

Remembrance

Lenten Devotional 2026

This year the forty days of Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on February 18th and runs through the joy of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday, April 5th. Lent is a time for reflection, repentance, and renewal for Christians. It is the most important time of the year to nurture our inner self as we prepare to celebrate the mystery of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- Reflection and nourishing our soul can be accomplished in many ways including worship, music, prayer, Bible studies, and serving others, just to name a few.
- Repentance (regret or remorse) is an attitude in which we are willing to let go of the things that prevent us from growing in spiritual maturity.
- Renewal is a continuing process of the death of the old and familiar, and being reborn into new hope, new trust, new love, and new joy; being born into a new creation!

In *Remembrance*, we will focus on Jesus' earthly life, crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Included are daily devotions Monday through Friday and Holy Week through Easter Sunday. Please note that Holy Week will not align with the dates on the calendar. This is intentional. Saturdays and Sundays are filled with prayers from The Book of Common Prayers, Scripture, or hymns from the United Methodist Hymnal. Each day begins with Scripture readings from the NLT (New Living Translation) Bible unless otherwise noted. If you do not have a Bible, contact the church office and they will be happy to give you one.

God reveals Biblical truths to us as we grow closer to Him. My prayer is that this devotional will reveal new truths to you to help you better understand God's Word, strengthen your faith, and increase your love for Jesus, all to help you become a stronger Christian.

God's blessings on your journey!

Remembrance is written by Nancy Mahowald who is a member of Coon Rapids United Methodist Church in Coon Rapids, MN. Anyone who would like to use this devotional, in whole or in part, has permission if it is used to advance the Kingdom of God.

Notes:

February 18 - Ash Wednesday

“When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, neither wild plants nor grains were growing on the earth. For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land. Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.” (Genesis 2:4b-7)

Ash Wednesday is the first day of Lent, a 40-day period leading to Easter Sunday. There are several 40-day references in the Bible including the 40 days and 40 nights of rain during the flood of Noah and the Ark in the book of Genesis, the 40 days that Moses sat on Mount Sinai receiving instructions, including the 10 Commandments, to bring back to the people in the book of Exodus, and the time that Elijah *“traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.”* In the book of 1-Kings. The forty days of Lent, however, are identified with the time that Jesus spent 40 days in the desert when He was being tempted by Satan. We will cover Jesus’ temptations in a few days.

The ashes we receive remind us that God created us from the dust of the earth and when we die, we will return to dust. The ashes are traditionally taken from the palm leaves we waved on Palm Sunday when Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem. They are burned down to ash and mixed with oil to be placed on your hand or forehead. When they are placed, the Pastor or another leader of the church will say, “Remember that you were made from dust and to dust you will return.” Which reminds us, *“The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man’s nostrils, and the man became a living person.”* during the Creation in Genesis 2:7. Or they may say, “Repent and believe in the Gospel.” because the Gospels record the life of Jesus.

When you receive the Wednesday ashes, whether in-person at church or at home in your heart, may you remember the cross from so many years ago. That cross held our Savior, Jesus. He was betrayed, accused, beaten, humiliated, and nailed to a cross to die. It was God’s plan to reconcile us to Himself and Jesus bore the burden of our sin, the sin of all humanity.

Prayer: Oh Lord, forgive me for my part in your crucifixion. How do I ever repay the pain of your sacrifice for me? Amen.

February 19 – Jesus Prays for All Believers

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me. Father, I want these whom you have given me to be with me where I am. Then they can see all the glory you gave me because you loved me even before the world began! O righteous Father, the world doesn’t know you, but I do; and these disciples know you sent me. I have revealed you to them, and I will continue to do so. Then your love for me will be in them, and I will be in them.”

(John 17:20-26)

Right before this scripture passage, Jesus prayed for himself, knowing that the time had come for His crucifixion. Then He prayed for His current disciples that they be protected from the evil one while they were doing the work on earth that they were called to do. Then He prayed for “*all who will ever believe in me.*” Did you know that Jesus prayed for you? He did.

His prayer centers on unity, protection from the evil one, and holiness. Jesus prayed that all the people who would ever believe in Him would feel the same unity that Jesus felt with His Father and that God felt with Jesus. If we remain in close communication with Jesus through prayer, we remain in unity. We can feel unity among ourselves if we are living in unity with God. Each feeds the other.

Then Jesus asks for us to be protected from Satan. We need that protection to help us turn away from things of this world that are evil and harmful to us and keep our focus on what is good and holy and beneficial to our lives.

Then He prays for our holiness. If we live out spiritual practices such as prayer, worship, giving of our talents, time, and money, fasting, reflection, meditation, journaling, connection to nature, and service to others, we grow stronger spiritually. It’s like exercising our bodies to become stronger physically. Spiritual practices help give us clarity and peace, give us a more meaningful life, lead us toward personal transformation, and deepen our connection to God.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for your prayer for me and for all believers. God, thank you for protecting me from the evil one. Holy Spirit, help all Christians to be unified through you. Amen.

February 20 – Jesus’ Temptations

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted there by the devil. For forty days and forty nights he fasted and became very hungry. During that time the devil came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But Jesus told him, ‘No! The Scriptures say, “People do not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.”’ Then the devil took him to the holy city, Jerusalem, to the highest point of the Temple, and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, jump off! For the Scriptures say, “He will order his angels to protect you. And they will hold you up with their hands so you won’t even hurt your foot on a stone.”’ Jesus responded, ‘The Scriptures also say, “You must not test the Lord your God.”’ Next the devil took him to the peak of a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ‘I will give it all to you,’ he said, ‘if you will kneel down and worship me.’ ‘Get out of here, Satan,’ Jesus told him. ‘For the Scriptures say, “You must worship the Lord your God and serve only him.”’ Then the devil went away, and angels came and took care of Jesus.” (Matthew 4:1-11)

Forty days of Lent. For forty days in the wilderness Jesus was alone with Satan. The devil tempted Jesus in every way he could imagine but Jesus never took the bait. Have you wondered how you would fare if it was you vs. Satan? Well, you don’t have to wait long, do you? You are tempted by him every day. You have choices to make. Will you listen to Satan or will you listen for the voice of your Lord and follow Him?

Our temptations and the way we respond to them are life-altering. We know we shouldn’t lie, or steal, or cheat. But knowing we shouldn’t and not giving in to the temptation are two different things. If we get caught up with the wrong people, temptations can quickly escalate. When we’re young and choose the wrong friends, we can get into trouble by following the crowd. We don’t want to be different, do we? We don’t want to look like a wimp! We don’t want to be on the outside looking in.

After my daughter was an adult, I asked her if she ever did drugs when she was younger. She said she had never even seen drugs in high school. That surprised me only because I knew that in the early to mid-eighties the high school that she went to had an alarming drug problem. I told her that was a testament to the friends she chose then. She turned away from the kids who were troublemakers and gravitated toward those who were basically the good kids. Thank you, Lord, for her choices then. She is still friends with the entire group that hung out together back in the day!

What if Satan came to you and told you that he would give you everything your heart desired? The only thing you had to do was get down on your knees and worship him. Be honest now ... could you resist?

Prayer: Oh, Father, I know that I face temptations each and every day. Send your Spirit to help me stay strong enough to resist them and guide me to make right choices. In your Son’s Name I pray, amen.

February 21

From the United Methodist Hymnal #268:

Lent

*O God our deliverer,
you led your people of old through the wilderness
and brought them to the promised land.
Guide now the people of your church, that
following our Savior,
we may walk through the wilderness of this world
toward the glory of the world to come;
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God, now and forever. Amen.*

The Lutheran Book of Worship, 1978
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From The Book of Common Prayer

*Almighty God,
your blessed Son was led by the Spirit
to be tempted by Satan.
Come quickly to help us who are
assaulted by many temptations.
And, as you know the weakness of each of us,
let each one find you mighty to save;
through Jesus Christ your Son, our Lord.*

*O God, your glory is always to have mercy.
Be gracious to all who have gone astray from your ways,
and bring them again with penitent hearts and steadfast faith
to embrace and hold fast the unchangeable truth of your Word,
Jesus Christ your Son,
who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

February 23 – Jesus Heals the Lame

“When Jesus returned to Capernaum several days later, the news spread quickly that he was back home. Soon the house where he was staying was so packed with visitors that there was no more room, even outside the door. While he was preaching God’s word to them, four men arrived carrying a paralyzed man on a mat. They couldn’t bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, so they dug a hole through the roof above his head. Then they lowered the man on his mat, right down in front of Jesus. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralyzed man, ‘My child, your sins are forgiven.’ But some of the teachers of religious law who were sitting there thought to themselves, ‘What is he saying? This is blasphemy! Only God can forgive sins!’ Jesus knew immediately what they were thinking, so he asked them, ‘Why do you question this in your hearts? Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man “Your sins are forgiven,” or “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk”? So I will prove to you that the Son of Man has the authority on earth to forgive sins.’ Then Jesus turned to the paralyzed man and said, ‘Stand up, pick up your mat, and go home!’ And the man jumped up, grabbed his mat, and walked out through the stunned onlookers. They were all amazed and praised God, exclaiming, ‘We’ve never seen anything like this before!’” (Mark 2:1-12)

The houses in Jesus’ day were made of stone, and the roofs were made of a mixture of mud and straw. Often, they had stairs on the outside of the house to get up to the roof.

This paralytic was a lucky man in that he had close friends who truly cared for him. This is evident because the four of them were willing to carry their friend on a mat to the house where Jesus was inside preaching to the people. The house was packed and it was standing room only outside so the four carried their friend up the stairs to the roof. Just imagine the commotion inside when they felt dried up mud and straw bits fall on them and then they saw hands making a hole in the roof! And what happened next was unbelievable. The lame man was lowered down on his mat right in front of Jesus so that he could be healed.

Before saying to the paralytic, “Get up,” Jesus said, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” Now, why would He say that? The man came for healing so that he could walk! The religious leaders were in attendance, too, and that statement, “Son, your sins are forgiven.” was blasphemous! And blasphemy was punishable by death. Only God could forgive sins.

