

*The Parables of Jesus*  
*Lent 2023*



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Jesus*

*Lenten Devotional 2023*

Parables are stories that Jesus told to help teach His followers how to live their lives according to God's plan for them. No parable by itself *completely* describes how we should live. Instead, each paints one part of the whole picture.

We discover spiritual truths when we understand the meaning of a parable. A parable helps us discover those truths when we are actively seeking them. On the other hand, to those who are too lazy or too strong-willed to change, the parables are just stories that don't make much sense. We hope that we are able to give you new perspectives.

We are treating Holy Week as just that - Holy. We will leave the Parables behind to treat Holy Week more traditionally. Take each day to draw closer to your Lord through prayer and repentance. Repentance is an attitude in which you are willing to let go of the things that prevent you from growing in spiritual maturity. Our prayer is that this devotional will be a tool for you to spend time with our Savior each day to repent and to let go. It is a time of being still and listening to the voice that talks to your heart while we take the time to pay attention to the community that surrounds us.

The forty days of Lent are traditionally a period of reflection 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 our Lord Jesus Christ. Life 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.

God bless you on your journey.

The Scripture used in this Lenten Devotional is from various translations of the Bible including the New Living Translation (NLT), the New International Version (NIV), the Common English Bible (CEB), Living Bible (TLB) and the paraphrase The Message (MSG).

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Anyone who would like to use this devotional, in whole or in part, has permission to do so as long as it is used to advance the Kingdom of God.

## **Psalm 51:1-17 (NLT)**

For the choir director: A psalm of David, regarding the time Nathan the prophet came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba.

*“Have mercy on me, O God, because of your unfailing love. Because of your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.*

*For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight. You will be proved right in what you say, and your judgment against me is just.*

*For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. But you desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there.*

*Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again; you have broken me—now let me rejoice. Don’t keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt.*

*Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from your presence, and don’t take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and make me willing to obey you. Then I will teach your ways to rebels, and they will return to you.*

*Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of your forgiveness. Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise you. You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God.”*

*Breath Prayer* – Create in **me** a clean heart, O God.

## Ash Wednesday

### February 22 - *Parable of the Lamp and Bushel*

Matthew 5:14b-16 – (MSG) - “You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We’re going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If I make you light-bearers, you don’t think I’m going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I’m putting you on a light stand. Now that I’ve put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you’ll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.”

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine.

We will sing in peace, we will sing in harmony.

This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine.

let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.

I remember singing this song as a child with one finger pointing up and wiggling it in front of me. I never understood that it was scriptural, or what it meant. When we smile a big smile our eyes light up, even glow. Sometimes it’s because we see someone we love, sometimes it’s because we have just gotten a similar smile from someone in the room. I understand that the people at Matthew 25 and Friday Food Giveaway are all smiles, both the givers and receivers. People see those smiles, they observe how we treat others, how we are Christ to our neighbor. When we smile a big smile, our eyes light up just like a light on a stand. That’s what God wants us to do; be a reflection of God’s generosity and love.

This parable is directed to the church (us), not to glorify the church, but to glorify God. We are to share our talents and our abilities, not to build ourselves up, but to show what God has done with us. God’s light reflecting through us.

*Breath Prayer* - God, guide me to shine my light so that others will see you.

jns

## February 23 – *Parable of The House on the Rock*

Matthew 7:24-27 (NLT) – “Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won’t collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn’t obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.”

Jesus spends a lot of time teaching in the Bible. He wants us to learn how to take care of others and how to keep ourselves from being polluted by the sin of this world. We can read the Bible all day long but if we don’t learn the lessons that it has to offer, then we’re not listening to God. However, if we put those lessons into practice, our attitudes and behaviors change for the better. Have you taken inventory lately? Are you living a better life as a Christian today than you were a year ago? Are you serving God by serving others?

Our church community is serving others in beautiful ways. We offer food, smiles, and acceptance at our Friday Food Distribution. We help families with food insecurity through Matthew 25 and by filling backpacks at Mississippi Elementary School. We show homeless teens that there are people who care through the Dignity Pantry. We help families who are homeless through Family Promise. We show what it means to serve others when we give with no expectation of getting anything in return.

People don’t intentionally build on sand. If they do it’s because they haven’t thought through what the end result will be. A house (or a life) built on sand will certainly collapse. If we build our lives on a firm foundation like the Rock of our Salvation, we can become the people that God meant us to be: Strong, caring, loving Disciples of Christ.

*Breath Prayer* – Holy Spirit, continue to lead the way.

nlm

## February 24 – *Parable of the Cloth/Garments*

Matthew 9:16 (NLT) - “Besides, who would patch old clothing with new cloth? For the new patch would shrink and rip away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger tear than before.”

In doing research on this parable, there was very little information. But one explanation made sense to me. I found it in a book titled **The Parables: Understanding the Stories Jesus Told** by Simon J. Kistemaker. His explanation is this: “Jesus’s presence entailed the rise of a new spirituality that could not simply be added onto Judaism as most were practicing it. Those, like John’s disciples and the Pharisees, could not maintain their traditional ways and add ‘a little bit of Jesus’ to them. There is considerable continuity between the Hebrew Scriptures and the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, but the religious system of Israel could not be just slightly amended without disastrous results (a worse tear results). Jesus’ point is not so much that Judaism and Christianity, respectively, are ruined by trying to combine them, as if they are both perfectly fine when unmixed. Instead, He proposed that catastrophe follows such an attempt, namely the forfeiture of salvation found only in Him.”

He goes on to explain, “The ‘new’ likely refers to the gospel and the old to Israel’s Scriptures, and especially Moses’ instruction. Jesus interprets the Law in fresh ways, but He doesn’t dispense with it.”

We couldn’t “just add a little Jesus”. I love that! How true. Jesus wasn’t just mending something, He was, and still is, making something brand new!

*Breath Prayer* – God, thank you for Jesus and His stories.

nlm

## February 25 – *Parable of the Wineskins*

Matthew 9:17 (NIV) – “Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.”

Jesus was talking about the Jewish system when referring to the old wineskins, which would not accommodate His new way. God is doing a new thing in Jesus.

Have you ever tried to reuse plastic Ziplock bags? It’s a pain, isn’t it? It’s admirable to recycle items, but if they have been reused too many times, the zip is gone from the zip lock.

When encountering re-occurring dilemmas, we sometimes revert to dealing with them in the same old way. If we seem to find ourselves in a familiar predicament, it’s easy to fall back on the same solution. Maybe it’s time to rethink. What exactly is the problem and what part do I play in it? Am I blaming other people or circumstances? Writing down pros and cons might help. Maybe look in the concordance of your Bible for a new approach. Or call a friend for advice.

*Breath Prayer* - Lord, help me to re-evaluate my options when I’m in a quandary.

jns

## February 26 - **Psalm 63:1-11** (NLT)

A psalm of David, regarding a time when David was in the wilderness of Judah.

