supplement will be the cure or this injection recommended by some random person on Facebook. My mind is constantly turning, trying to find relief. But here's the kicker—if I could let that go...I could be RESTING instead, which is, in fact, the #1 recommendation for the chronic illnesses that I have. When I started to realize the absolute absurdity of trying to control my fatigue, I came back to my favorite verse: Cast your anxieties on him.

I think the key is that casting your cares on him is not a one-and-done. For me, it is done daily, hourly, and even sometimes minute by minute. Deeply entrenched neural pathways in the brain are not overcome by reading a Bible verse one time. At least, it has never worked that way for me! Ask God to help you give your cares to him, and the Holy Spirit, I believe, will help you to be mindful throughout the day to remember to let go of whatever it is that you are desperately trying to control. I've even gone so far as to make myself a physical reminder. I have a polished stone that I have placed on my home altar, which represents my fatigue. I can see it when I lay down for a nap and remember that I have given it to God, and now it is time to rest completely with my burdens lifted.

So, cast your cares on him as often as it takes, get creative, and be mindful of what it is you're trying to control in your life, and get ready for a peace that passes all understanding.

Lindsay Sexton



Saturday, April 5, 2025

“Do You Want to Be Healed?”

John 5:2-9

Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Beth-za-tha, which has 5 porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame paralyzed. One man was there, who had been ill for 38 years. When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man replied that no one was there to help him into the pool, so someone else got there first and was healed.

“Do you want to be healed?” can sound like a dumb question—who wants to be sick all the time? We all have need of healing in some form, especially the spiritual or emotional kind. The question for us to answer is, “Am I ready to be healed of fears, past resentments and frustrations, or more serious issues such as forms of abuse or neglect? Am I ready to forgive those who hurt me and live a life closely to Jesus and His love?”

It’s hard to let go of these things but put them into the hands of Jesus and tell Him, “Lord, I want to be healed. Help me overcome my fears, anger and resentments. Lead me to a life filled with You and Your love, peace and joy.”

Amen

Alison Mimms





Sunday, April 6, 2025

1 Thessalonians 5: 16 – 18

Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

When was the last time you prayed? For me, it was minutes before I started writing this devotional. (Please, Lord, give me the right words for this devotional.)

I pray throughout the day. I wake up and give a quick prayer for the privilege of another day. (“This is the day the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” Psalm 118:24 KJV) I pray during my morning devotional time.

This is usually my longest prayer of the day. I praise God, confess my sins, ask for forgiveness, and pray for others. Inspired by my parish priest in Dallas, who would stop everything to pray when he heard the fire department across the street from our church go out on a call, I pray whenever I hear a siren in the distance. (Please be with the emergency workers and those they will help. Keep them all safe.)

I have an app that reminds me to drink water - I know, silly! When the notification comes up, I use it as a reminder to thank God for the rivers of living water I receive through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit and to pray for whatever else is on my heart at that time. Other prayers are one liners (Thank you! Help me! Wow!) throughout my day.

Now, if you've ever heard me pray out loud, you know I'm not the most articulate speaker. When I pray with someone else, I feel somewhat stilted, like I should be more eloquent. I try not to let that stop me, though. God knows what's in my heart and my intentions. I find that my personal prayers are much more conversational with God. I believe that is why prayer is so important. We ought to be having conversations with God. We talk with our friends and family to stay close and connected. We need to do the same with God. Now my quick prayers are usually one-sided on my part, but during my longer prayers I try to sit and listen.

Do I “pray continually?” Sadly, no. However, this Lenten season, my goal is to increase my conversations with God and listen more carefully. Won't you join me?

Dear God, thank You for giving me prayer as a way to communicate with You and bring me closer to You. Inspire me to listen to You as well as talk to You. Please help me to make my prayers a continuous dialogue with You and use them to invite You into my life. In Jesus' name I pray.

Amen.

Kristi Story



Monday, April 7, 2025

Dear Brothers and Sisters, when troubles of any kind come your way, consider it an opportunity for great joy. for you know that when your faith is tested, your endurance has a chance to grow, So let it grow, for when your endurance is fully developed, you will be perfect and complete, needing nothing.