The religious leaders believed that Jesus could not be God. They had come to listen to Jesus for just this opportunity. Now they had the evidence they needed to get rid of Jesus. But Jesus knew what they were thinking. *“Why do you question this in your hearts? Is it easier to say to the paralyzed man ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or ‘Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk’? It would be easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’ Who could determine whether it had actually happened? But if one says, ‘Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk’, and the lame man cannot move, the one who spoke is clearly an imposter. But the paralytic got up immediately and walked out amazing everyone! What Jesus can do is beyond our understanding. Have faith in the miracles of God!*

Prayer: O Lord, thank you for healing the man who could not walk and proving your authority over those religious leaders. I marvel at your majesty and your power. Amen.

February 24 – Healing of the Lepers

“As Jesus continued on toward Jerusalem, he reached the border between Galilee and Samaria. As he entered a village there, ten men with leprosy stood at a distance, crying out, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ He looked at them and said, ‘Go show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were cleansed of their leprosy. One of them, when he saw that he was healed, came back to Jesus, shouting, ‘Praise God!’ He fell to the ground at Jesus’ feet, thanking him for what he had done. This man was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, ‘Didn’t I heal ten men? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give glory to God except this foreigner?’ And Jesus said to the man, ‘Stand up and go. Your faith has healed you.’” (Luke 17:11-19)

In Jesus' day, people with leprosy were warned to stay away from other people. If they did have to come by you, they had to announce their presence. If someone with leprosy thought they were cured, they could go before a priest, and the priest would pronounce them 'clean'. Jesus sent the ten lepers to the priest before He healed them. They obviously believed that Jesus could heal them as they went on their way; they went in faith! By the time they reached the priest, all ten lepers were clean.

These ten were ALL healed, but only one, a Samaritan, came back to thank Jesus. The Jews hated the Samaritans. They looked down on them as an idolatrous mixed race produced when Jews from the northern kingdom intermarried with other peoples after Israel's exile. And here, the Samaritan man is the only one to come back to say thank you to Jesus for curing him. God's grace is for everyone.

When you cry out to God for help and He heals whatever problem you have, do you remember to thank Him and give Him the praise He deserves? It is possible to receive God's great gifts with an ungrateful spirit. God doesn't need our thanks, but I think He smiles when we remember. Nine of the lepers had an ungrateful spirit. The Samaritan learned that his faith played a role in his healing, and his responsiveness taught him more about Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, may I always remember to have a grateful spirit and to thank you when I recognize that my prayers have been answered. Amen

February 25 - I Am the Good Shepherd

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd. The Father loves me because I sacrifice my life so I may take it back again. No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded.” (John 10:11-18)

“So Jesus told them this story: ‘If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them gets lost, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others in the wilderness and go to search for the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he will joyfully carry it home on his shoulders. When he arrives, he will call together his friends and neighbors, saying, “Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.” In the same way, there is more joy in heaven over one lost sinner who repents and returns to God than over ninety-nine others who are righteous and haven’t strayed away!’” (Luke 15:3-7)

A good shepherd cares for his sheep, he guides them to find food and water, and sometimes he even dies for them to protect them from predators. A shepherd knows his sheep and the sheep recognize their shepherd’s voice. When one is missing, he’s going to leave the rest of them to go find the one that is lost.

All these attributes apply to Jesus as our Good Shepherd. We are His sheep. He cares for us, He guides our lives, He protects us and He laid down His life for us when He sacrificed Himself on the cross. When we become lost, He searches for us to bring us back into the fold. Our Good Shepherd is our spiritual leader and the head of the church.

Notice in the John 10 passage that Jesus says, *“I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd.”* The other “sheep” likely refers to Gentiles. Jesus is opening up His ministry to non-Jewish people. And when He says, *“there will be one flock with one shepherd.”* He is referring to unity in the church – that all parishioners will have one “shepherd”, or one leader.

I love the picture of the rejoicing in heaven when one lost sinner returns to God. There must be constant celebration because we all have been lost at one time or another and have asked God’s forgiveness and turned back to God. Hallelujah!

Prayer: Oh, My Shepherd, you lead me beside still waters and to green pastures. I pray that I will always have my ears open to hear your voice leading me. Amen.

February 26 – Jesus Heals the Blind

“Then they reached Jericho, and as Jesus and his disciples left town, a large crowd followed him. A blind beggar named Bartimaeus (son of Timaeus) was sitting beside the road. When Bartimaeus heard that Jesus of Nazareth was nearby, he began to shout, ‘Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!’ ‘Be quiet!’ many of the people yelled at him. But he only shouted louder, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me!’ When Jesus heard him, he stopped and said, ‘Tell him to come here.’ So they called the blind man. ‘Cheer up,’ they said. ‘Come on, he’s calling you!’ Bartimaeus threw aside his coat, jumped up, and came to Jesus. ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ Jesus asked. ‘My Rabbi,’ the blind man said, ‘I want to see!’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Go, for your faith has healed you.’ Instantly the man could see, and he followed Jesus down the road.” (Mark 10:46-52)

Imagine Bartimaeus’ surprise when he called out to Jesus to have mercy on him, and Jesus stopped and summoned him. The people around him told Bartimaeus that Jesus was calling for him! When Jesus asked him what he wanted, the blind man simply said, *“I want to see!”* Because of his faith, he was healed instantly!

When I read this story, I wonder what I would ask from Jesus were I to meet Him face to face. How about you? What would you ask from Him? We must remember that Jesus is not a genie in a bottle. He will not give us our three wishes and be gone.

How did Jesus determine who would be healed? I think He looked at people’s hearts. More than once He said, *“Your faith has healed you.”* But what about the ten lepers He healed and only one came back to thank Jesus, and he was a Samaritan. So, perhaps Jesus is just showing His deep compassion for those who seek Him for healing, regardless of their beliefs.

Jesus extended His grace to everyone, even if they were social outcasts. We see that with the ten lepers and with sinners that he healed. His healings were not based on who you were or what you had done. If one cried out to Jesus, He listened and helped.

It was against Jewish law for one to heal on the Sabbath and Jesus disregarded that law when He healed a woman who was crippled for many years. *“On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues, and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, ‘Woman, you are set free from your infirmity.’ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God.”* (Luke 13:10-13, NIV) Jesus demonstrated that He is the Lord of the Sabbath!

Prayer: Oh, Savior, thank you that you dared to show your healing powers even on the Sabbath; even on people who thought they weren’t worthy to be healed; even on lepers and sinners, even on outcasts Thank you for the mercy and grace you have shown to those whom you have healed, including me. Amen.

February 27 - Jesus' First Disciples

"One day as Jesus was walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers—Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew—throwing a net into the water, for they fished for a living. Jesus called out to them, 'Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people!' And they left their nets at once and followed him. A little farther up the shore he saw two other brothers, James and John, sitting in a boat with their father, Zebedee, repairing their nets. And he called them to come, too. They immediately followed him, leaving the boat and their father behind." (Matthew 4:18-22)

"The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, 'Look! There is the Lamb of God!' When John's two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus. Jesus looked around and saw them following. 'What do you want?' he asked them. They replied, 'Rabbi' (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?" 'Come and see,' he said. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day. Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, 'We have found the Messiah' (which means "Christ"). Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, 'Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas' (which means "Peter"). The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Come, follow me.' Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown. Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.' 'Nazareth!' exclaimed Nathanael. 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' 'Come and see for yourself,' Philip replied." (John 1:35-46)

There were twelve original disciples: Simon (also called Peter), Andrew (Peter's brother), James and John (sons of Zebedee), Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew (the tax collector), James (son of Alphaeus), Thaddaeus, Simon (the zealot), and Judas Iscariot (who later betrayed Jesus).

It has always amazed me how quickly the disciples responded to Jesus. *"Come, follow me."* That was all Jesus had to say in the Matthew passage. They left their boat and nets, they left their father and, not only that, but they also left their security to follow Jesus.

In the John passage, they found the Messiah! Imagine what they felt when they realized that the prophets from long ago were right. They knew a Messiah would be coming and that He would bring them their salvation. And now He was right there with them! Yes, Nathanael, something very good came from Nazareth. As you read the Bible, imagine yourself in the stories of the early disciples. I'm sure you can understand their wonderings about what Jesus was doing and what He would ask them to do.

Has Jesus called to you? Have you stepped outside of your comfort zone to follow Him? Or are you playing it safe? If you are a believer, you are a disciple of Jesus. You are a part of His big picture, and you are needed in His ministry. Jesus calls us, not only once but each and every day. Are you willing to go all the way for Jesus?

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for calling me to come beside you to become your disciple. Give me the ability to hear your voice and give me the courage to always say "yes" when you call. You bring me outside my comfort zone, but I have learned so much. Thank you for being my Rabbi. Amen.

Psalm 23:1-6

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.*

*He lets me rest in green meadows;
He leads me beside peaceful streams.*

He renews my strength.

*He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.*

*Even when I walk through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,*

for you are close beside me.

Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me.

You prepare a feast for me in the presence of my enemies.

You honor me by anointing my head with oil.

My cup overflows with blessings.

*Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,*

*and I will live in the house of the Lord
forever.*

From the United Methodist Hymnal #454

Open My Eyes, That I May See

*Open my eyes, that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me;
place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.*

*Refrain, verse 1: Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine!*

*Open my ears, that I may hear
voices of truth thou sendest clear;
and while the wave-notes fall on my ear,
everything false will disappear.*

*Refrain, verse 2: Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my ears, illumine me, Spirit divine!*

*Open my mouth, and let me bear
gladly the warm truth everywhere;
open my heart and let me prepare
love with thy children thus to share.*

*Refrain, verse 3: Silently now I wait for thee, ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my heart, illumine me, Spirit divine!*

March 2 – The Lord’s Prayer

“When you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites who love to pray publicly on street corners and in the synagogues where everyone can see them. I tell you the truth, that is all the reward they will ever get. But when you pray, go away by yourself, shut the door behind you, and pray to your Father in private. Then your Father, who sees everything, will reward you. When you pray, don’t babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don’t be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this: Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy. May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need, and forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us. And don’t let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:5-15)

“This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:9-13, NIV)

“Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy (your) name. Thy (your) kingdom come, thy (your) will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine (yours) is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever.” Amen. (United Methodist Hymnal, #895)

Did you notice that the ending to the Lord’s Prayer as we say it is not in the Bible? The first time we see this doxology (a short hymn of praise) is in an early Christian manual, The Didache (100 AD). But this ending does have a Biblical basis. *“Yours, O Lord, is the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty.”* (1 Chronicles 29:11a)

The Lord doesn’t need long prayers with flowery or theological words. He wants us to be real with Him and so He gives us a guide on how to pray. You should always acknowledge His sovereignty and praise Him. You can request help for yourself or for others. You should name your sins and ask for His forgiveness (don’t forget to forgive those who have wronged you!). Ask Him for protection from Satan as you go about your day and to give you the strength you need to turn away from the temptations you will encounter, and always give Him thanks for His provision.