“O God, you are my God;  
I earnestly search for you.  
My soul thirsts for you;  
my whole body longs for you  
in this parched and weary land  
where there is no water.  
I have seen you in your sanctuary  
and gazed upon your power and glory.  
Your unfailing love is better than life itself;  
how I praise you!  
I will praise you as long as I live,  
lifting up my hands to you in prayer.  
You satisfy me more than the richest feast.  
I will praise you with songs of joy.  
I lie awake thinking of you,  
meditating on you through the night.  
Because you are my helper,  
I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings.  
I cling to you;  
your strong right hand holds me securely.  
But those plotting to destroy me will come to ruin.  
They will go down into the depths of the earth.  
They will die by the sword  
and become the food of jackals.  
But the king will rejoice in God.  
All who swear to tell the truth will praise him,  
while liars will be silenced.”

*Breath Prayer* – Lord, when I search, let me find you.

## February 27 – *Parable of the Sower*

Matthew 13:1-9 (NLT) – *“Later that same day Jesus left the house and sat beside the lake. A large crowd soon gathered around him, so he got into a boat. Then he sat there and taught as the people stood on the shore. He told many stories in the form of parables, such as this one: ‘Listen! A farmer went out to plant some seeds. As he scattered them across his field, some seeds fell on a footpath, and the birds came and ate them. Other seeds fell on shallow soil with underlying rock. The seeds sprouted quickly because the soil was shallow. But the plants soon wilted under the hot sun, and since they didn’t have deep roots, they died. Other seeds fell among thorns that grew up and choked out the tender plants. Still other seeds fell on fertile soil, and they produced a crop that was thirty, sixty, and even a hundred times as much as had been planted! Anyone with ears to hear should listen and understand.’”*

The scattered seeds fell on different types of soil. Some never grew, some grew but never matured and others took root and became what they were meant to become. Just like us.

Some of us never grow spiritually, some start growing but never mature fully and others keep seeking and learning and maturing; becoming who they are meant to be.

Pastors, Bible study facilitators, youth and children’s directors are like the farmer scattering the seeds. They are teaching spiritual truths, but most of the time they don’t know on what kind of “soil” their teaching is landing. Is the person receptive? Is he/she listening? Is the person putting in the time to learn? Are they seeking; do they even want to know? If yes, their teaching is landing on good soil.

Sometimes we don’t know if our actions have made a difference. We don’t always see the results. Don’t be discouraged! Keep scattering the “seeds” of God by being a truth-seeker, a justice seeker, by being kind and serving others, loving others without reservation, and by changing one thing about yourself to become a better person.

*Breath Prayer* – Father, change me from the inside out to become who you made me to be.

nlm

## February 28 – *Parables of the Wheat and Weeds*

Matthew 13:24-30 (NLT) – *“Here is another story Jesus told: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a farmer who planted good seed in his field. But that night as the workers slept, his enemy came and planted weeds among the wheat, then slipped away. When the crop began to grow and produce grain, the weeds also grew. The farmer’s workers went to him and said, ‘Sir, the field where you planted that good seed is full of weeds! Where did they come from?’ ‘An enemy has done this!’ the farmer exclaimed. ‘Should we pull out the weeds?’ they asked. ‘No,’ he replied, ‘you’ll uproot the wheat if you do. Let both grow together until the harvest. Then I will tell the harvesters to sort out the weeds, tie them into bundles, and burn them, and to put the wheat in the barn.’”*

When I was researching, I learned that the young weeds and the young blades of wheat look the same. You can’t tell them apart until it’s harvest time and they are fully mature.

Jesus explains the story of the wheat and the weeds in verses 36-43. In this parable the weeds are those who are unbelievers and the wheat depicts the believers. Just as in the field of this parable, we also live side by side in this world. No one can tell an unbeliever from a believer just by looking at our outer appearance.

We will be separated when the judgment comes at the end of time. None of us know when that will be. We need to be vigilant so that we are ready when the time comes. Believe in Jesus the Messiah, say your prayers, repent of your sins, serve your fellow mankind any way that you can. If you cannot serve physically, you can pray for that ministry. Stay in right standing with God and you will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. This is one of God’s promises and you can trust God’s faithfulness.

*Breath Prayer* – Lord, let me be ready when you return.

nIm

## March 1 – *Parable of the Mustard Seed*

Matthew 13:31-32 (CEB) – “He told another parable to them: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and planted in his field. It’s the smallest of all seeds. But when it’s grown, it’s the largest of all vegetable plants. It becomes a tree so that the birds in the sky come and nest in its branches.’”

The mustard seed grew quietly but persistently. Something tiny has grown into something completely different. We all begin as a tiny egg. As we matured into adulthood, we became that tree for those around us, young and old. How we think, act, and speak affects them.

As the mustard tree, there are times you have broad branches that reach out to those far away, other times you have many branches that crowd together to enfold someone who needs your nurture, or perhaps a place to rest from difficulties or pressures.

Growth of God’s kingdom is a result of divine power, not human endeavor. God gives us blessings to give to others; that is the way we are part of God’s kingdom. We contribute to its development. It is miraculous how the work of the kingdom grew from its beginning with Jesus and His disciples to what it is today, a worldwide religion.

*Breath Prayer* - Lead me to be part of the development of your kingdom here on earth.

jns

## March 2 – *Parable of the Leaven*

Matthew 13:33 (NIV) – “He told them still another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.’”

Yeast is used in baking bread and other bakery products as a leavening agent, which causes the bread to rise and expand. It starts small and grows and grows transforming the mixture into bread. Changing what were individual ingredients into a fragrant tasty treat. Yeast is alive, doing its thing as the bread is rising. The kingdom of heaven is working through life constantly changing us thereby building up the Kingdom.

Contrast the small beginning with eleven disciples to the extensive results of the power of the Kingdom now at work. Divine power slips into the silent action of the coming kingdom of God. That is God working in a hidden way, pervading one’s life and giving it a new quality. This helps us see, sometimes unknown to us, how God is working constantly in and through our lives, guiding us, channeling our uniqueness each day.

*Breath Prayer* - Knead me. Mold me. Use me in your Kingdom, Lord.

jns

## March 3 – *Parable of the Treasure*

Matthew 13:44 (NIV) - *“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.”*

We usually think of a treasure as a thing. It is significant that the man found it; he went above and beyond to get the treasure. But to me, a treasure really is a place, a feeling, a calmness, serenity. We discover we have it sometimes for only a moment. At other times we experience it for a longer period of time.

The Kingdom of Heaven is a place where all are accepted, loved and cared about. It's a place and time where people truly enjoy each other's company. It is a smile on a friend's face as we see them at the store. When we look outside, we see the wonders of creation. There is an experience and a response. It is when we feel loved by God. That true treasure is the Kingdom of God. He is always with us. His kingdom is where you are right now.

*Breath Prayer* - Breathe in calmness, breathe in joy.

jns

## March 4 – *Parable of the Pearl Merchant*

**Matthew 13:45-46** (NLT) – “Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it!”

In this parable, I think Jesus wants us to think about His early disciples. Jesus came to them and said, “Come, follow me.” The Bible says that they **immediately** put down their nets or left their boat and their father and followed Jesus. That is a true sacrifice.

The merchant in this parable sells everything to get that pearl of great value. But this sacrifice is not the same. He sold something to buy something of equal or greater value. He’s not out anything.