James 1:2-4

"James writes of troubles of any kind (Jas. 1:2) The trials we face are like polka dots. They're variegated, come in different sizes, and are dotted all over the maps of our lives. James tells us that in the face of these troubles we are to find joy. Why? First trials give us an opportunity to prove our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Second, trials have benefits for us. As we endure various trials, we will find that they are all avenues that lead back to Christ as we turn to Him in dependence. This in turn, will strengthen our faith as we learn by depending on Christ that He is strong where we are weak. Remember, there isn't any kind of pain we encounter that He has difficulty identifying with." From Charles R Swindoll

"Heb 4:15&16 "This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for He faced all of the same testings we do, yet He did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy. and we will find grace to help us when we need it most."

I chose these passages from hearing all of the caring and praying that go on in the various Church groups and realizing that we all have problems to take to the Lord.

Ken Strahm



Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.
Matthew 6:34

Last year was a "worry" year for me. Health and family issues kept me spinning plates on sticks like the guy on Ed Sullivan. (You youngsters may have to Google that!). I was in "react" mode trying to keep those plates from falling, and exhausted from the effort. "**I**" was the problem. Leaving God out of that equation was not my brightest move, but aren't we taught from an early age **you CAN do it?** Images of "Rosie the Riveter" kept popping up...another thing for the youngsters to look up.

In early December I realized I had to make a change. Twelve months was enough. What can I say? I'm a slow learner. While having a heart to heart with Don, I concluded that I needed to be intentional in my thinking. **Intentional** was going to be my Resolution for 2025. I would be intentional in my words, actions and decisions rather than reactionary. No more waiting for things to happen and then jumping through hoops. I now had a plan, and being an A personality, that means lists and checking things off. I was ready for 2025!!!

Christmas Day put an end to that in a heartbeat. Don started getting ill and soon became delirious and eventually hospitalized. But God didn't give up on me. HE kept poking me with that word, INTENTIONAL, even though I was jumping on that worry train again.

While in the hospital, trying to sleep in a straight chair I finally realized it wasn't about making plans and intentionally ignoring the chaos. Yes, it was about the right intentions in actions and words, but it was more about being intentional in my listening for GOD and handing over the reins. I was tired of driving, tired of worrying, and just plain tired. The last two months surely tested my limits, but I **KNEW** God had my back and would give me the strength to make it to the other side. Worry kept me from seeing that clearly.

The moral of the story? GOD always has my back and HE'S a much better driver. I'm keeping my word for the year, BUT turning over **ALL** the worry to HIM. **I can't, HE can, so let HIM...**

Mayra Loeber



Tuesday, April 8, 2025

The Great Escape

Galatians 5:1

“For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”

1 Peter 2:16

“Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God.”



Art expresses the human condition and teaches theological lessons. As a teacher of ethics through the lens of the arts and study of Sacred Art, Francesco Queirolo’s 18th century *Il Disanganno* (*The Release from Deception*) is a fascinating reflection of how we find ourselves entangled in our own disinformation. Sculpted from one solid block of marble, Queirolo’s God given vision for this master work was released to speak to our souls. Gazing upon this meticulously sculpted moral story, we are drawn into its complexity seeing ourselves trapped in the netting. Art enables us to come to the reality about ourselves and become aware of who we truly are.

In our original sin position, we weave our own web of self-deceit entrapping our minds, bodies, and souls. Struggling against the strong netting of sin is futile. Allowing the intervention of the Holy Spirit brings the freedom we crave. Looking back at the pile of netting from which we are freed, it amazes us with creative disinformation and deception.

The angel releases the fisherman from the netting of wrongdoing and lifts him up introducing him to the Bible. He can see himself through God’s eyes to a clear and free path to eternal life. We must beware of the web we weave for ourselves and for others.

Tom Creely



Wednesday, April 9, 2025

For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep them in all they ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Psalm 91:11-12

It is a comforting thought that God has provided guardian angels to guard and protect us. There have been three times in my life when God has sent his guardian angels to comfort and protect me.