Your prayers are conversations with God. Pray and listen. Don’t forget to listen because then you will begin to “hear” Him. Spend some time with Jesus each day. You will be blessed when you do!

Prayer: Lord, I treasure my time with you. You know what I need before I even ask. Thank you for your care for me and for listening to my prayers. Forgive me when I show my impatience. Help me to do better. With your strength, I can. Amen.

March 3 – Peter’s Confession of Christ

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say that the Son of Man is?’ ‘Well,’ they replied, ‘some say John the Baptist, some say Elijah, and others say Jeremiah or one of the other prophets.’ Then he asked them, ‘But who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means “rock”), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.’ Then he sternly warned the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah.” (Matthew 16:13-20)

There were many people who didn’t believe Jesus was the Messiah. Jesus asked Peter who people said He was. Peter told Him that most of them thought that He was one of the great prophets come back to life. And then Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say I am?” Peter knew the correct answer, “The Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus knew that Peter did not learn that from someone else, rather it was revealed to him by God himself.

Then Jesus disclosed that He would build His church upon Peter’s confession of faith. Peter recognized Jesus as the divine promised cornerstone of the church. My Life Application Bible states, “Jesus changed Simon’s name to Peter and praised Him for his confession of faith. It is faith like Peter’s that is the foundation of Christ’s kingdom.”

It continues, “The meaning of 16:19 (“And I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. Whatever you forbid on earth will be forbidden in heaven, and whatever you permit on earth will be permitted in heaven.”) has been a subject of debate for centuries. Some say the keys represent the authority to carry out church discipline, legislation, and administration (Matthew 18:15-18); while others say the keys give the authority to announce the forgiveness of sins (John 20:23). Still others say the keys may be the opportunity to bring people to the kingdom of heaven by presenting them with the message of salvation found in God’s Word (Acts 15:7-9). The religious leaders thought they held the keys of the kingdom, and they tried to shut some people out. We cannot decide to open or close the kingdom of heaven for others, but God uses us to help others find the way inside. To all who believe in Christ and obey his words, the kingdom doors are swung wide open.”

Finally, Jesus told the disciples not to talk to others about Peter’s confession because they would not fully understand the kind of Messiah He had come to be – not a mighty military commander but a suffering servant. The people would have a hard time understanding what Jesus came to do until His mission on earth was complete.

Prayer: Father, thank you for revealing Jesus’ identity to Peter. I continue to more fully understand how your church began. People back then didn’t have the Bible. I’m sure they wondered, “Who is this man who heals, who drives demons out of people, who teaches and preaches?” Father, I am so grateful for your followers who formed the early church. Amen.

March 4 – Jesus Predicts His Death

“The Son of Man must suffer many terrible things,” he said. ‘He will be rejected by the elders, the leading priests, and the teachers of religious law. He will be killed, but on the third day he will be raised from the dead.’ Then he said to the crowd, ‘If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross daily, and follow me. If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but are yourself lost or destroyed? If anyone is ashamed of me and my message, the Son of Man will be ashamed of that person when he returns in his glory and in the glory of the Father and the holy angels. I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:22-27)

This is the first time Jesus predicted His death. He wanted His disciples to know what to expect in the days to come. He explained that after He died and rose again, at some point in time, He would return (the Second Coming) to bring about His eternal kingdom. But, for us right now, we must imitate Christ day to day. Not only do we need to follow His commands, but we must identify with Christ’s message of being humble, seeking justice, welcoming the stranger, feeding the hungry, loving the Lord your God, and loving your neighbor as yourself.

We must give up our own way and choose Jesus’ way. We must deny self, take up our cross, and follow Him. Sometimes it costs a lot to follow Jesus, but it is well worth it. Either we choose the material things of this world or eternal life with the Lord. Matthew put it another way: *“What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?”* (Matthew 16:26) This verse strikes fear in my heart. I certainly don’t want to forfeit my soul.

When Jesus said, *“I tell you the truth, some standing here right now will not die before they see the Kingdom of God.”* He was saying that those who were listening to Him would not have to wait for another, future Messiah – the kingdom was among them, and soon it would come in power. Our Lord was with His followers then and He is with us now; every minute of every day He walks with us.

Prayer: Almighty One, I trust that you are with me always. Help me to know the best way for me to follow your lead to deny self, take up my cross, and follow you. In your precious Name I pray, amen.

March 5 – I Am the Resurrection and the Life

“Martha said to Jesus, ‘Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask.’ Jesus told her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ ‘Yes,’ Martha said, ‘he will rise when everyone else rises, at the last day.’ Jesus told her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die. Do you believe this, Martha?’ ‘Yes, Lord,’ she told him. ‘I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God.’” (John 11:21-27)

Martha and her sister Mary had sent word to Jesus telling Him, *“Lord, your dear friend is very sick.”* (John 11:3) and Jesus would have known to whom they were referring. But by the time the messengers got to Jesus, their brother Lazarus was likely already dead and in Jesus’ time, the dead were buried the same day they died.

When He was in Jerusalem, Jesus used Bethany as His base of operations. Jesus knew the family well and stayed with them in their homes. The women reached out to Jesus because He was their friend and well known as a healer.

Martha believed that Jesus could heal Lazarus and told Jesus that if He had been there, Lazarus would not have died. However, she knew that Jesus and God had a special relationship and perhaps she believed that a miracle could happen.

Jesus asked Martha if she believed what He was saying: *“I am the resurrection and the life ... everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never ever die.”* Martha confirmed that she had always believed in Him as the Messiah, the Son of God.

Jesus said, *“Because I live, you also will live.”* (John 14:19b). I believe that Jesus is the Resurrection and the Life, the Messiah, my Savior who died on the cross to reconcile me to God. Martha also believed in Jesus, but she had no idea what Jesus was about to do!

Prayer: Father, what a perfect plan you put into place to bring us sinful beings back to you. You sent Jesus to become the Resurrection and the Life by His sacrifice on the cross. Thank you for your care for Martha, Mary, and for all your believers. Amen.

March 6 – Jesus Raises Lazarus

“When Jesus saw her (Mary, Lazarus’ sister) weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him and he was deeply troubled. ‘Where have you put him?’ he asked them. They told him, ‘Lord, come and see.’ Then Jesus wept. The people who were standing nearby said, ‘See how much he loved him!’ But some said, ‘This man healed a blind man. Couldn’t he have kept Lazarus from dying?’ Jesus was still angry as he arrived at the tomb, a cave with a stone rolled across its entrance. ‘Roll the stone aside,’ Jesus told them. But Martha, the dead man’s sister, protested, ‘Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible.’ Jesus responded, ‘Didn’t I tell you that you would see God’s glory if you believe?’ So they rolled the stone aside. Then Jesus looked up to heaven and said, ‘Father, thank you for hearing me. You always hear me, but I said it out loud for the sake of all these people standing here, so that they will believe you sent me.’ Then Jesus shouted, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ And the dead man came out, his hands and feet bound in graveclothes, his face wrapped in a headcloth. Jesus told them, ‘Unwrap him and let him go!’ Many of the people who were with Mary believed in Jesus when they saw this happen. But some went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. Then the leading priests and Pharisees called the high council together. ‘What are we going to do?’ they asked each other. ‘This man certainly performs many miraculous signs. If we allow him to go on like this, soon everyone will believe in him. Then the Roman army will come and destroy both our Temple and our nation.’” (John 11:33-48)

The many people gathered there were neighbors and friends who were grieving Lazarus’ death and trying to console his sisters, Martha and Mary. Jesus hadn’t come when they had sent word to Him that Lazarus was very sick. He was there now, but it was too late. Back then, people believed that the spirit or soul left the body of one who had died on day four. The Jews would return to the cemetery after three days to make sure the person was dead. Lazarus had died four days prior.

The women led Him to Lazarus’ tomb, and they rolled the stone from the entrance. Jesus prayed and then called Lazarus out.

When Jesus prayed, He prayed out loud for the benefit of the bystanders. His work is always done in collaboration with God’s will. *“I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself. He does only what he sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does.”* (John 5:19)

Lazarus appeared still wrapped in his graveclothes and Jesus told them to unwrap him. Lazarus was alive! What a scene that must have been! Since the people saw the miracle with their own eyes, many of them believed in Jesus as the Messiah. But others went to the religious leaders, and this led to the beginning of the end for Jesus. The council began to plot Jesus’ death.

Prayer: Almighty Lord, you brought Lazarus back to life! I wish it had been recorded what he experienced in those four days! His book would surely be a best seller! I am grateful that your miracles have been written for us. Your miracles, your salvation, and your love for me remind me daily why I follow you. In your precious Name I pray, amen.

March 7

Just prior to this scripture passage, the apostles had been arrested by the religious leaders and put in jail. An angel of the Lord came and released them to go to the Temple to teach the people. The leaders sent men to bring the apostles before them to be sentenced, but they found the apostles missing! The men were sent out to find them. They reported back to the leaders that they were in the Temple teaching about Jesus, the Messiah. The leaders were furious.

The Apostles Meet Opposition
Act 5:26-42

"The captain went with his Temple guards and arrested the apostles, but without violence, for they were afraid the people would stone them. Then they brought the apostles before the high council, where the high priest confronted them. 'We gave you strict orders never again to teach in this man's name!' he said. 'Instead, you have filled all Jerusalem with your teaching about him, and you want to make us responsible for his death!'