If we look at this parable through a Christian lens, the pearl can be identified as Christ. When a person discovers Jesus, he changes; he gives up his sinful lifestyle and devotes himself to serving the Lord. Jesus has given that new believer a pearl of great value.

*Breath Prayer* – Lord, thank you for the pearl of eternal life with you.

nlm

March 5

**Psalm 67:1-7 (NLT)**

For the choir director: A song. A psalm, to be accompanied by stringed instruments.

*“May God be merciful and bless us.*

*May his face smile with favor on us.*

*Interlude*

*May your ways be known throughout the earth,  
your saving power among people everywhere.*

*May the nations praise you, O God.*

*Yes, may all the nations praise you.*

*Let the whole world sing for joy,*

*because you govern the nations with justice  
and guide the people of the whole world.*

*Interlude*

*May the nations praise you, O God.*

*Yes, may all the nations praise you.*

*Then the earth will yield its harvests,  
and God, our God, will richly bless us.*

*Yes, God will bless us,*

*and people all over the world will fear him.”*

*Breath Prayer* – God, we lift up prayers for the entire world. Please unify us and give us peace.

## March 6 – *Parable of the Fishing Net*

Matthew 13:47-50 (NIV) - *“Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”*

In my reading, I learned this parable is a warning to the members of the church as they approach the final judgment. Because we are all human, on some days we are “good fish” and others “bad fish”. There are days when we may be like a fish with mercury poisoning; resentful, selfish, full of pride, arrogant, lacking understanding, feeling sorry for oneself, unforgiving, judgmental, many of which I exhibit regularly. So as good fish we try to avoid being filled with mercury poisoning. John Wesley told us Methodists are “going on to perfection.” Meaning we try each day to be our best selves. Avoid negativity; look for something good each day; try to let that child of God emerge. By doing this we will experience the Kingdom of heaven where we find joy, fulfillment and love.

*Breath Prayer* - Fill me with your calm, your peace, and your compassion.

jns

## March 7 – *Parable of the Lost Sheep*

Matthew 18:10-14 (NLT) – *“Beware that you don’t look down on any of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father. If a man has a hundred sheep and one of them wanders away, what will he do? Won’t he leave the ninety-nine others on the hills and go out to search for the one that is lost? And if he finds it, I tell you the truth, he will rejoice over it more than over the ninety-nine that didn’t wander away! In the same way, it is not my heavenly Father’s will that even one of these little ones should perish.”*

Jesus cherishes little children and wants them to come to Him. Children have the receptive attitude needed to approach God. Matthew 19:14 (NIV) says, *“Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”* We also need to come before God with childlike wonder.

If a man owned a hundred sheep in Jesus’ day he would be quite wealthy. He would hire shepherds to care for them. Sheep belong in a flock and that is where they feel most comfortable. If a sheep got separated from the rest of the flock, the lost sheep would experience anxiety, lie down, and wait for the shepherd to find him. At least that would make it easier to find - it wouldn’t be wandering around!

We are like the lost sheep. God goes to great lengths to find us. When we go astray, He looks for us again and again and again. He doesn’t want to lose even one.

2 Peter 3:9b (NIV) says, *“He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”*

*Breath Prayer* – Thank you for running after me, Lord. I am yours.

nIm

## March 8 – *Parable of the Unforgiving Debtor*

Matthew 18:21-35 (NLT) - *“Then Peter came to him and asked, ‘Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?’ ‘No, not seven times,’ Jesus replied, ‘but seventy times seven!’*

*Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven can be compared to a king who decided to bring his accounts up to date with servants who had borrowed money from him. In the process, one of his debtors was brought in who owed him millions of dollars. He couldn’t pay, so his master ordered that he be sold—along with his wife, his children, and everything he owned—to pay the debt. But the man fell down before his master and begged him, ‘Please, be patient with me, and I will pay it all.’ Then his master was filled with pity for him, and he released him and forgave his debt.*

*But when the man left the king, he went to a fellow servant who owed him a few thousand dollars. He grabbed him by the throat and demanded instant payment. His fellow servant fell down before him and begged for a little more time. ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it,’ he pleaded. But his creditor wouldn’t wait. He had the man arrested and put in prison until the debt could be paid in full.*

*When some of the other servants saw this, they were very upset. They went to the king and told him everything that had happened. Then the king called in the man he had forgiven and said, ‘You evil servant! I forgave you that tremendous debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn’t you have mercy on your fellow servant, just as I had mercy on you?’ Then the angry king sent the man to prison to be tortured until he had paid his entire debt. That’s what my heavenly Father will do to you if you refuse to forgive your brothers and sisters from your heart.”*

Does it sound familiar? I’m sure that all of us have been forgiven for something we have done against someone else - a friend, a family member, a co-worker. The feeling is amazing when we have righted a wrong.

There are some things that we have a whole lot of trouble forgiving. What if a person physically abused a loved one of yours or a friend? What if someone hurt one of your family members? Not physically but emotionally and/or financially. Do you have someone that you just can’t forgive?

My only advice to you is to pray hard and pray relentlessly. You need to find a way to forgive that person. I prayed for probably 20 years because I just couldn't find it in my heart to reconcile in my mind what had happened many years ago. I was finally able to say, "I forgive you." Less than a year later that person died. I realized then what a burden I had been carrying.

I saw a mom on TV whose daughter had been brutally murdered. When they went to court for the sentencing, the mom told the man that she forgave him. A reporter asked her how she could forgive her child's killer. The woman said, "That certainly doesn't mean that I condone his actions; it doesn't mean that I will ever forget. I am forgiving him for myself. I don't want him to be in my mind or my life after this day and I don't want to live in anger for the rest of my life." I wish I had heard that many years ago. If you have someone who has harmed you in any way, please forgive him or her ... not for them but for YOU.

*Breath Prayer* – Lord, thank you for your infinite love and mercy. Keep teaching me how to forgive.

nlm

## March 9 - *Parable of the Vineyard Workers*

Matthew 20:1-16 (NIV) - *“For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard. About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’*

*‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered. He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’ When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’ The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These men who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’ But he answered one of them, ‘Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’ So the last will be first, and the first will be last.”*

The vineyard owner needs to take care of his produce in a timely manner, so he needs additional workers. He takes the usual steps and goes to the temporary employment office. The temps all do a good job, but grumble when they think they were cheated. A deal is a deal. The owner is so happy the job was accomplished well and on time. His joy bubbles up and he gives everyone the same pay.

What’s fair is fair, right? Is this fair? “No,” say our feelings of self-righteousness. It’s the owner’s right to do what he wants to with his money. Why question his generosity? It’s not about who did a better job.

God is so very munificent, caring for each one of us, loving each one of us, as we need it. God's grace is available to all. Yes, some people get more than others. Does that mean that some deserve more than the next person? It's like parents who have more than one child - parents' love them equally, care for them equally (individuality considered). Well, we all know the baby of the family is most favored [that was me, spoiled]. Human parents, like our heavenly parent, love each one of us as we are.

This is about when we give our lives to Jesus as our Savior. It's all in the timing, right? No, God welcomes us with open arms whenever we accept our servanthood. God's love is so generous, He loves us all equally, no matter what we accomplish in our lives.