The first time was on March 18, 1968. I was a combat engineer lieutenant/platoon leader with the U. S. Army 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam. Our mission was to lob grenades at the enemy, to try to keep them from overrunning our position. We were surrounded by a large force of North Vietnam Army/Viet Cong soldiers. They spotted me and threw a grenade at me, knocked me down, and sprayed me with shrapnel. As the battle escalated, I prayed to God to save me. All of a sudden I felt this calming feeling, and I put myself in His hands. Later that night I was medevacked out of the battlefield area to our aid station at Phuoc Vinh.

The second time I was in Northside Hospital for eleven days, most of the time in a coma with the West Nile Virus. As I came out of the coma, I felt this calming feeling, and I knew everything was going to be alright.

The third time, I was returning home from Savannah. An eighteen-wheeler cut in front of me, striking my car on the right side, spinning me around three times, and slamming me into a guard rail. My car was totaled but I was uninjured. I was standing by the side of the road in shock, with traffic flying by. I looked to the sky and said, "Thank you, Father," and, again, the calming feeling came over me.

These three events have taught me three things: the power of prayer, a belief in guardian angels, and a belief in miracles. As we travel this Lenten Road to Easter, I pray that God will send you guardian angels to guide and protect you.

Your brother in Christ,

Mike Blalock





Thursday, April 10, 2025

John 6:35

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty....”

John 6:51

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

As I come to write my Lenten devotional this year, I am thinking with gratitude of Our Lord’s presence in the Holy Eucharist. The verses quoted above from the sixth chapter of St. John’s Gospel remind me of what a priceless and precious gift Our Lord has given us in coming down to us from heaven as “living bread.” What precious promises these verses hold, and what joy and consolation they bring to us!

I am reminded, also, of the text of one of my favorite Eucharistic hymns, “Let Thy Blood in Mercy Poured.” (Number 313 in our Episcopal Hymnal):

“Let thy Blood in mercy poured, let thy gracious Body broken, be to me, O gracious Lord, of thy boundless love the token.”

“Thou didst die that I might live; blessed Lord, thou cam’st to save me; all that love of God could give Jesus by his sorrows gave me.”

“By the thorns that crowned thy brow, by the spear-wound and the nailing, by the pain and death, I now claim, O Christ, thy love unfailing.

“Thou didst give thyself for me, now I give myself to thee.”

I love this reminder that Christ’s Blood, poured out in mercy, and his broken Body, a token of boundless love, will be for me true channels of Christ’s presence and his redeeming love, if only I will receive them “in spirit and in truth.” I hope that I will be able to “claim, O Christ, thy love unfailing” by receiving the Holy Eucharist with reverence and love, and that I will have the grace to repent wholeheartedly for those times that I have not done so. May Christ’s boundless and unfailing love, demonstrated and made present in the Holy Eucharist, draw us all closer to the Throne of Grace and render us worthy to dine at Our Lord’s table in eternal life with Him!

Thanks Be to God!

George Chesnut
Director of Music & Organist



Friday, April 11, 2025
Knowing the Depth of God's Love

Ephesians 3: 17-19 ESV

“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith - that you, being rooted and grounded in LOVE, may have strength to COMPREHEND with all the saints the breadth and length and height and depth, and to KNOW the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be FILLED with all the fullness of God.”

Jeremiah 9: 23-24 ESV

“Thus says the Lord: Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he UNDERSTANDS and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I DELIGHT, declares the Lord.”

Recently, I developed an interest in reading and watching videos about near death experiences. If I was having difficulty sleeping, I'd take my iPad with me to the guest bedroom, so as not to disturb my sleeping husband, and read the stories or listen to the videos, to lull me back to sleep. It became as comforting as a childhood bedtime story, as a reminder of the depth of God's love for us in Christ. I learned that His love is like a tidal wave compared to a glass of water. Infatuation might seem big to us here on earth, but it is nothing next to the love of the God of the universe.

Although I had grown up in a Christian family, always attending worship services every chance the doors were open, I wanted a more devoted spiritual life. Sure, I could spout numerous verses throughout the Bible, but I wanted authenticity. Saying scripture by rote doesn't necessarily indicate an intimate life with Christ. Saying and doing are two entirely different things. I wanted to do intimacy, because effort on my part just wasn't cutting it. It was like being a nonstop gym rat, perfecting the outer self, but ignoring the inner self, the soul.