But Peter and the apostles replied, 'We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead after you killed him by hanging him on a cross. Then God put him in the place of honor at his right hand as Prince and Savior. He did this so the people of Israel would repent of their sins and be forgiven. We are witnesses of these things and so is the Holy Spirit, who is given by God to those who obey him.'

When they heard this, the high council was furious and decided to kill them. But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while. Then he said to his colleagues, 'Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered. So my advice is, leave these men alone. Let them go. If they are planning and doing these things merely on their own, it will soon be overthrown. But if it is from God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You may even find yourselves fighting against God!'

The others accepted his advice. They called in the apostles and had them flogged. Then they ordered them never again to speak in the name of Jesus, and they let them go. The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus. And every day, in the Temple and from house to house, they continued to teach and preach this message: 'Jesus is the Messiah.'"

From the United Methodist Hymnal #632

Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether

*Draw us in the Spirit's tether, for when humbly in thy name,
two or three are met together, thou art in the midst of them.*

Alleluia! Alleluia! Touch we now thy garment's hem.

*As disciples used to gather in the name of Christ to sup,
then with thanks to God the Father break the bread and bless the cup:*

Alleluia! Alleluia! So now bind our friendship up.

*All our meals and all our living make as sacraments of thee,
that by caring, helping, giving, we may true disciples be.*

Alleluia! Alleluia! We will serve thee faithfully

March 9 – Triumphal Entry

“When all the people heard of Jesus’ arrival, they flocked to see him and also to see Lazarus, the man Jesus had raised from the dead. Then the leading priests decided to kill Lazarus, too, for it was because of him that many of the people had deserted them and believed in Jesus. The next day, the news that Jesus was on the way to Jerusalem swept through the city. A large crowd of Passover visitors took palm branches and went down the road to meet him. They shouted, ‘Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!’ Jesus found a young donkey and rode on it, fulfilling the prophecy that said: ‘Don’t be afraid, people of Jerusalem. Look, your King is coming, riding on a donkey’s colt.’ His disciples didn’t understand at the time that this was a fulfillment of prophecy. But after Jesus entered into his glory, they remembered what had happened and realized that these things had been written about him. Many in the crowd had seen Jesus call Lazarus from the tomb, raising him from the dead, and they were telling others about it. That was the reason so many went out to meet him—because they had heard about this miraculous sign. Then the Pharisees said to each other, ‘There’s nothing we can do. Look, everyone has gone after him!’” (John 12:9-19)

Everyone was hearing about the miracles Jesus performed. They also wanted to see for themselves the man that Jesus had brought back to life.

The religious leaders had other thoughts. When Jesus brought Lazarus out of the grave, it sealed Lazarus’ fate as well as Jesus’. The leaders realized the people were now following Jesus, not them. This was the beginning of the end. They began to plot Jesus’ death.

Jesus came into Jerusalem riding on a donkey. People had expected a warrior riding on a stallion, but Jesus was fulfilling a prophecy. After Jesus died on the cross, was buried and resurrected, His disciples finally realized that the prophecies were written about HIM! But this day *“They shouted, ‘Praise God! Blessings on the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hail to the King of Israel!’”*

We know this was not the beginning of the end, but the beginning of God setting things right.

Prayer: All-knowing God, thank you for bringing Jesus into Jerusalem in peace and humility. Help us to follow His example, no matter how hard it is. Amen.

March 10 - The Last Supper

“Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread arrived, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John ahead and said, ‘Go and prepare the Passover meal, so we can eat it together.’ ‘Where do you want us to prepare it?’ they asked him. He replied, ‘As soon as you enter Jerusalem, a man carrying a pitcher of water will meet you. Follow him. At the house he enters, say to the owner, “The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room where I can eat the Passover meal with my disciples?” He will take you upstairs to a large room that is already set up. That is where you should prepare our meal.’ They went off to the city and found everything just as Jesus had said, and they prepared the Passover meal there.”

“When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table. Jesus said, ‘I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. For I tell you now that I won’t eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.’ Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, ‘Take this and share it among yourselves. For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.’ He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ After supper he took another cup of wine and said, ‘This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.’” (Luke 22:7-20)

Think about hearing these passages when you have never heard of Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. These concepts were very strange to say the least! “This is my body.” No, Jesus. It’s bread. “This is the new covenant.” What are you talking about? It’s just a cup of wine. The apostles could not know what Jesus was talking about until after He died. Jesus repeatedly told them what would occur, but they refused to believe their long-awaited Messiah would be arrested and crucified.

When the religious leaders heard what Jesus was saying, they thought he was talking about cannibalism! How would you have described what Jesus was talking about as He shared the Last Supper with you?

The apostles didn’t know then, but they would know soon enough. After Jesus died, they remembered what Jesus had told them would happen and they remembered the strange words He spoke as they shared supper together.

Prayer: Savior, I, too, must remember the words you spoke and their deep meaning. Your body on the cross, your blood pouring out, the new covenant established by your sacrifice for your believers. I will partake in Holy Communion with humility, thankfulness, and great awe. Amen.

March 11 – Jesus Washes the Disciples’ Feet

“Before the Passover celebration, Jesus knew that his hour had come to leave this world and return to his Father. He had loved his disciples during his ministry on earth, and now he loved them to the very end. It was time for supper, and the devil had already prompted Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had given him authority over everything and that he had come from God and would return to God. So he got up from the table, took off his robe, wrapped a towel around his waist, and poured water into a basin. Then he began to wash the disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel he had around him. When Jesus came to Simon Peter, Peter said to him, ‘Lord, are you going to wash my feet?’ Jesus replied, ‘You don’t understand now what I am doing, but someday you will.’”

‘No,’ Peter protested, ‘you will never ever wash my feet!’ Jesus replied, ‘Unless I wash you, you won’t belong to me.’ Simon Peter exclaimed, ‘Then wash my hands and head as well, Lord, not just my feet!’ Jesus replied, ‘A person who has bathed all over does not need to wash, except for the feet, to be entirely clean. And you disciples are clean, but not all of you.’ For Jesus knew who would betray him. That is what he meant when he said, ‘Not all of you are clean.’ After washing their feet, he put on his robe again and sat down and asked, ‘Do you understand what I was doing? You call me “Teacher” and “Lord,” and you are right, because that’s what I am. And since I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash each other’s feet. I have given you an example to follow. Do as I have done to you. I tell you the truth, slaves are not greater than their master. Nor is the messenger more important than the one who sends the message. Now that you know these things, God will bless you for doing them.’” (John 13:1-17)

What a beautiful gift Jesus gave His disciples! Jesus has shown His disciples how to live – with humility, eager to bless others. Washing guests’ feet was a chore for a household servant to carry out when guests arrived, not the Son of God.

When Jesus got to Peter, he protested – loudly! Seeing Jesus behave like a slave unnerved Peter. He just didn’t understand that Jesus was teaching them how to treat one other as well as those to whom they will share the message of salvation. He’s showing them by example that to be a leader, one must be a servant. How do you treat those who work under you (whether children, employees, or volunteers)?

When we work with others, we must serve in ways that glorify God. Are you willing to follow Jesus’ example of being a humble servant? I believe there is a special blessing awaiting those who emulate Jesus’ and serve others with humility.

Prayer: Holy One, serving you brings me such joy! Fill my heart so that when I serve, others will see that I am glorifying you! Amen.

March 12 - Jesus Promises the Holy Spirit

“If you love me, obey my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, who will never leave you. He is the Holy Spirit, who leads into all truth. The world cannot receive him, because it isn’t looking for him and doesn’t recognize him. But you know him, because he lives with you now and later will be in you. No, I will not abandon you as orphans—I will come to you. Soon the world will no longer see me, but you will see me. Since I live, you also will live. When I am raised to life again, you will know that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them.” (John 14:15-21)

“But now I am going away to the one who sent me, and not one of you is asking where I am going. Instead, you grieve because of what I’ve told you. But in fact, it is best for you that I go away, because if I don’t, the Advocate won’t come. If I do go away, then I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world of its sin, and of God’s righteousness, and of the coming judgment. The world’s sin is that it refuses to believe in me. Righteousness is available because I go to the Father, and you will see me no more. Judgment will come because the ruler of this world has already been judged. There is so much more I want to tell you, but you can’t bear it now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own but will tell you what he has heard. He will tell you about the future. He will bring me glory by telling you whatever he receives from me. All that belongs to the Father is mine; this is why I said, ‘The Spirit will tell you whatever he receives from me.’” (John 16:5-15)

What a beautiful gift Jesus has given us! He promised the disciples that He would send an Advocate, also called the Counselor or the Holy Spirit, to be with them when He left. The disciples didn’t know where Jesus was going, but Jesus had told them what was going to happen, that He would soon have to leave, but they wouldn’t be left alone.

Jesus gave us the Holy Spirit, too. He guides us as we live and make decisions, as we pray and commune with God, as we study and learn, as we fellowship and worship, as we enjoy and connect with family, as we volunteer and serve others, and when we reconcile with those whom we’ve been estranged. He is with us in every aspect of our life.

Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, we live. When we live like Jesus and love like Jesus, He lives in us. When He lives in us, we are changed forever. Our hearts are cleansed, our sin is forgiven, and we have direct access to God. And when our time on earth is done, we are promised eternal life with Jesus. By believing in Jesus, we are invited into the divine.

Prayer: Thank you, Lord, for giving me the Holy Spirit. I can see how He has guided my life and led me to possibilities I would never have found on my own. I can see how I learned and grew my gifts and when the time was right, I was ready to say, “Here I am, Lord.” Amen.

March 13 - I Am the Bread of Life

“Jesus said, ‘I tell you the truth, Moses didn’t give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘give us that bread every day.’ Jesus replied, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But you haven’t believed in me even though you have seen me. However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.” (John 6:32-40)

“Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands. Yes, he humbled you by letting you go hungry and then feeding you with manna, a food previously unknown to you and your ancestors. He did it to teach you that people do not live by bread alone; rather, we live by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.” (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)

Every day, God provided manna from heaven during the Exile. But this Bread, the true Bread of God is Jesus, but the people don't understand. They ask for this bread every day. They think it will take away their physical hunger, but this Bread satisfies spiritual hunger.