*Breath Prayer* - Thank you Lord for being so very bighearted, you accept me as I am.

jns

## March 10 – *Parable of the Two Sons*

Matthew 21:28-32 (NLT) - *“But what do you think about this? A man with two sons told the older boy, ‘Son, go out and work in the vineyard today.’ The son answered, ‘No, I won’t go,’ but later he changed his mind and went anyway. Then the father told the other son, ‘You go,’ and he said, ‘Yes, sir, I will.’ But he didn’t go. ‘Which of the two obeyed his father?’ They replied, ‘The first’.*

*Then Jesus explained his meaning: ‘I tell you the truth, corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes will get into the Kingdom of God before you do. For John the Baptist came and showed you the right way to live, but you didn’t believe him, while tax collectors and prostitutes did. And even when you saw this happening, you refused to believe him and repent of your sins.’”*

The first son is like the corrupt tax collectors and prostitutes. The son said no, but then changed his mind and went out to work. The tax collectors and prostitutes were sinners, but when they heard John the Baptist preaching about repentance for the forgiveness of their sins, they repented and were baptized.

The second son is like the religious leaders. To make his father happy the son said yes, but had no intention of working in the vineyard. The religious leaders were like that. They always wanted to be the most important, to be looked at, and to be held in esteem. They did everything for others to see in order to feel important. They didn’t practice what they preached. They listened to the word of John the Baptist, they ignored what he was preaching and refused to be baptized.

I remember teaching on the book of James some years ago. I hear this parable in James 1:22 (NIV) – “Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”

*Breath Prayer* – Lord, may I be an example. Let me not only hear, but do.

## March 11 – *Parable of the Wicked Tenants*

Matthew 21:33-46 (NLT) - *“Now listen to another story. A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. At the time of the grape harvest, he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants to collect for him, but the results were the same. Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking, “Surely they will respect my son.” But when the tenant farmers saw his son coming, they said to one another, “Here comes the heir to this estate. Come on, let’s kill him and get the estate for ourselves!” So they grabbed him, dragged him out of the vineyard, and murdered him. ‘When the owner of the vineyard returns,’ Jesus asked, ‘what do you think he will do to those farmers?’ The religious leaders replied, ‘He will put the wicked men to a horrible death and lease the vineyard to others who will give him his share of the crop after each harvest.’ Then Jesus asked them, ‘Didn’t you ever read this in the Scriptures? “The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the LORD’s doing, and it is wonderful to see.” I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on. When the leading priests and Pharisees heard this parable, they realized he was telling the story against them—they were the wicked farmers. They wanted to arrest him, but they were afraid of the crowds, who considered Jesus to be a prophet.”*

The landowner did everything right. He had a contract with the tenant farmers to take care of the vineyard, and when they produced the grapes after four years, they would all share in the profits. The farmers had other ideas. Maybe they felt that they “owned” the vineyard because of their hard work for four long years. But that wasn’t the agreement. Looking at this parable, we can recognize the landowner as God and the landowner’s son as Jesus. The religious leader’s realized that Jesus was talking about them as the farmers as well as the builders. If that is true then Jesus was predicting His own death.

Jesus intermingled the story of the vineyard with the story of the capstone when He said, *“I tell you, the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a nation that will produce the proper fruit. Anyone who stumbles over that stone will be broken to pieces, and it will crush anyone it falls on!”* The religious leaders rejected Jesus and thus met defeat and death. Those who believe in Jesus are assured that Jesus Christ is the Everlasting King who is victorious in the end.

We can see in this parable that God’s love and patience for people who do not believe, is almost endless, but when His patience runs out, look out! Those who reject His Son will find themselves at the mercy of God.

*Breath Prayer* – Lord, may I always produce fruit for your kingdom.

nIm

March 12 - **Psalm 71:1-12** (NLT)

*“O LORD, I have come to you for protection;  
don’t let me be disgraced.  
Save me and rescue me,  
for you do what is right.  
Turn your ear to listen to me,  
and set me free.  
Be my rock of safety  
where I can always hide.  
Give the order to save me,  
for you are my rock and my fortress.  
My God, rescue me from the power of the wicked,  
from the clutches of cruel oppressors.*

*O Lord, you alone are my hope.  
I’ve trusted you, O LORD, from childhood.  
Yes, you have been with me from birth;  
from my mother’s womb you have cared for me.  
No wonder I am always praising you!  
My life is an example to many,  
because you have been my strength and protection.  
That is why I can never stop praising you;  
I declare your glory all day long.*

*And now, in my old age, don’t set me aside.  
Don’t abandon me when my strength is failing.  
For my enemies are whispering against me.  
They are plotting together to kill me.  
They say, ‘God has abandoned him.  
Let’s go and get him,  
for no one will help him now.’  
O God, don’t stay away.  
My God, please hurry to help me.”*

*Breath Prayer* – Thank you for your protection.

## March 13 – *Parable of the Marriage Feast*

Matthew 22:1-14 (NIV) – “Jesus spoke to them again in parables, saying: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son. He sent his servants to those who had been invited to the banquet to tell them to come, but they refused to come. Then he sent some more servants and said, “Tell those who have been invited that I have prepared my dinner: My oxen and fattened cattle have been butchered, and everything is ready. Come to the wedding banquet.”’

But they paid no attention and went off—one to his field, another to his business. The rest seized his servants, mistreated them and killed them. The king was enraged. He sent his army and destroyed those murderers and burned their city. Then he said to his servants, “The wedding banquet is ready, but those I invited did not deserve to come. So go to the street corners and invite to the banquet anyone you find.” So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, both good and bad, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. But when the king came in to see the guests, he noticed a man there who was not wearing wedding clothes. “Friend”, he asked, “How did you get in here without wedding clothes?” The man was speechless. Then the king told the attendants, “Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” For many are invited, but few are chosen.”’

Many heard Jesus’ preaching, but they were too busy with their everyday lives. The invitation was to the king’s friends and associates. They too, were too busy so he opened the invitation to many more of all sorts of people. One person was not appropriately dressed. If God invited you to a celebration off the street, what would you be wearing? Probably not your Sunday-go-to-meeting clothes. Perhaps it doesn’t really matter what you have on, it’s what you have inside, in your heart. In my reading, [The Interpreters One-Volume Commentary on the Bible](#), it stated the wedding garment is like putting on the garment of righteousness. How do we do that? We act on behalf of justice. We follow Jesus’ teachings as best as we can. We treat others with compassion and courtesy, etc. (fill in your own ideas). Many hear the stories, but few take them on as their own.