I envied what saints of old had: an insatiable love with the Triune God. I wanted to know the depth of His love for me as an individual: not an academic knowledge; I wanted to feel His love, thereby gaining a true peace in my soul.

Peace is not something I have enjoyed throughout my life - not a personal peace, anyway. I've always been engulfed in the sludge of life; whether it's anxiety about meeting deadlines, paying bills, having to perform with perfection in any endeavor, possessing God's peace deep within my soul is a whole other thing, and this is exactly what I gained by meditating on God's love for us.

I was taught to test everything by scripture. Sure enough, the Bible says it plain as day. God loves me. He has an intimate love for me. He knows the very hairs on my head (Matthew 10:30). He knew me in my mother's womb (Psalm 13:13). He seeks me (Ezekiel 34:11)! Just me (Matthew 18:12)! He delights in me (Zephaniah 3:17)!

Over and over, I found self-affirming scriptures that seemed to jump off the pages of the Bible. Why it hadn't made sense before, I don't know, but now, it was coming together for me. The self-condemnation, perfectionism, guilt over past sins, resentment of past hurts all seemed to dissipate. I desired to be lifted heavenward and focus only on the Divine. Living in the knowing of God's delight in me has changed the way I want everyday life to be. It's an elevation, so to speak. To live on earth with a heavenward mindset is nothing like living without it. There is no comparison. Staying this way is to let go of all the muck and mire I mentioned before. Let go of all the negativity. Focus on His love demonstrated by sending His Son Christ to die and resurrect for our sins.

The beauty around me is so much brighter when I dedicate my every moment to live in His love.

Linda Kepler



Saturday, April 12, 2025

Paul's Travel's to Caesarea

"I have shown you all things, how that so laboring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive." Acts 20 vs 35

The Dictionary defines Bless, blessed or blessing in many ways:

1. to consecrate or sanctify by a religious rite; make or pronounce holy.
2. to request of God the bestowal of divine favor on: *Bless this house*
3. to bestow good of any kind upon: *a nation blessed with peace.*
4. to extol as holy; glorify: *Bless the name of the Lord*, and my favorite
5. to protect or guard from evil (usually used as an interjection): *Bless you!*

For some time now I try to make it a habit to say to those I interact with at the store or elsewhere when parting, to "have a Blessed Day!" Sometimes I get a response of "thank you" or "you too" or no response at all. But this particular day, I truly felt God was in this moment when the woman serving samples at Costco replied "I think I just did" with a beautiful smile on her face. She not only received the blessing I wished her, but with her words returned that blessing to me tenfold!

Have a Blessed Day!

Linda Dill



Amos 5:22-26

Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them, and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs. I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like water and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. Did you bring to me sacrifices and offerings the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel? You shall take up Sakkuth your king and Kaiwan your star god, your images, which you made for yourselves.

Every year during the season of Lent, I am drawn to the book of the prophet Amos. Amos stands as a bold admonition that fasts, feasts and festivals are all well and good, but ultimately meaningless if we neglect to live as Christ taught us. If we fast, but aren't merciful, we are doing nothing more than a health cleanse. If we offer our sacrifices to God, but still turn to idols, we are merely trying to trick God. It is the acme of foolishness to think that our actions will pull the wool over God's eyes. Instead, his love, grace, and mercy cover all our inadequacies. As we follow Christ, we are transformed by the Holy Spirit to be more like him. We live and proclaim God's justice, love, mercy, grace and forgiveness.

Nathan Webb



Sunday, April 13, 2025

Palm Sunday

The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, “Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—the King of Israel!” Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it; as it is written: “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion. Look, your king is coming, sitting on a donkey’s colt!” [Zechariah 9:9] His disciples did not understand these things at first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him.... The Pharisees said one to another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him.
John 12:12-16

EXPECTATIONS

Crowd: What a day! What joy! The Passover Feast is here. The true Messiah is coming. He just raised Lazarus from the dead in Bethany yesterday, so we know he is the One, and now he’s coming to Jerusalem. Life as a Jew is going to be great after he kicks out the Romans. Once again this will be the land of milk and honey. Our King is coming! Look there he is! Where’s his big horse, his chariot? He’s riding a donkey – not even a donkey, a foal of a donkey. Well, ok, Zechariah told us he would come on a donkey. Let’s cut the palm branches and put them in the street for him anyway. He probably has a better plan with this donkey subterfuge. Hosanna”

Disciples: What is going on? All this time with him he told us to keep quiet about his miracles and who he really is. And now, he comes to Jerusalem, after raising Lazarus in front of all those people in Bethany, and he heads up a parade to show himself to everyone, including the Pharisees, who don’t like him and want him out of the way. We told him not to come. This isn’t going to turn out well.