The people still see Jesus as merely a man, the son of Jewish parents, the son of a carpenter living in a common Jewish community. They are demanding more evidence. Jesus tells them that the first step they must take is belief. They are not willing to come to Jesus and confess their hunger.

The darkness of the world is overwhelming. Only God is able to penetrate the darkness so that people can see Jesus clearly and accept the gift He is offering. We do not live on earthly bread alone, but on the Bread that God has given us.

Jesus is inviting people still today to come to Him and to believe in Him. He came down from heaven to do God's will, not His own. Everyone who believes in Jesus the Christ, will enjoy eternal life. Jesus will not lose one of the sheep that God has given Him.

Prayer: O God, you have sent me the perfect gift, Jesus. Thank you for every word that Jesus shares with me. Help me to use each one to draw others closer to you. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

From the United Methodist Hymnal #614

For the Bread Which You Have Broken

*For the bread which you have broken,
for the wine which you have poured,
or the words which you have spoken,
now we give you thanks, O Lord.*

*By this pledge that you do love us,
by your gift of peace restored,
by your call to heaven above us,
hallow all our lives, O Lord.*

*With our sainted ones in glory
seated at the heavenly board,
may the church that's waiting for you
keep love's tie unbroken, Lord.*

*In your service, Lord, defend us,
in our hearts keep watch and ward;
in the world where you have sent us,
let your kingdom come, O Lord.*

Words: Louis F. Benson, 1924

Music: V. Earle Copes, 1960

Music copyrighted 1960, renewed 1988 Hope Publishing Co.

March 15

From the United Methodist Hymnal #331

Holy Spirit, Come, Confirm Us

*Holy Spirit, come, confirm us
in the truth that Christ makes known;
we have faith and understanding
through your helping gifts alone.*

*Holy Spirit, come, console us,
come as advocate to plead;
loving Spirit from the Father,
grant in Christ the help we need.*

*Holy Spirit, come, renew us,
come yourself to make us live;
holy through your loving presence,
holy through the gifts you give.*

*Holy Spirit, come, possess us,
you the love of Three in One,
Holy Spirit of the Father,
Holy Spirit of the Son.*

Words: Brian Foley
Music: V. Earle Copes, 1960

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March 16 – I Am the Light of the World

“Jesus spoke to the people once more and said, ‘I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won’t have to walk in darkness, because you will have the light that leads to life.’ The Pharisees replied, ‘You are making those claims about yourself! Such testimony is not valid.’ Jesus told them, ‘These claims are valid even though I make them about myself. For I know where I came from and where I am going, but you don’t know this about me. You judge me by human standards, but I do not judge anyone. And if I did, my judgment would be correct in every respect because I am not alone. The Father who sent me is with me. Your own law says that if two people agree about something, their witness is accepted as fact. I am one witness, and my Father who sent me is the other.’ ‘Where is your father?’ they asked. Jesus answered, ‘Since you don’t know who I am, you don’t know who my Father is. If you knew me, you would also know my Father.’ Jesus made these statements while he was teaching in the section of the Temple known as the Treasury. But he was not arrested, because his time had not yet come. (John 8:12-20)

God’s first creation was light. This is the third verse of the Bible: *“Then God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light ‘day’ and the darkness ‘night.’ And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.”* (Genesis 1:3-5)

There are many other instances beside the creation story where “Light” is mentioned. Even when Pharaoh finally let the people go, God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. *“The Israelites left Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. The Lord went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. This allowed them to travel by day or by night. And the Lord did not remove the pillar of cloud or pillar of fire from its place in front of the people.”* (Exodus 13:20-22) Notice that God provided them with a pillar of cloud to protect them from the sun and a pillar of fire to light their way.

In a world where there was no public lighting after dusk, any illumination after dark was special. There were feasts and festivals where lanterns or torches would be lit. On the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus is teaching in the Temple court where the lighting ceremony takes place. He stands under the sixteen lit bowls of oil and says that He is not only the true light of Jerusalem, but of the whole world!

If you accept Jesus, you can believe that: *“Your word is a lamp to guide my feet and a light for my path.”* (Psalm 119:105) If we believe that Jesus is the Christ, then we know that He is the source of all spiritual guidance for a world lost in sin and darkness. Let Him be the one to light your way.

Prayer: Almighty God, thank you for giving me the light of Christ to shine on my path and light up the dark places. When Jesus is by my side and guides me, I never lose my way. Let your light shine through me every day so that others I meet will see your love shining through me. Amen.

March 17 - The Greatest Commandment

“But when the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees with his reply, they met together to question him again. One of them, an expert in religious law, tried to trap him with this question: ‘Teacher, which is the most important commandment in the law of Moses?’ Jesus replied, ‘You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.” (Matt 22:34-40)

“One of the teachers of religious law was standing there listening to the debate. He realized that Jesus had answered well, so he asked, ‘Of all the commandments, which is the most important?’ Jesus replied, ‘The most important commandment is this: ‘Listen, O Israel! The Lord our God is the one and only Lord. And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength. The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself. No other commandment is greater than these.’” (Mark 12:28-31)

Jesus was quoting Deuteronomy 6:5, “And you must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.” and Leviticus 19:18, “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against a fellow Israelite, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.” These two commands summarize the Ten Commandments. If you fulfill these two commands, you keep all the others. Think about it. When you love someone, you won’t commit adultery. If you love your neighbor you won’t steal from them, and you certainly won’t kill them. If you love God, you won’t take His Name in vain. You won’t love another god more than Him and you will keep Sunday a Holy Day. You get the idea. Love is what matters.

Back when I was taught about the Ten Commandments, the emphasis was on what I should **not do**: **Thou shalt not** ... The Ten Commandments have not changed, my understanding of them changed. What if I change from the negative to the positive ... from what I should **not do** to all that I **can do** to show my love for God and my neighbors? What better way to honor our Lord and Savior.

Prayer: Almighty God, I try to obey the Ten Commandments. I’m grateful to have them as a guide in my life. Recently I have realized that love is the most important thing in this life. That doesn’t negate the Ten Commandments, it only helps me keep them. Thank you for your guidance. In Jesus Name I pray, amen.

March 18 - I Am the True Vine

"I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father." (John 15:1-8)

Jesus' lesson in this passage is very clear. We must stay connected to Him, the True Vine, to be able to do anything that will increase our wisdom, draw us even closer to Him, and share the Gospel message with others.

If you are a gardener, you know that many plants need to be pruned to remain healthy. If a plant is too dense, new buds cannot grow. Pruning controls the size and shape of a plant. And, if the plant has too many diseased branches, much of the nutrition and water taken into the plant will go to those branches instead of the healthy ones. When we prune, we remove dead or diseased branches which attract pests. Pruning actually promotes growth even though you are cutting branches off!

If we are not connected to Jesus day to day, we will start to wither like those diseased branches. Continue a healthy prayer life and push yourself to try new spiritual practices during the year. Keep yourself connected to your church community and be a vital part of the ministries of your church. Pray for God to give you opportunities to share the Good News of His Son, Jesus. Don't worry, when the time is right, He will give you the words to say. Stay healthy! Stay connected to the True Vine.

Prayer: Lord, you are the True Vine. Give me the strength to remain spiritually healthy by staying connected to you. Give me the courage to try a new spiritual practice this year that will draw me even closer to you. Amen.

March 19 – I Am the Way, the Truth, and the Life

“Don’t let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, and trust also in me. There is more than enough room in my Father’s home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am. And you know the way to where I am going’ ‘No, we don’t know, Lord,’ Thomas said. ‘We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus told him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me. If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!’ Philip said, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied.’ Jesus replied, ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?’” (John 14:1-10a)

In this scripture passage, Jesus asks the disciples to trust Him that there is plenty of room in heaven for everyone. Jesus tells them that He himself is going to prepare a place for them and that He will return for them when the time is right.

Jesus has prepared the way for us, but we need to choose Him before we can go. When Thomas said, “How can we know the way?” Jesus told him that He was the way to God, the source of all truth, and the provider of eternal life to everyone who believes in Him.

Then Philip tells Jesus that they would be satisfied if only Jesus would show them the Father. Jesus is so patient with them. He tells Philip that if they have seen Him, they have seen the Father as well. Jesus is God in human form.

Do you accept the idea of the Trinity? Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, One God forever and ever. If it’s difficult for you, just imagine how hard it would have been for the early disciples to understand. Yes, they believe Jesus is the Messiah they have been waiting for, but they don’t understand all that that means. They are just beginning to see how the Messiah thinks, lives, and loves. They haven’t yet experienced the crucifixion or the resurrection.

Prayer: Savior, keep guiding me daily to believe in what I cannot see – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I know that I live in your creation and have experienced your miracles. I trust that you are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

March 20 – The Great Commission

“Then the eleven disciples left for Galilee, going to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him—but some of them doubted! Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.’” (Matt 28:16-20)

We are to GO and make disciples for Jesus. Do you have your story ready? Think about how you would share with someone the Good News of Jesus Christ. Think about it right now. Get a pen and paper and begin to write it down. You might find it more difficult than you think. During the next week, come back to this piece of paper and continue writing and editing. What would make sense to an unbeliever? What story could you share that might resonate with them? I know for me, when my father-in-law asked about my belief, I shared many Scripture passages that relay the messages of Jesus' comfort, peace, and unfailing love for us. He responded after each one, “But how do you know for sure?” Finally, I shared the story of doubting Thomas and he said, “Thank you, Nancy.” And I knew he understood.

It's not the same for everyone. Sometimes you are just planting a seed that someone else will water, and still another will fertilize, and yet another will witness the harvest. Begin your day with a prayer asking that in your day-to-day encounters, you can share Jesus' love with others by a smile, a kind word or gesture, or a conversation about God's love for them. Don't be scared – the Holy Spirit is here to help us and will give us the words we need. Be fishers of men. GO and make disciples! Be faithful and believe.

Prayer: Lord, we are so privileged to be able to share your story with others. We pray that the seeds we plant will reap a good harvest in heaven. Thank you for helping us find the right words and for giving us the courage we need when the time is right. Amen.