*Breath Prayer* - King Jesus, help me to put on a wedding garment each day.

jns

## March 14 – *Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids*

Matthew 25:1-13 (NLT) – *“Then the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten bridesmaids who took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, and five were wise. The five who were foolish didn’t take enough olive oil for their lamps, but the other five were wise enough to take along extra oil. When the bridegroom was delayed, they all became drowsy and fell asleep. At midnight they were roused by the shout, ‘Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out and meet him!’ All the bridesmaids got up and prepared their lamps. Then the five foolish ones asked the others, ‘Please give us some of your oil because our lamps are going out.’ But the others replied, ‘We don’t have enough for all of us. Go to a shop and buy some for yourselves.’ But while they were gone to buy oil, the bridegroom came. Then those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was locked. Later, when the other five bridesmaids returned, they stood outside, calling, ‘Lord! Lord! Open the door for us!’ But he called back, ‘Believe me, I don’t know you!’ So you, too, must keep watch! For you do not know the day or hour of my return.”*

Five of the bridesmaids were not prepared for the evening; they did not bring additional oil for their lamps. As I was researching, I learned that the dowry was negotiated right before the wedding. A dowry was giving of gifts by the family of the bridegroom to the family of the bride. Sometimes there were arguments and it could take a long time before both families were in agreement. That meant that the bridesmaids could be waiting into the middle of the night!

I also learned that there was a procession from the family home to the wedding banquet and the bridesmaids needed their lamps not only for this procession but they were expected to dance (with their lamps lit) when they arrived.

Once everyone got to the wedding feast, the doors were locked. So the bridesmaids who needed to get additional oil for their lamps got there too late – the doors were locked.

Some of us get hung up over the fact that the five bridesmaids with the additional oil didn’t share with those who didn’t. The ones who had the oil knew that they had enough to get themselves through the night but not enough to share with another. All of them could have ended up being locked out!

The teaching from this parable is that we need to be prepared for Jesus' second coming. None of us know when it will happen, not even Jesus. Only God knows. It's going to happen in the blink of an eye. There will be no time to turn things around, no time to right a wrong. Do everything you can now to be ready.

God looks at your heart. How do you treat people? What are the motives behind your actions? Are you serving others? Have you forgiven those who have wronged you? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you do better. Study the Bible and go to the Lord in prayer. Develop a personal relationship with your Savior. When you "hear" His voice, it's easier to stay on the right path. He wants you to trust in Him. He's waiting to hear from you.

*Breath Prayer* – Holy Spirit, help me to be ready for Jesus' return.

nlm

## March 15 – *Parable of the Talents*

Matthew 25:14-30 (NIV) - *“Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

*The man with the two talents also came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.’*

*His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’*

*“Then the man who had received the one talent came. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.’ His master replied, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’”*

When the man knew he was going away, he chose carefully which persons were assigned to take care of the money. He knew the capabilities of each of his servants. There is always risk whenever new responsibilities are assigned to an employee. Obviously more responsibility went to the person who he was sure could handle it well. When the master

returned, two of the servants were commended for their efforts. The third was so afraid of his master that he did not risk losing the money.

This parable is about how we use our God-given gifts. Do we use them to further God's kingdom on earth or to advance our own wants? What are your gifts? Many scoff, "I don't have any gifts!" Everyone has been given at least one spiritual gift from God. Do you have patience with people, can you organize figures, do you have a green thumb? Or maybe you have a hobby. Any of these things can enhance your life. When your life is enriched, it is an opportunity to be of faithful service and share your gifts with others.

*Breath Prayer* - Dear Lord, what would you like me to do today to be your faithful servant?

jns

## March 16 – *Parable of the Sheep and the Goats* (*The Final Judgment*)

Matthew 25:31-46 (NLT) – *“But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed me. I was thirsty, and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger, and you invited me into your home. I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me.’*

*Then these righteous ones will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Or thirsty and give you something to drink? Or a stranger and show you hospitality? Or naked and give you clothing? When did we ever see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were doing it to me!’ Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, ‘Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons. For I was hungry, and you didn’t feed me. I was thirsty, and you didn’t give me a drink. I was a stranger, and you didn’t invite me into your home. I was naked, and you didn’t give me clothing. I was sick and in prison, and you didn’t visit me.’*

*Then they will reply, ‘Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you?’ And he will answer, ‘I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me.’ And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.”*

Matthew 25 is certainly familiar to Coon Rapids UMC. If people don’t know the story, here it is. This is the Scripture on which we base our Matthew 25 Food Distribution each month. We are asked by Jesus to treat our neighbors the same way that we would treat Him. It’s as simple as that. We need to let go of our biases and our prejudices and treat everyone equally.

But to get to the actual parable, the sheep and the goats, we need to know that we are talking about Judgment Day. Jesus will separate the righteous from the evil, just as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

The sheep (the righteous ones) inherit the Kingdom, just as they were promised. It's not because of their good works that they are saved; it is because of their love and faithfulness to God the Father.

The goats (the evil ones) have not necessarily committed any crime; they only have not served a person asking for help. If that causes them to not receive the Kingdom, that's pretty scary when I think about it. How many times have I closed my eyes to a need before me? How many times has my heart hardened when I saw someone in need and made an assumption about him or her and turned away?

While I serve at the Friday Food Distribution, I am learning to not make assumptions about the people who come through. Some people have sat beside me and shared a part of their story with me. They ARE me. Our stories are the same. We all experience loss and grief and we also find joy in the little things. The details don't matter.

Open up your eyes to what is happening around you. You just might have an opportunity to serve a fellow human being and, in doing so, be an angel in disguise. It might change their life (and/or yours).

*Breath Prayer* – Lord, keep my eyes and my heart fully open.

nlm

## March 17 – *Parable of the Growth of Seeds*

Mark 4:26-29 (MSG) - “Then Jesus said, ‘God’s kingdom is like seed thrown on a field by a man who then goes to bed and forgets about it. The seed sprouts and grows—he has no idea how it happens. The earth does it all without his help: first a green stem of grass, then a bud, then the ripened grain. When the grain is fully formed, he reaps—harvest time!’”

The seed sits in the quiet, warm environment for as long as it takes to reach maturity. As children we learn the basics of God’s ways. As we worship, study, and observe others’ actions that follow Jesus’ example, our faith develops into mature Christians. We have become disciples! Like the seed sown in the ground, the growth of God’s kingdom is a mystery, a result of divine power, not within human effort or understanding.

God’s kingdom is alive and well around us. God’s kingdom is cultivated in our small groups, our neighborhoods, our church and numerous activities that fill our lives. We choose to participate in it and recognize its growth. We experience the Kingdom when we feel God’s love surround us.

You are in God’s Kingdom. Become a seed again. Turn off the TV, your cell phone, the radio, anything that would distract you. Close your eyes; imagine God’s loving arms surrounding you. Sit quietly for one minute, or more if possible.