Pharisees: This is getting out of hand. This guy is a blaspheming heretic. We have to stop him.

Jesus: “Jerusalem, you who kill prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” Matthew 23:37

Each party had a part to play and had an expectation on this day. The **crowd** expected a mighty warrior king to turn their world upside down – put them on top and the Romans and Gentiles on the bottom. Hosanna – save us. And He did, but not in the way they envisioned. Some understood later and others did not. Are we in that crowd? Do we pray to be saved from somethings in our lives and later find that we are saved, but not in the way we wanted or expected? Do we accept Jesus’ saving grace or do we reject it like the Jerusalem had, that he saw and knew before his entrance to it on Palm Sunday.

The **disciples** expected more miracles, more teaching, more time with this wondrous man they had left everything behind to follow. They expected him to continue doing things more in the background, not in front of and in the face of the Pharisees and scribes. They were confused and fearful. They expected him to stay safe and keep them safe. Are we with them? Do we look to stay in the background with our faith and works, while at the same time expecting miracles? Are we afraid to show ourselves as Jesus people to the world – afraid to be denigrated, ostracized, ignored, laughed at, humiliated. I have been.

The **Pharisees** had an expectation of Jesus being a challenge to their authority as the moral arbiters of the social order. They and their ancestors had spent centuries establishing rules and regulations to keep Jewish society running smoothly (often for them) and “correctly,” according to their interpretation of God’s laws. They did not have an expectation of allowing anything new to be in opposition or even collateral to their rigid interpretations of how things should be. Are we ever Pharisees? I know I often find myself in that position. I am not always open to change, especially if it threatens my comfort zones. As a life-long Episcopalian, I love the liturgy and did not like the change to Rite II. But I had to accept it and now I love it more than Rite I. As a lawyer, I like the security of the law. But at times I had to make creative

interpretations to find justice and rightness, when the law seemed too rigid. Change is difficult when it calls for sacrifice from us and threatens our security.

Jesus had great expectations – expectation of a kingship. But he knew and expected for that to occur many dark things were going to happen. He had an expectation of being glorified, but he knew he would have to be abandoned by the crowd, betrayed and abandoned by his disciples, tried by the Pharisees, tortured by the Romans, and die. He expected all of that as he rode into Jerusalem. And he grieved for the people of Jerusalem who were going to do these things and had done them in the past to those sent by God.

But Jesus knew that his sacrifice of himself to the horrible darkness of the coming week would create a new order, a new world, but not the world expected by the crowd, the disciples, or the Pharisees. The values of their world on that day were expectations for self-interest, power over others, competition that harms others, pride in oneself. The newly created world Jesus was to bring was and is one where the values are humility, service above self-interest, thankfulness to our God, who has provided everything we need and could ever want. Jesus expectation to be glorified was met in that his sacrifice allowed this new world to be created; it allowed all mankind to once again come to and be with God, as if we were back in Eden. His sacrifice of himself made original sin forgiven. The veil in the Temple was torn so that all could come into God's presence again, not just the High Priest. Jesus became the permanent, eternal High Priest for all of mankind, eternally offering His sacrifice for our sins.

His sacrifice met the expectations of the crowd, the disciples and the Pharisees, just not in the way they expected. The disciples understood this after the crucifixion and resurrection, and by the Holy Spirit they spread this good news of our sins being forgiven by His sacrifice throughout the world and down to us. How often are our expectations for help with the values held by the crowd, the disciples, the Pharisees? I know mine are like that every day. I have to remember every day the joy that comes with knowing that Jesus has already met every expectation that I could ever have. What a relief! What a great joyous day Palm Sunday was, and is, that He decided to go to Jerusalem.