From the United Methodist Hymnal #481

The Prayer of Saint Francis

*Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt; faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.*

*O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love;
for it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.*

Francis of Assisi, Italy, 13th cent.

From the United Methodist Hymnal #297

Beneath the Cross of Jesus

*Beneath the cross of Jesus I fain would take my stand,
the shadow of a mighty rock within a weary land;
a home within the wilderness, a rest upon the way,
from the burning of the noon-tide heat, and the burden of the day.*

*Upon that cross of Jesus mine eye at times can see
the very dying form of One who suffered there for me;
and from my stricken heart with tears two wonders I confess:
the wonders of redeeming love and my unworthiness.*

*I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of His face;
content to let the word go by, to know no gain nor loss,
my sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.*

Words: Elizabeth C Clephane, 1872

Music: Frederick C. Maker, 1881

March 23 – The Beatitudes

“One day as he saw the crowds gathering, Jesus went up on the mountainside and sat down. His disciples gathered around him, and he began to teach them. ‘God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses those who mourn, for they will be comforted. God blesses those who are humble, for they will inherit the whole earth. God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be satisfied. God blesses those who are merciful, for they will be shown mercy. God blesses those whose hearts are pure, for they will see God. God blesses those who work for peace, for they will be called the children of God. God blesses those who are persecuted for doing right, for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. God blesses you when people mock you and persecute you and lie about you and say all sorts of evil things against you because you are my followers. Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted in the same way.” (Matt 5:1-12)

The Beatitudes are a code of ethics for all believers. As it says in my Life Application Bible, “These beatitudes are not multiple choice – pick what you like and leave the rest. They must be taken as the whole. They describe what we should be like as Christ’s followers.”

This day’s devotion is not easy for me to write. It’s not always easy to be a Christ follower. As I’m writing this devotional, we have had three residents of Minneapolis shot and two of them are dead. I grew up in south Minneapolis and went to school just blocks away from these two deaths. It’s hard to be a Christ follower when there is devastation surrounding you, when you are mourning, when you are calling for justice for those who died, and when you have no idea where all this is heading. Will this be the norm for the next 3 years? Will this lead to a civil war in our country? Will someone come forward to regain civility in our streets, please? This is why it is so important to be a Christ follower. As we go through this most trying time, Jesus is right beside us.

We want to protest! We want to shout! We want ICE out of our state. We can’t tolerate another killing. We can’t tolerate our neighbors being taken into ICE custody and shipped out of state to be held for who knows how long. Many of these neighbors are American citizens. Some of them are asylum seekers whom our state has granted permission to reside in our communities, allowing them safety from persecution and the opportunity to contribute positively to our shared life. And granted, some are drug kingpins, murderers, traffickers, and other thugs. I pray that we can allow our own police departments to take out the bad guys and leave the good guys alone.

In the meantime, we must do our best to be peacemakers, be merciful, stay humble, and keep our hearts pure. We can still cry for mercy and justice as we peacefully assemble. My son and daughter-in-law and my grandchildren have taken part in these protests. Please pray for all the protesters who are there with pure hearts, not wanting anyone to be hurt, but protesting to keep their fellow human beings safe.

Prayer: Oh God, I cry out to you to change the hearts of our federal government leaders who are sending ICE agents into our nation’s streets to “round up the bad guys.” I pray for all who are protesting. Surround them with your protection and bring them home safely. Amen.

March 24 - Ask, Seek, Knock

“Keep on asking, and you will receive what you ask for. Keep on seeking, and you will find. Keep on knocking, and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.” (Matthew 7:7-8)

“Jesus Knocking on the Door”



by Warner Sallman

This is a copy of a picture that hung in my parent's bedroom when I was growing up. It had a beautiful ornate gold frame, and I was drawn to that picture. I was about 7 or 8 years old when I asked my dad why there wasn't a doorknob on the door and he explained that when Jesus knocks on the door of your heart, you are the one who must open the door. It's up to you to receive Jesus; He's not going to force His way in!

“Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.” (Revelation 3:20) I love to think of Jesus knocking on the door of my heart and me opening the door to invite Him in. This scripture passage was written to the Church in Laodicea, not to an individual. That church had turned lukewarm spiritually. They thought that they truly didn't need Jesus. They were satisfied with what they were doing.

Jesus is not only asking each of us individually, but He is imploring our church to open the door. Jesus is knocking on the front doors of our church. Have we opened them up wide and invited Him in, no matter what He is wearing, no matter what color His skin, no matter what He is asking us to do? Have we invited Him to sit next to us, have we shared coffee and donuts with Him? The next person you welcome just may be Jesus himself.

Prayer: Jesus, thank you for continually seeking us as individuals and as the church. I pray that I have always welcomed you with open arms and an open heart. Amen.

March 25 – Jesus at the Garden of Gethsemane

“Then Jesus went with them to the olive grove called Gethsemane, and he said, ‘Sit here while I go over there to pray.’ He took Peter and Zebedee’s two sons, James and John, and he became anguished and distressed. He told them, ‘My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.’ He went on a little farther and bowed with his face to the ground, praying, ‘My Father! If it is possible, let this cup of suffering be taken away from me. Yet I want your will to be done, not mine.’ Then he returned to the disciples and found them asleep. He said to Peter, ‘Couldn’t you watch with me even one hour? Keep watch and pray, so that you will not give in to temptation. For the spirit is willing, but the body is weak!’ Then Jesus left them a second time and prayed, ‘My Father! If this cup cannot be taken away unless I drink it, your will be done.’ When he returned to them again, he found them sleeping, for they couldn’t keep their eyes open. So he went to pray a third time, saying the same things again. Then he came to the disciples and said, ‘Go ahead and sleep. Have your rest. But look—the time has come. The Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Up, let’s be going. Look, my betrayer is here!’” (Matt 26:36-46)

Jesus went to the garden to pray. He needed His Father. He knew what was about to happen and He was in agony. He asked God if this really needed to happen, but then He asked that God’s will be done, not His. I have prayed the same prayer and it’s hard to submit to the Father’s will.

Peter, James, and John were with Jesus in the garden. Jesus wanted them with, probably for moral support. But they weren’t much help. Each time Jesus went to pray, He came back to find them sound asleep. He wanted them to be praying, too. He knew what witnessing His crucifixion would do their spirits and their souls. He knew that they believed and followed Him now, but what would happen after He died? *“The spirit is willing, but the body is weak!”*

Jesus prayed His prayer three separate times in the garden. In the end, He knew that His Father’s will would be done. Then He roused His disciples and told them that they needed to go – His betrayer was there.

Prayer: Jesus, I feel your agony in your prayers. You knew what was about to happen and the pain you would go through, but you were willing to go through it for me. I certainly don’t deserve your sacrifice, but I am so grateful for God’s grace and mercy and your everlasting love for me. Amen.

March 26 – Jesus Betrayed and Arrested

“Then Judas Iscariot, one of the twelve disciples, went to the leading priests and asked, ‘How much will you pay me to betray Jesus to you?’ And they gave him thirty pieces of silver. From that time on, Judas began looking for an opportunity to betray Jesus. (Matthew 26:14-16)

“And immediately, even as Jesus said this, Judas, one of the twelve disciples, arrived with a crowd of men armed with swords and clubs. They had been sent by the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders. The traitor, Judas, had given them a prearranged signal: ‘You will know which one to arrest when I greet him with a kiss. Then you can take him away under guard.’ As soon as they arrived, Judas walked up to Jesus. ‘Rabbi!’ he exclaimed and gave him the kiss.”

(Mark 14:43-45)

Thirty pieces of silver. That's what it took for Judas to betray Jesus and hand Him over to the religious leaders. And he did it with a kiss. What would cause Judas to turn on his teacher and friend like that? We'll never know for sure, but one theory is that Judas, like many others, expected Jesus to start a rebellion and overthrow the Roman government. He may have expected to have a high position in Jesus' new governmental system. As the treasurer for Jesus and the disciples, he soon figured out that Jesus' kingdom was not physical or political, but spiritual. He could never become rich following Jesus, so he betrayed Him for money. By giving Jesus that kiss, he would also gain favor from the religious leaders. They had planned to wait until after the Feast of Unleavened Bread which lasted a week, to arrest Jesus, but Judas' offer was too good to pass up. They paid him the 30 pieces of silver (the price of a slave then) and followed him into the garden where Jesus had gone to pray.

“So Judas came straight to Jesus. ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ he exclaimed and gave him the kiss. Jesus said, ‘My friend, go ahead and do what you have come for.’ Then the others grabbed Jesus and arrested him. ... ‘Don’t you realize that I could ask my Father for thousands of angels to protect us, and he would send them instantly? But if I did, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that describe what must happen now?’ Then Jesus said to the crowd, ‘Am I some dangerous revolutionary, that you come with swords and clubs to arrest me? Why didn’t you arrest me in the Temple? I was there teaching every day. But this is all happening to fulfill the words of the prophets as recorded in the Scriptures.’ At that point, all the disciples deserted him and fled.” (Matthew 26:49-50, 53-56)

Why would they feel the need to come with swords and clubs to arrest Jesus? Perhaps they were afraid of Him because of His power to heal, bring people back from the dead, and how He so easily persuaded people to follow Him. As always, Jesus allows His Father's will to be done by fulfilling prophecy. He was arrested and all His disciples ran away.

What the disciples experienced that day was traumatic! One of their friends, Judas, was responsible for Jesus' arrest. Men were in the garden with weapons. They arrested Jesus and the disciples didn't know what to do, so they fled.

Prayer: Lord, you could have beckoned those angels, but then prophecy would not have been fulfilled. You allowed yourself to be arrested to bring about your Father's will. May I be as obedient when I am asked to follow His will. Amen.