*Breath Prayer* - Breathe on me breath of God.

jns

## March 18 – *Parable of the Two Debtors*

**Two Debtors** Luke 7:36-50 (CEB) – *“One of the Pharisees invited Jesus to eat with him. After he entered the Pharisee’s home, he took his place at the table. Meanwhile, a woman from the city, a sinner, discovered that Jesus was dining in the Pharisee’s house. She brought perfumed oil in a vase made of alabaster. Standing behind him at his feet and crying, she began to wet his feet with her tears. She wiped them with her hair, kissed them, and poured the oil on them. When the Pharisee who had invited Jesus saw what was happening, he said to himself, If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. He would know that she is a sinner.*

*Jesus replied, ‘Simon, I have something to say to you.’ ‘Teacher, speak,’ he said. ‘A certain lender had two debtors. One owed enough money to pay five hundred people for a day’s work. The other owed enough money for fifty. When they couldn’t pay, the lender forgave the debts of them both. Which of them will love him more?’*

*Simon replied, ‘I suppose the one who had the largest debt canceled.’ Jesus said, ‘You have judged correctly.’ Jesus turned to the woman and said to Simon, ‘Do you see this woman? When I entered your home, you didn’t give me water for my feet, but she wet my feet with tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn’t greet me with a kiss, but she hasn’t stopped kissing my feet since I came in. You didn’t anoint my head with oil, but she has poured perfumed oil on my feet. This is why I tell you that her many sins have been forgiven; so she has shown great love. The one who is forgiven little loves little.’ Then Jesus said to her, ‘Your sins are forgiven.’*

*The other table guests began to say among themselves, ‘Who is this person that even forgives sins?’ Jesus said to the woman, ‘Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.’”*

What a big contrast. The host, Simon, a Pharisee, is a holy man with resources to host a wonderful dinner versus a woman from the city. He did not provide customary services to an honored guest. She, on the other hand, brought expensive oil in an alabaster jar. She wept tears of absolution and wiped Jesus’ feet with her hair. Jesus completely understands what the woman gifts him, thus forgives her, grants her peace. Peace, calm, tranquility, serenity. Something she has sought for a long time.

The quick story Jesus told the Pharisee about the lender says it all. The lender lent the first worker a large amount of money, the second a lesser amount. Simon incriminated

himself by saying the one who was forgiven the larger amount is the one who had more to forgive, thus is loved more. That doesn't mean we should go and do a deadly sin to gain God's forgiveness. It means we are blessed with a God who accepts who we are and forgives our wrongdoing no matter the gravity.

*Breath Prayer* - Holy One, Grant me forgiveness, your calming peace.

jns

March 19 - **Psalm 121:1-8** (NLT)

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

*"I look up to the mountains—  
does my help come from there?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
who made heaven and earth!*

*He will not let you stumble;  
the one who watches over you will not slumber.  
Indeed, he who watches over Israel  
never slumbers or sleeps.*

*The LORD himself watches over you!  
The LORD stands beside you as your protective shade.  
The sun will not harm you by day,  
nor the moon at night.*

*The LORD keeps you from all harm  
and watches over your life.  
The LORD keeps watch over you as you come and go,  
both now and forever."*

*Breath Prayer* – O God, thank you for keeping watch over me wherever I am.

## March 20 – *Parable of the Good Samaritan*

Luke 10:25-37 (NLT) – “One day an expert in religious law stood up to test Jesus by asking him this question: ‘Teacher, what should I do to inherit eternal life?’ Jesus replied, ‘What does the law of Moses say? How do you read it?’ The man answered, “You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind.’ And, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ ‘Right!’ Jesus told him. ‘Do this and you will live!’ The man wanted to justify his actions, so he asked Jesus, ‘And who is my neighbor?’

Jesus replied with a story: ‘A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. Then a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, “Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.” “Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits?” Jesus asked. The man replied, “The one who showed him mercy.” Then Jesus said, “Yes, now go and do the same.’”

The expert in religious law knew the answer to the question of how to inherit eternal life. “Love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.” That is the most important commandment in the Bible.

Not only did the Good Samaritan bandage his wounds, but he took the man to an inn, got him a room in which to recuperate, **and** paid his bill! It didn’t matter to him the man’s race, religion, or how rich or poor he was. He was a fellow human – a brother.

Most of us are afraid to approach a stranger lying in the road, especially if he has been beaten up. What did he do to deserve that? Luckily, nowadays we have cell phones and can call 911 for professionals to come and render aid to this person. We don’t have to get our hands dirty.

If you found a stranger lying alongside the road and you didn't have cell phone service, would you load him in your car and take him to the nearest hospital? Some of us don't have the physical capability to do that. Or would you go to the next town and call for help? I sincerely doubt that anyone reading this devotional would see the stranger and just pass by and ignore what you just saw.

But what if it was the day after 9/11 and the person you saw was Middle Eastern? Would you walk by then, thinking, "You deserve it", or "Serves you right", or, "Take that, you ---!" Or would you help him even then? Jesus would have.

*Breath Prayer* – Jesus, you ask me to do such hard things sometimes. You ask me to love my enemies.

nlm

## March 21 – *Parable of the Friend at Midnight*

Luke 11:5-13 (NIV) - *“Then He said to them, ‘Suppose one of you has a friend, and he goes to him at midnight and says, ‘Friend, lend me three loaves of bread; because a friend of mine on a journey has come to me, and I have nothing to set before him.’ Then the one inside answers, ‘Don’t bother me. The door is already locked, and my children are with me in bed. I can’t get up and give you anything.’ I tell you, though he will not get up and give him the bread because he is his friend, yet because of the man’s boldness he will get up and give him as much as he needs.*

*So I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened.*

*Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!”*

This friend was persistent. He kept asking and asking. Eventually the man answers the door and the request was granted. God is my friend; I know if I ask, She will give what I need. Not exactly what I want or when I want it, but what I need. No garter snake, no spider. God knows what we need. God is always listening, loving us.

God never goes on vacation; the computer is always on and never loses power. Day or night, God is there for you. Whether in a moment of silent adoration, or in an hour, a day, or a week of despair, God listens. Keep asking, keep knocking, and keep praying. The Holy Spirit will intercede for you.

*Breath Prayer* – Come, Holy Spirit, come and guide my mind.

jns

## March 22 – *The Parable of the Rich Fool*

Luke 12:16-21 (NLT) – *“Then he told them a story: ‘A rich man had a fertile farm that produced fine crops. He said to himself, “What should I do? I don’t have room for all my crops.” Then he said, “I know! I’ll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I’ll have room enough to store all my wheat and other goods. And I’ll sit back and say to myself, ‘My friend, you have enough stored away for years to come. Now take it easy! Eat, drink, and be merry!’*

*But God said to him, “You fool! You will die this very night. Then who will get everything you worked for?” Yes, a person is a fool to store up earthly wealth but not have a rich relationship with God.”*

This parable is pretty self-explanatory. Jesus tells us the meaning at the end. God has promised to always provide what we need if we bring Him our “first fruits”, meaning we will give Him our offering from the first of what we receive and not give Him our leftovers.

Notice that in this parable the rich man continually say “I” and “my”. That show how self-centered he is. He’s not planning to share his wealth with anyone else or to help the needy. He wants complete control over his crops and his life: He shows no dependency on God.

*“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be.” Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV)*

*Breath Prayer* – Lord, help me to desire you before all things.

nlm

## March 23 – *Parable of the Watchful Servant*

**Watchful Servant** Luke 12:35-40 (NIV) - *“Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.”*

Be ready. Be vigilant. Lock your door to keep the robbers out. Don't let vanity say to you, “Nothing bad will happen because I am completely in charge of what happens to me and my life.” Prepare yourself for the future. Do not be concerned about possessions; concentrate on taking care of the Master. How do we do that? Watch for opportunities to serve. Be kind. Be willing to care for someone, even when it is not convenient. Take time for worship whether in church, on line, or at home. Love God. Love your enemies.