Billy Harrison





Monday, April 14, 2025

For by grace, you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. Ephesians 2: 8-9

My spiritual life has been quite an evolutionary journey. I grew up Methodist, believed in God, but that's about all I knew. In high school I attended some

Baptist revivals. At one such revival, I was given a cartoon booklet to read. It was about a high school kid who was captain of the football team and quite popular. All the girls loved him. He smoked, drank, and danced (GASP!). While driving, he had a wreck, died, and went up to heaven. God showed him a reel of his sinful life, then kicked him down to Hell to live an eternity of damnation. This greatly affected me and my understanding of God.

When I was in my late 20's I attended what I call a "fundamentalist protestant" church. I began to truly learn about Jesus. I was told I had to be born again and ask Jesus into my life. It was a moving experience when I got down on my knees and turned my life to Christ. It was preached to me that ONLY those who make such a declaration will go to Heaven. So now my faith moved to where I could actually do something (Getting saved) to enter Heaven, and I would not have to worry about my sins keeping me out. THANK YOU! That image of God kicking me into Hell had haunted me for years.

In 1989 my father was dying. He was a great man and a loving father. He always attended church. But Daddy had never made a "public declaration" asking Jesus to come into his life. I was greatly distressed and worried about his soul. I carried this weight in my heart for years.

Then one day my eyes were opened to the Cross. It is here where my Lord showed pure love and grace through the ultimate sacrifice of his Son. God does not sit on a throne to kick sinners down to Hell. If He did, no one would be in Heaven. For as the saying goes, "Only sinners go to Heaven." Nor is there anything we can do to "earn" our way into Heaven. None of us are justified. Jesus died on the Cross for ALL who believe in Him – however they believe. There are no special hoops one must jump through to receive this gift from God. I know my Daddy believed in Jesus and I now know - without question - that he is in Heaven ready to greet me when I enter. I cannot begin to express the consolation I felt upon understanding this realization.

My faith grew from Unknowing, to Fear, to Action, to Acceptance – acceptance through Faith of this unconditional gift from Jesus Christ and the Grace from God. I will never know all the answers. But what I do know for sure is this: **The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard my heart and my mind in Christ Jesus.**

And therein lies my Hope, and my Peace.

Stuart Wright



Tuesday, April 15, 2025

John 9:25

He answered, "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see"

We find in Chapter 9 of the Gospel of John, the familiar story of the blind man who has his sight restored by Jesus as he was passing by with his disciples.

This action by Jesus and how a man who was blind at birth can now see, becomes the talk of the town. He was asked by his neighbors "who is he?" that cured him, and he answered, "I do not know".

It then comes to the attention of the Pharisees and the man is summoned to appear before them as they are certain it is some type of scam. They then summon his parents and have the man appear a second time. All three times the Pharisees want to know the "who, how and what". His parents respond, "*we do not know how it is that now he sees, nor do we know who opened his eyes*". The man himself responds with a simple "*One thing I do know, that whereas I was blind, now I see*". Centuries later his response will become a well-known phrase in the hymn *Amazing Grace*.

In our faith journey we are often asked how do you know that there is a living God, and that we are saved through Grace from Christ Jesus? The doubters often ask where is your proof, where is the evidence and how do you **really** know?

I believe that in my faith journey there has been a key element of mystery. How do I really know? It is hard to describe to others, especially non-believers, the presence of the Holy Spirit within you and the comfort that it brings. Hard to describe the feeling of peace one gets from reading scripture, prayer and communal worship.

Does my faith suffer, and I am less certain because there is an element of mystery involved in my belief? I do not because whereas before I was blind, I now can see and feel the presence of God within me because of the Grace that comes only from Christ Jesus.

As we say, most Sundays during Communion:

"Therefore, we proclaim the **mystery** of faith:

Christ has died

Christ has risen

Christ will come again"

And that is **really** all I need to know!

John Bareham



Wednesday, April 16, 2025

Ecclesiastes 3:9-15

What gain have the workers from their toil? I have seen the business that God has given to everyone to be busy with. He has made everything suitable for its time; moreover, he has put a sense of past and future into their minds, yet they cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it nor anything taken from it; God has done this so that all should stand in awe before him. That which is already has been, that which is to be already is, and God seeks out what has gone by.