March 27 – Jesus Before Pilate and Sentenced to Death

“They began to state their case: ‘This man has been leading our people astray by telling them not to pay their taxes to the Roman government and by claiming he is the Messiah, a king.’ So Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’ Jesus replied, ‘You have said it.’” (Luke 23:2-3)

“When they saw him, the leading priests and Temple guards began shouting, ‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’ ‘Take him yourselves and crucify him,’ Pilate said. ‘I find him not guilty.’ The Jewish leaders replied, ‘By our law he ought to die because he called himself the Son of God.’ When Pilate heard this, he was more frightened than ever. He took Jesus back into the headquarters¹ again and asked him, ‘Where are you from?’ But Jesus gave no answer. ‘Why don’t you talk to me?’ Pilate demanded. ‘Don’t you realize that I have the power to release you or crucify you?’ Then Jesus said, ‘You would have no power over me at all unless it were given to you from above. So the one who handed me over to you has the greater sin.’ Then Pilate tried to release him, but the Jewish leaders shouted, ‘If you release this man, you are no “friend of Caesar.” Anyone who declares himself a king is a rebel against Caesar.’ When they said this, Pilate brought Jesus out to them again. Then Pilate sat down on the judgment seat on the platform that is called the Stone Pavement (in Hebrew, Gabbatha). It was now about noon on the day of preparation for the Passover. And Pilate said to the people, ‘Look, here is your king!’ ‘Away with him,’ they yelled. ‘Away with him! Crucify him!’ ‘What? Crucify your king?’ Pilate asked. ‘We have no king but Caesar,’ the leading priests shouted back. Then Pilate turned Jesus over to them to be crucified.” (John 19:6-16)

Pilate had found Jesus not guilty, so what happened here? Pilate did not see Jesus as a threat to Rome or as a terrorist. The Jewish leaders thought Jesus should die because He claimed He was the Son of God. Pilate began interrogating Jesus and became more agitated because Jesus would not answer him. Pilate tried to release Jesus because He could not justify His death.

Now the people in the crowd began to call for Jesus to be crucified. Pilate brought Jesus out and announced, *“Look, here is your king!”* Pilate was incredulous that the people would want their king crucified. It is not in this Scripture passage, but there was a Passover tradition of amnesty in which one prisoner was released during the festival. The outcome was placed in the hands of the governor and the Sanhedrin. So when Pilate brought Jesus out, he was shocked that the people called for the release of Barabbas instead. Barabbas was a violent insurrectionist, a terrorist! What?

So Pilate tried to appease the people by letting them know he would have Jesus flogged (beaten) to satisfy them. But the crowds cry out even louder for His crucifixion. Pilate calls out in disgust that if the leaders want a crucifixion, they will have to do it themselves because he finds Jesus innocent. Pilate is exonerating himself of any responsibility for Jesus’ death.

If Pilate won’t execute his duties, the Jewish leaders will. According to Leviticus 24:16b, *“Any native-born Israelite or foreigner among you who blasphemes the Name of the Lord must be put to death.”* That was enough for them. Now Pilate began to worry because he felt his career was in danger, so he handed Jesus over to be crucified.

Prayer: Oh, God, it all had to play out so that Jesus could save me. My soul is crying. I must always remember what He has done for me. In your Son’s precious Name I pray, amen.

From the United Methodist Hymnal #293

Behold the Savior of Mankind

*Behold the Savior of mankind
nailed to the shameful tree;
how vast the love that him inclined
to bleed and die for thee!*

*Hark how he groans! while nature shakes,
and earth's strong pillars bend!
The temple's veil in sunder breaks,
the solid marbles rend.*

*'Tis done! the precious ransom's paid!
"Receive my soul!" he cries;
see where he bows his sacred head!
He bows his head and dies!*

*But soon he'll break death's envious chain
and in full glory shine.
O Lamb of God, was ever pain,
was ever love like thine?*

Written by Samuel Wesley (1662-1735), this is one of the few relics of his papers found after the fire which destroyed the Epworth rectory during the night of February 9, 1709, when his son, young John Wesley, was rescued as a "brand plucked out of the burning." It was first printed in John Wesley's hymnbook, *A collection of Psalms and Hymns* (Charleston, 1737), under the title "On the Crucifixion."

March 29 – Palm Sunday - Faith of the Centurion

“When Jesus returned to Capernaum, a Roman officer came and pleaded with him, ‘Lord, my young servant lies in bed, paralyzed and in terrible pain.’ Jesus said, ‘I will come and heal him.’ But the officer said, ‘Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed. I know this because I am under the authority of my superior officers, and I have authority over my soldiers. I only need to say, “Go,” and they go, or “Come,” and they come. And if I say to my slaves, “Do this,” they do it.’ When Jesus heard this, he was amazed. Turning to those who were following him, he said, ‘I tell you the truth, I haven’t seen faith like this in all Israel! And I tell you this, that many Gentiles will come from all over the world—from east and west—and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven. But many Israelites—those for whom the Kingdom was prepared—will be thrown into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ Then Jesus said to the Roman officer, ‘Go back home. Because you believed, it has happened.’ And the young servant was healed that same hour.”

(Matt 8:5-13)

If you were not Jewish, you were considered a Gentile, a term that distinguished people by their heritage and religious identity. The centurion would have been a gentile. He was a professional officer in the Roman army who commanded about 100 soldiers.

He had profound faith. He believed Jesus did not need to physically visit his home to perform a miracle. He famously stated, *“Lord, I am not worthy to have you come into my home. Just say the word from where you are, and my servant will be healed.”*

He understood authority. He equated Jesus’ spiritual power with his own military authority, recognizing that just as his soldiers obeyed his orders, his servant’s sickness would obey Jesus’ command, and he was right! Because of his great faith, his servant was healed instantly!

Prayers: Lord, I recognize the humility and faith of this centurion, and his care for his servant who was sick. Thank you for hearing his plea and for healing his young servant. Praise be to God! Amen.

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From The Book of Common Prayer

The Sunday of the Passion: Palm Sunday

It is right to praise you, Almighty God,

for the acts of love by which you have redeemed us

through your Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

On this day he entered the holy city of Jerusalem in triumph,

and was proclaimed as King of kings

by those who spread their garments and

branches of palm along his way.

Let these branches be for us signs of his victory,

and grant that we who bear them in his name

may ever hail him as our King,

and follow him in the way that leads to eternal life;

who lives and reigns in glory

with you and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever. Amen.

March 30 – Jesus’ Crucifixion

“When they came to a place called The Skull, they nailed him to the cross. And the criminals were also crucified—one on his right and one on his left. Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing.’ And the soldiers gambled for his clothes by throwing dice. The crowd watched and the leaders scoffed. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘let him save himself if he is really God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.’ The soldiers mocked him, too, by offering him a drink of sour wine. They called out to him, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ A sign was fastened above him with these words: ‘This is the King of the Jews. (Luke 23:33-38)

“By this time, it was about noon, and darkness fell across the whole land until three o’clock. The light from the sun was gone. And suddenly, the curtain in the sanctuary of the Temple was torn down the middle. Then Jesus shouted, ‘Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands!’ And with those words he breathed his last. When the Roman officer overseeing the execution saw what had happened, he worshiped God and said, ‘Surely this man was innocent.’ And when all the crowd that came to see the crucifixion saw what had happened, they went home in deep sorrow. But Jesus’ friends, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance watching.” (Luke 23:44-49)

It breaks my heart that Jesus thought God had abandoned Him. This is what Jesus dreaded. He knew that when all the sin of mankind was placed on Him, He would be separated from God because God cannot be in the presence of sin. For those moments between Jesus calling out to His Father and when He took His last breath, Father and Son were apart.

In the Jewish Temple, a thick, ornate curtain separated the Most Holy Place from the rest of the Temple. The Most Holy Place was the most sacred room in the temple. It contained the Ark of the Covenant, which held the Ten Commandments. The Ark of the Covenant symbolized God’s presence. The Most Holy Place was only entered once a year by the High Priest who was seeking atonement from God for his own sin as well as all of Israel’s sins.

The curtain symbolized the separation between God and humanity. When Jesus died, the curtain was torn in two and man didn’t need a go-between like the High Priest. Jesus’ sacrifice opened a direct path between God and mankind. God has brought us into His presence.

Prayer: Holy Lord, what a sacrifice you made when you took all my sin upon yourself. Thank you, not only for dying on the cross for me, but for removing the curtain between us. I love being able to come into your presence and talk to you, one on one, in prayer. Amen.

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From *The Book of Common Prayer*

Good Friday

*Almighty God, we pray you graciously
to behold this your family,
for whom our Lord Jesus Christ
was willing to be betrayed,
and given into the hands of sinners,
and to suffer death upon the cross;
who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.*

*Let us commit ourselves to our God,
and pray for the grace of a holy life,
that, with all who have departed this world,
and have died in the peace of Christ,
and those whose faith is known to God alone,
we may be accounted worthy
to enter into the fullness of the joy of our Lord,
and receive the crown of life in the day of resurrection.*

Amen.

2016, p. 238, 241

March 31 – Jesus’ Burial

“As evening approached, Joseph, a rich man from Arimathea who had become a follower of Jesus, went to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. And Pilate issued an order to release it to him. Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a long sheet of clean linen cloth. He placed it in his own new tomb, which had been carved out of the rock. Then he rolled a great stone across the entrance and left. Both Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were sitting across from the tomb and watching. The next day, on the Sabbath, the leading priests and Pharisees went to see Pilate. They told him, ‘Sir, we remember what that deceiver once said while he was still alive: “After three days I will rise from the dead.” So we request that you seal the tomb until the third day. This will prevent his disciples from coming and stealing his body and then telling everyone he was raised from the dead! If that happens, we’ll be worse off than we were at first.’ Pilate replied, ‘Take guards and secure it the best you can.’ So they sealed the tomb and posted guards to protect it.” (Matt 27:57-66)

I’m glad that Joseph was there to claim Jesus’ body. I’m certain he reverently wrapped the linen cloth around Jesus and placed His body tenderly in his own tomb. The entrance to the tomb was enclosed with a huge stone.

The Pharisees were worried about Jesus’ claim that He would come back from the dead in three days. They went to Pilate to express their concern. He offered his guards to help them go to the tomb and seal the stone securely.

But, after Jesus rose from the dead, these guards were given a large bribe by the leaders to tell the authorities and the townspeople, *“You must say, ‘Jesus’ disciples came during the night while we were sleeping, and they stole His body.’”* (Matthew 28:13b) Now, we know that didn’t happen, but some people then believed them.