No one knows when Jesus will return, or when we will pass on. To me that means I must live my life as Jesus modeled in the best way I can and be open to God's plan for me. Follow His teachings, study the Bible and try to figure out how Scripture applies to me.

*Breath Prayer* - Open my heart, Lord, guide my thoughts on how to serve you.

jns

## March 24 – *Parable of the Fig Tree*

Luke 13:6-9 (CEB) – “Jesus told this parable: ‘A man owned a fig tree planted in his vineyard. He came looking for fruit on it and found none. He said to his gardener, “Look, I’ve come looking for fruit on this fig tree for the past three years, and I’ve never found any. Cut it down! Why should it continue depleting the soil’s nutrients?” The gardener responded, “Lord, give it one more year, and I will dig around it and give it fertilizer. Maybe it will produce fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down.’”

The crowd hearing this parable understood about taking care of a fig tree. The owner wants to cut his losses. The gardener wants to keep trying. He is eager to do the work of rejuvenation, willing to dig deep and nurture this one plant.

Are we a prosperous fig tree or are we wilting on the vine? I need to take a good look at myself. What are the good things I have going, and what adjustments do I need to make? Am I willing to change? For myself, I need to take better care of myself, get better rest. My doctor says that taking regular walks is always good. So those are physical ways for change, but what about my spiritual life? I must reevaluate my habits so I can work on living the way Jesus exemplified. What steps do I need to take to renew my commitment to being Jesus’ disciple? For me and my vine, my brand of fertilizer is called Bible study. God will give me the strength I need to continue to serve Him.

*Breath Prayer* - Grant me reprieve from my sin, O Lord, thank you for second chances.

jns

## March 25 – *Parable of the Great Feast*

Luke 14:15-24 (NLT) – *“Hearing this, a man sitting at the table with Jesus exclaimed, ‘What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the Kingdom of God!’ Jesus replied with this story: ‘A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, “Come, the banquet is ready.” But they all began making excuses. One said, “I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.” Another said, “I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.” Another said, “I just got married, so I can’t come.” The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious and said, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ After the servant had done this, he reported, ‘There is still room for more.’ So his master said, ‘Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet.’”*

In Jesus’ day, it was customary to extend two invitations to a dinner or a banquet. The first was to make reservations and the second was to announce that the banquet was ready. In this parable Jesus made it clear that his hosts, the leaders of the nation, had in effect declined His invitation (to believe in Him) and that others (the Gentiles) would be invited to take their places.

Jesus has invited the lame, the blind, the social outcasts and even a criminal to join Him at His heavenly feast. They are made holy and enter into God’s family. Jesus is sending His servants (us) out to let people know that God’s kingdom has come. Those who hear the message are invited to share in this kingdom. They should not make excuses and delay or they may not have another chance. We have the responsibility of sharing the Good News with others. If we don’t, who will?

*Breath Prayer* – God, give me opportunities to share the Good News of Jesus Christ with others.

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March 26 - **Psalm 130:1-8** (NLT)

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem.

*“From the depths of despair, O LORD,  
I call for your help.  
Hear my cry, O Lord.  
Pay attention to my prayer.*

*LORD, if you kept a record of our sins,  
who, O Lord, could ever survive?  
But you offer forgiveness,  
that we might learn to fear you.*

*I am counting on the LORD;  
yes, I am counting on him.  
I have put my hope in his word.*

*I long for the Lord  
more than sentries long for the dawn,  
yes, more than sentries long for the dawn.*

*O Israel, hope in the LORD;  
for with the LORD there is unfailing love.  
His redemption overflows.  
He himself will redeem Israel  
from every kind of sin.”*

*Breath Prayer* – O Lord, my hope is in you. Hear my prayer.

## March 27 - *Parable of the Tower/King*

Luke 14:25-33 (CEB) – *“Large crowds were traveling with Jesus. Turning to them, he said, ‘Whoever comes to me and doesn’t hate father and mother, spouse and children, and brothers and sisters—yes, even one’s own life—cannot be my disciple. Whoever doesn’t carry their own cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. If one of you wanted to build a tower, wouldn’t you first sit down and calculate the cost, to determine whether you have enough money to complete it? Otherwise, when you have laid the foundation but couldn’t finish the tower, all who see it will begin to belittle you. They will say, “Here’s the person who began construction and couldn’t complete it.” Or what king would go to war against another king without first sitting down to consider whether his ten thousand soldiers could go up against the twenty thousand coming against him? And if he didn’t think he could win, he would send a representative to discuss terms of peace while his enemy was still a long way off. In the same way, none of you who are unwilling to give up all of your possessions can be my disciple.’”*

Jesus was speaking with his disciples; they had already dropped their nets, left their families to follow Jesus. I know I could not do that. I am sure God doesn’t want me to hate my family, God wants me to take care of them. I believe there are other ways I am to carry Jesus’ cross in my daily life. I try to follow Jesus’ example. I am a planner; being organized is key to my existence so the two examples fit me to a T. But it is hard to plan to be a true disciple every moment of every day. I am selfish. I let my wishes come before thinking of others. Sometimes I would rather watch a favorite TV show than call or write a note to a friend who is hurting. God asks us to commit our lives wholeheartedly, accepting any hardship this choice may bring. I hope God forgives me when I make wrong choices with my time.

This parable shows me how I must be willing to give up my normal way of living, shows me about what I need to give up to be Jesus’ true disciple. What is your life? It’s your time, your resources, and your abilities. They are part of you. It seems to me that when you share those things, you are giving of yourself on behalf of others.

*Breath Prayer* - Help me make wise and Christ-centered choices.

jns

## March 28 – *Parable of the Lost Coin*

Luke 15:8-10 (NLT) - “Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Won’t she light a lamp and sweep the entire house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she will call in her friends and neighbors and say, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost coin.’ In the same way, there is joy in the presence of God’s angels when even one sinner repents.”

Oh, boy, can I relate to this story! I was at work one day in the ‘90’s when I noticed the diamond in my engagement ring was gone! It looked like a cavernous black hole where it had once been. I looked on my desk and on the floor. I went out to the parking lot and retraced my steps looking as I walked to my car and checked inside. No diamond. I knew it would be a long shot to find it. What were the odds?

When I went home that evening, I looked throughout the house. No luck. Then I decided to get the vacuum cleaner out. I figured that I might hear it if it got sucked up into the bag. I started vacuuming. I did the living room and the dining room and started down the hallway. Something caught the light on the front of the vacuum ... it looked like a speck of glitter. I bent over to see what it was and I picked up my diamond. I couldn’t believe it, but there it was. Hallelujah! Thank you, Jesus, for helping me find my diamond! What was an impossibility was resolved and caused me to rejoice, just like the woman in the parable. We lost something precious to us and we found it.

Our rejoicing is nothing compared to how heaven rejoices when one sinner repents. Just think about that. Let’s keep God’s heavenly angels rejoicing. Spread the Good News!