This passage gave me great comfort when I was younger, and my parents wanted me to do something. It was always nice to be able to reply, "The Bible says, 'What gain does a worker have from his toil?'" and to go back to whatever it was that I wanted to do.

What I had failed to realize is that this isn't a "get out of work free" card. Rather, it is a stark reminder that only the things that God does will ultimately remain. If I do something just because it's what I want, or it's what I think is right, it will crumble back into dust. I find that incredibly comforting. I don't have to worry about being perfect, doing enough or getting it right. God does all the work, and we get to participate in what he is doing and rest knowing that he is in control.

Nathan Webb





Thursday, April 17, 2025
Maundy Thursday

Luke 22:14-15

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer..."

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As we begin the Sacred Triduum (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday,) it is easy to think of all that lies before us. The number of services, the things to plan for and prepare, it can seem daunting.

I've always loved this passage and that this is how Jesus begins his Passion. Jesus is about to be arrested, tried, tortured and executed, and what does he do? He reclines at a table and enjoys a dinner with his friends. Despite everything going on around him, he rests and enjoys the company of those around him. He knows that he is about to suffer, and yet he still eagerly desires to eat this Passover with them. Not only that, but he desires to share it with us as well.

Each time we celebrate the Eucharist, Christ invites us to join him at his table where he shares with and feeds us, not just with bread and wine, but himself.

Nathan Webb



Psalm 121:1

I lift up my eyes to the hills,

From where does my help come?

My help comes from the LORD,

Who made heaven and earth.

No question, this year has been a rough one. To be perfectly honest, it's been nothing less than an ordeal, as I've endured serious, chronic health problems. Relentlessly painful, often agonizing--with no clear resolution in sight. Pursuing every imaginable avenue of relief, I have come mighty close to frustration, despair--all out despondency, in fact.

I have to admit, at times it's been tempting to give in and give up. Awfully tempting.

Gradually, however, I've come to realize that my current sufferings also offer an opportunity to grow spiritually: to grow more fully human. My road to recovery, the path toward true healing, therefore begins (as it must) with acceptance – acceptance of my present situation, however undesirable. After all, this patch in my life is but temporary, a moment in time, fleeting as all things are ultimately fleeting in this earthly existence.

I still hold the power to lean on my faith. And that is a choice forever open to all.

As the saying goes: " Let go and let God."

Will Weidman



Friday, April 18, 2025

Good Friday

Matthew 27: 51

At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, and the rocks were split.

WHAT DID YOU GIVE UP FOR LENT?

So often I have heard the question “what did you give up for lent?” and for years, I thought of this as a sacrifice we make or a small fast (as many times, it is food that I give up) to show our devotion to God. However, as I have grown in my faith, I believe that these things that I “give up” are a good way to help me grow closer to God.

When I give something up, when I sacrifice something, I like to do or like to eat, it makes me think more about the true reason I am making this sacrifice. I think about the “Sacrifice” that God made for me. I think of Christ on the cross at Calvary. I see the curtain in the temple torn in two from top to bottom (Matthew 27: 51). I think about the blood of Christ Jesus washing over me and sanctifying me so that I can be reconciled with God.

I see the great “Sacrifice” that God made so that we all have the opportunity to actually develop the deeper and more meaningful relationship with our Lord that he so desperately desires to have with each and every one of us. I think about God’s grace and steadfast love that never changes.

This all makes me see that the question is not “what did you give up for lent?” but rather “what did God give up for us?”

Peace,

Terry Sheehan





HOLY SATURDAY
April 19, 2025

He is not here, for He has risen. Luke 24:5

Holy Saturday ... to me it is a day of Quiet ... Stillness ... a time to pause and to reflect on the meaning of Jesus' death on the day before we celebrate the Resurrection. What does it mean for you; how has it transformed you and the way you live your life? As you think about this on your journey of faith, let me offer a thought or two.

One thing that frustrates those who are skeptical about the Resurrection is that, obviously, something happened on that first Easter. No one was expecting a resurrection. The disciples were dispirited and in hiding. Then suddenly their dampened spirits were ignited. They became so emboldened that they would risk their lives in storming the world with their good news.