There were women who saw Joseph place Jesus in the tomb. They had returned to their homes to get the spices ready for Jesus’ body. But it was too late for them to go back to the tomb. Sabbath had begun. They wouldn’t be able to return until Sunday.

Prayer: Lord, I am thankful for Joseph and the women who took such good care of your body. I’m even more grateful that your tomb was empty because you had risen from the dead! Alleluia! Amen.

April 1 – Women at the Tomb

“But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn’t find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, ‘Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day.’ Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn’t believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened.” (Luke 24:1-12)

The women couldn’t go to the tomb any sooner. It was the Sabbath starting at sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday. They brought spices and perfumes to show their love for Jesus. Imagine their surprise when they entered the tomb and it was empty! There were two angels who told them that Jesus was alive and reminding them that Jesus had told them that this would happen. When they remembered, they ran to tell the other disciples.

Even though Jesus had shared with the disciples several times what was going to happen, it sounded unbelievable. He told them that He would be arrested and killed, but in three days He would rise from the dead. Even Peter had to run to the tomb to see for himself and when he saw the strips of linen that had covered Jesus’ body, he walked away perplexed.

Jesus’ resurrection is the foundation of Christianity. Because of the resurrection, we are assured that death has been conquered. That reassures us that we, too, will be raised from the dead to live with Christ for eternity. It gives us hope for the future and that is what we need now and every day.

Prayer: Everlasting God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, to die and be resurrected back to life. You brought Him back to where you are and one day all believers will be with you, too. Thank you for your eternal hope. In Jesus Name I pray, amen.

April 2 – Jesus’ Resurrection

“Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb. Suddenly there was a great earthquake! For an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, rolled aside the stone, and sat on it. His face shone like lightning, and his clothing was as white as snow. The guards shook with fear when they saw him, and they fell into a dead faint. Then the angel spoke to the women. ‘Don’t be afraid!’ he said. ‘I know you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He isn’t here! He is risen from the dead, just as he said would happen. Come, see where his body was lying. And now, go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and he is going ahead of you to Galilee. You will see him there. Remember what I have told you.’ The women ran quickly from the tomb. They were very frightened but also filled with great joy, and they rushed to give the disciples the angel’s message. And as they went, Jesus met them and greeted them. And they ran to him, grasped his feet, and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘Don’t be afraid! Go tell my brothers to leave for Galilee, and they will see me there.’” (Matthew 28:1-10)

The guards are still in front of the tomb. All is well ... until they feel a great earthquake! But it wasn’t an earthquake at all; the huge stone was being rolled away from the entrance by an angel and the guards fainted dead away when they saw him. The women were there, too, and they were the ones the angel wanted to speak to. First he tells them, *“Do not be afraid.”* He told them that Jesus wasn’t there, that He had risen from the dead! Then the angel invites them to *“Come and see.”* He’s inviting the women to look inside the tomb themselves, to check out the evidence. Then he tells them to go and share the joy of the resurrection with others. The women were scared but eager to go share what the angel told them.

We are called to listen to the angel as well; to believe in the resurrection because the tomb is still empty. Check out the evidence if you have any doubts. Then go and share the Good News of Jesus with others.

Jesus’ resurrection is the foundation of our faith and the church’s witness to the world. Jesus’ resurrection provides the final triumph over human death because Jesus promises that He has prepared a place for us in His Father’s house. He reveals to us the power of God over death and the assurance of eternal life. Our Lord has risen; He has risen indeed! Let us rejoice and be glad as we celebrate His Resurrection Day!

Prayer: Oh, Lord, your love for me knows no end. You died to take away my sin, and you have reserved a place in heaven for those who have accepted you as their Lord and Savior. I’m happy to know that I have nothing to fear because you have conquered death for me. In your precious Name I pray, amen and amen.

April 3 - Road to Emmaus

"That same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem. As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him. He asked them, 'What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?' They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, 'You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days.' 'What things?' Jesus asked. 'The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth,' they said. 'He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago.'

"Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive! Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said.' Then Jesus said to them, 'You foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures. Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?' Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."

"By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, 'Stay the night with us, since it is getting late.' So he went home with them. As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared! They said to each other, 'Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?' And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, 'The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.' Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread." (Luke 24:13-35)

I know that was a long Scripture reading, but isn't it a wonderful story? Just imagine walking along and talking about the events from the past week that culminated in Jesus' death. Then this stranger joins you and you relay the story to Him. For some unknown reason, you are drawn to this stranger and invite Him to stay with you when you stop for the night. Then, he breaks the bread when you sit down to eat and you are reminded of the Last Supper when Jesus broke the bread and you recognize Him – it's Jesus!

Did you notice that during their walk, Jesus explained the prophecies and the writings of Moses? He was trying to help them understand that He needed to die before He could be risen to new life! To the disciples, the Old Testament prophecies indicated that the coming Messiah was a military and political Messiah; they didn't know that the Messiah had come to save them from their sins. When Jesus died on that cross, they lost hope. They would soon realize that Jesus' death offered the greatest hope imaginable.

Prayer: Almighty God, I wish that I could have been in that room with the disciples when Jesus broke the bread! To know that they had seen the Messiah – that they, too, were witnesses to His Resurrection! And through the Bible, we are witnesses, too. May I take every opportunity to share with others the wonderful story of Jesus' resurrection Amen.

April 4 – Alive In Christ

“Once you were dead because of your disobedience and your many sins. You used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else. But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that you have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus. God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” (Ephesians 2:1-10)

“We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. Yet God, in his grace, freely makes us right in his sight. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood.” (Rom. 3:22-25a)

For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don’t drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News.” (Colossians 1:19-23a)

When we were born into this world, we were sinners. All of us have disappointed God by following Satan instead of Him. When we sin, we are separated from God because God cannot be in the presence of sin. Let that knowledge influence your decisions.

Without Christ we are all alienated from God. But God, in his great mercy, sent his Son, Jesus to rescue and redeem His sinful and broken people. We should be condemned but instead we are loved. We should be punished but instead we become participants in the divine. We have been saved! Jesus’ death on the cross, and our faith in Him, bring about the reconciliation. Though our sin once separated us from Him, now because of Jesus’ death and resurrection, we can know this great God more intimately. We have become His children, and we are alive in Christ!

Prayer: God, let me be the example of your grace and love to future believers. Let me be a shining light for their path to draw them closer to you. Amen.

April 5 – Easter – The Supremacy of Christ

“Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can’t see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.” (Colossians 1:15-18)

God is invisible, but He can be seen in His Son, Jesus, because He is the image of God. He is the ruler over all creation; visible (i.e., people & animals) and invisible (angels and spirits). Christ is the Head of the Church and Reconciler of the Church.

God is Omnipotent (All-Powerful). God has supreme, unlimited power and can do anything that is logically possible. He controls creation and its laws. *“Jesus looked at them intently and said, ‘Humanly speaking, it is impossible. But with God everything is possible.’”* (Matthew 19:26)

God is Omniscient (All-Knowing). God possesses complete knowledge of the past, present, and future, including all thoughts and details, leaving nothing unknown. *“Even if we feel guilty, God is greater than our feelings, and he knows everything.”* (1 John 3:20)

God is Omnipresent (All-Present). God’s presence fills the entire universe, being in all places simultaneously. *“Can anyone hide from me in a secret place? Am I not everywhere in all the heavens and earth?” says the Lord.*” (Jeremiah 23:24)

God’s attributes are key to understanding God’s nature. They highlight His ultimate sovereignty, perfect understanding, and constant participation in our lives and in the world. They provide us comfort, showing that God is always available, and they offer a basis for faith and trust in His plans, even in difficult times.

We can never perceive God’s Supremacy. How can we understand someone all-knowing, all-present, and all powerful? It is beyond our ability. But we can understand that our faith in this Supreme God needs our continuous attention. Stay strong against Satan’s power. Continue to be curious and studious. Remain in your Bible. Stay in close communication with Him by continual prayer. I believe in God’s love for us, the Holy Spirit’s guidance in our lives, Jesus’ sacrifice for us on the cross and His Glorious Resurrection! Hallelujah! He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today!

Prayer: Almighty God, what a day for us to celebrate our Christian beliefs! We acknowledge your supremacy over our lives and our church and know that you love us beyond our understanding. We can remain strong with your help. We can remain faithful with your help. And we will live forever with you for eternity because of your unending love for us! May the *Remembrances* of the life, death, and resurrection of your Son stay with us to give us the hope we need each day and to encourage us to live and love like Him. In your Son’s precious Name I pray, amen.

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From the United Methodist Hymnal #504

The Old Rugged Cross

*On a hill far away stood and old rugged cross,
the emblem of suffering and shame;
and I love that old cross where the dearest and best
for a world of lost sinners was slain.*

Refrain: *So I'll cherish the old rugged cross, till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross and exchange it some day for a crown.*

*O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
has a wondrous attraction for me;
For the dear Lamb of God left his glory above
to bear it to dark Calvary.*

Refrain

*In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
a wondrous beauty I see,
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,
to pardon and sanctify me.*

Refrain

*To the old rugged cross I will ever be true,
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;
Then he'll call me some day to my home far away,
Where his glory forever I'll share.*

Refrain

Words and Music: George Bennard, 1913

Eastertide

Beginning on Easter Sunday and running through Pentecost Sunday is the seven-week period called the Easter season or Eastertide within the United Methodist Church. It is a time for reflecting on the power of the Resurrection and the personal transformation which results.

The Preparation for Worship is found in the Book of Common Prayer which sets the tone for the seven weeks following Easter:

Blessed are you, Lord God of our salvation,

to you be praise and glory forever.

As once you led your people through the waters

from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the promised land,

now you have delivered us from the dominion of darkness

and brought us into the kingdom of your beloved Son.

Rising from death, he has destroyed death

And opened to us the gate of everlasting life.

May we, the first fruits of your new creation,

Rejoice in this new day you have made

And praise you for your mighty acts.

Blessed be God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Blessed be God forever.

Happy Eastertide Everyone!