SOMETHING HAPPENED! God raises a dead Jesus to life on the third day. The drastically good and the unexpectedly gracious God comes through the walls of the disciples' fear and bestows peace instead of acrimony. He didn't have to do it, but he did. Such is the unexpected nature of grace. This come-back-to-life Jesus accepts and does not shame; He edifies and never seeks to get even. Jesus releases from fear and then empowers the disciples with the Holy Spirit, sending them forth as agents of redemption and release.

This whole event teaches that the life of faith, in the last analysis, is anything but predictable, anything but planned, anything but boring. And if it has gotten that way, then a freak visit by the resurrected Lord into the fearful confines of the "closed doors" of a moribund and predictable religion is the earth-jarring event needed to keep an unexpectant church on its toes.

Contrary to any general impression, the Resurrection of Jesus was not simply the resurrection of Jesus' physical body. It was neither a completely physical event nor a totally spiritual event. The tomb was empty, but when Jesus appeared to his disciples, it was obvious to them that Jesus' physical body had been transformed. Here was a new and different reality. This is what resurrection is. It is God transforming us and, ultimately, all things into a new creation. Can we describe it? Words could not carry such freight even if our minds could comprehend it. The higher realm is not subject to time and space. It is a mysterious dimension of reality.

And one last thought: the Gospels do not explain the Resurrection. The Resurrection explains the Gospels. Belief in the Resurrection is not an appendage to the Christian Faith. It is Christian Faith! Probably the most meaningful single sentence that human ears ever heard or can hear is, "**He is not here ... for he has Risen.**"

Bishop Don Wimberly





EASTER SUNDAY
Sunday, April 20, 2025

“Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here but has risen.” Luke 24:5b

Dear Friends in Christ,

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Today we celebrate the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. Today the power of sin and death and hell are conquered, and the power of God gives us forgiveness, reconciliation with him and with each other, and new life in Christ that will never die. All that we have laid at the feet of Jesus in Lent pales in comparison to the richness of knowing Jesus and being known by him.

As the first disciples learned and passed on to us, Jesus changes our lives by giving us his life. No longer do the days ahead look like death, but rather each day is filled with the power and presence of God. Every day is a gift from God (even the hard days). Jesus shows us that suffering and loss do not have the last word, and that we can even find the presence of God with us in those hard days. And through it all and at the end of it all, we will find the fullness of life that God gives us.

This new life infects who we are today, infects our family and friends and neighbors. God’s grace and mercy working in us can further transform the world around us. Do you want more of that life in your life? Pursue God even as God pursues you; share with others the delight of discovering God’s love, and live more and more into God’s dream for you, alive in new life in Christ.

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Yours in Christ,

-Tom





Lent, Holy Week, & Easter Worship Services

The First Sunday of Lent - March 8 & 9

Maundy Thursday April 17 at 7:30PM

Good Friday, April 18 at 7AM, Noon, and 7:30PM

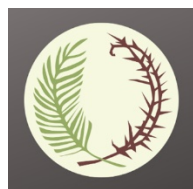
The Great Vigil of Easter - Saturday, April 19 at 8:30PM

Easter Sunday, April 20

8AM Service - Choir with Brass

10:30AM Service - Choir with Brass & with mild incense

Easter Egg Hunt - 9:30am in Children's Chapel



Lenten Resources

Lenten Devotional - Comprised of devotional writings by our parishioners and clergy. Printed copies available today. Daily writings will also be available beginning March 2 at peterandpaul.org and on our social media.

Liturgy of the Ordinary: Churchwide Study - Starting March 2nd. through the season of Lent, all the Sunday School classes and several other bible studies and small groups are all reading the same book, "The Liturgy of the Ordinary."

Stations of the Cross - In the Nave with Amy Stillwell, Wednesdays from 11:30am-noon, beginning March 9

Stations of the Cross - Outdoors and self-guided. The Way of the Cross booklet will be available on the credenza in the Children's Ministry area which is located near the first cross, beginning March 2

Labyrinth - Outdoors & self-guided, near the pavilion at the back of the church

Lectio Divina - Led by Amy Stillwell on Sunday nights from 7-7:30PM via Zoom

Prayer Beads - Several instructional resources are available

Additional details about for many of the Lenten Resources are available at peterandpaul.org/lentresources