*Breath Prayer* – Holy Spirit, give me an opportunity to share the love and salvation of Jesus Christ with one other person.

nlm

## March 29 - *Parable of the Prodigal Son*

Luke 15:11-32 (CEB) – *“Jesus said, ‘A certain man had two sons. The younger son said to his father, “Father, give me my share of the inheritance.” Then the father divided his estate between them. Soon afterward, the younger son gathered everything together and took a trip to a land far away. There, he wasted his wealth through extravagant living.*

*When he had used up his resources, a severe food shortage arose in that country and he began to be in need. He hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him into his fields to feed pigs. He longed to eat his fill from what the pigs ate, but no one gave him anything. When he came to his senses, he said, “How many of my father’s hired hands have more than enough food, but I’m starving to death! I will get up and go to my father, and say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son. Take me on as one of your hired hands.’” So he got up and went to his father. While he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion. His father ran to him, hugged him, and kissed him. Then his son said, “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserve to be called your son.” But the father said to his servants, “Quickly, bring out the best robe and put it on him! Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet! Fetch the fattened calf and slaughter it. We must celebrate with feasting because this son of mine was dead and has come back to life! He was lost and is found!” And they began to celebrate. Now his older son was in the field. Coming in from the field, he approached the house and heard music and dancing. He called one of the servants and asked what was going on. The servant replied, “Your brother has arrived, and your father has slaughtered the fattened calf because he received his son back safe and sound.” Then the older son was furious and didn’t want to enter in, but his father came out and begged him. He answered his father, “Look, I’ve served you all these years, and I never disobeyed your instruction. Yet you’ve never given me as much as a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours returned, after gobbling up your estate on prostitutes, you slaughtered the fattened calf for him.” Then his father said, “Son, you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive. He was lost and is found.””*

The father accepted his younger son’s decision for his life, knowing the possible outcome. As expected the young man saw the opportunity to do what he wanted with dire results. But he stopped, thought about his predicament, considered a worthwhile and humble option. The forgiving, lonesome father welcomed his errant son home. All is forgiven.

Love prevailed. The older resentful son raised his voice against his father, seeing only all the work left to him, not understanding love in action. Perhaps when he cooled down he would understand love has no bounds. I made my share of bad decisions in my life, but somehow God led me so that it all turned out. That decision was not quite what my parents had in mind, but they still loved me.

God accepts those who have loved Him for a lifetime, as well as those who rebel and come back. God forgives our sins, and continues to love us no matter what we have thought, done, or said. That indeed is a miracle.

*Breath Prayer* - Thank you for your deep understanding and abiding love.

jns

## March 30 – *Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus*

Luke 16:19-31 (NIV) - *“There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man’s table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham’s side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’ But Abraham replied, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.’ He answered, ‘Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.’ Abraham replied, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them.’ ‘No, father Abraham,’ he said, ‘but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.’”*

Jesus is speaking to the Pharisees about the law, men who were knowledgeable about Abraham, the law and the prophets. In the story, Abraham, being the father of the Israelites, sets the scene perfectly for the Pharisees. Many thought that the rich were the good guys and the poor people were the bad guys. Money is not evidence of favor with God, nor does poverty indicate God’s displeasure. So it was an interesting conflict of thought for the Pharisees to see why the rich man went to hell and the poor one went to Abraham’s bosom. The two men are in complete opposite circumstances in life; their situations were reversed in death. The rich man has the audacity to request that God send Lazarus with a cup of water. And what’s more, please send someone to admonish his brothers to listen and follow what the Prophets have been urgently telling people all along about repentance.

Many people think they are above the law, or can always do what they want. Sometimes we think powerful people have all the answers, do all the right things. When we watch the news, we know that is not true. Eventually they are brought to justice and are punished for their misdeeds.

Sometimes, we too, think we are cleverly worming our way, to take advantage of certain situations to get what we want. "I have worked hard all my life, I deserve it." When that happens, we need to pause and think about what we are doing. What effect will what I do have on others? Will this be a detriment to my dear ones, or even on me? If I follow through on this deed, what's next? Remember, God is merciful, an understanding God. If we repent, there is forgiveness.

*Breath Prayer* - Gracious God, grant me your pardon.

jns

## March 31 – *Parable of the Insistent Widow*

Luke 18:1-8 (NIV) – “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. He said: ‘In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, “Grant me justice against my adversary.” For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, “Even though I don’t fear God or care about men, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually wear me out with her coming!” And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?’”

So the judge is sick and tired of the widow who keeps haranguing him to give justice to those who deceived her. Being a corrupt judge, he thought, “OK If she will leave me alone, I’ll give her reprieve, but only because I, too, will get relief from her!”

Jesus told his disciples not to give up, always pray. The widow persevered, would not stop striving for justice for being taken advantage of by those in power. She acted on principles of honesty and fairness, finally getting vindication. We too see many instances of inequality and injustice on the news. What should we do? Act on our principles, educate ourselves on the issue, perhaps write to our state and federal representatives. Join with others of similar thinking, and above all else, pray and don’t get discouraged. I pray Jesus will find faith on earth when He returns.

*Breath Prayer* - Holy One, inspire me to be courageous, have patience to put my faith in action.

jns

## April 1 – *Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector*

*Luke 18:9-14 (NLT) –“Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else: ‘Two men went to the Temple to pray. One was a Pharisee, and the other was a despised tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed this prayer: “I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters, sinners, adulterers. I’m certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income.” But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, “O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.” I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.’”*

Oh, what an example of how to come before God in prayer! The Pharisee’s prayer is all about himself. He has nothing to be sorry for, so there is no confession. He doesn’t need God’s mercy because he relies on his own strength. The tax collector, on the other hand, can’t even bring himself to look toward heaven because he is so guilt-ridden. He’s begging for God’s mercy; he’s asking to be forgiven. He knows he can’t do it on his own. He prays Psalm 51:1: *“Have mercy on me, O God.”* David pleads for God’s forgiveness, just as the tax collector does in this parable. The tax collector was declared righteous (justified) because of his repentant heart.

As you say your prayers, remember to include **A**doration, **C**onfession, **T**hanksgiving, and **S**upplication – **ACTS**.

*Breath Prayer* – O, God, may I always rely on you.

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*“He [Jesus] told many stories  
in the form of parables,  
saying,*

*‘Anyone with ears to hear  
should listen and  
understand.’”*

*Matthew 13:3, 9*

## April 2 - *Palm Sunday*

### **Psalm 145:8-13 (NLT)**

*The LORD is merciful and compassionate,  
slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.  
The LORD is good to everyone.  
He showers compassion on all his creation.*

*All of your works will thank you, LORD,  
and your faithful followers will praise you.  
They will speak of the glory of your kingdom;  
they will give examples of your power.*

*They will tell about your mighty deeds  
and about the majesty and glory of your reign.  
For your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom.  
You rule throughout all generations.*

*The LORD always keeps his promises;  
he is gracious in all he does.*

*Prayer* – Lord, thank you for your love and mercy. I will praise you forever. You are entering the city to rejoicing and hallelujahs. We didn't know then that you were inching ever closer to the cross. May we all remember your journey. Amen.

## April 3 – *Holy Monday*

### **Jesus cleansed the Temple**

(Mark 11:15-19) – *“On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. And as he taught them, he said, ‘Is it not written: “My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations?” But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching. When evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city.”*

*Prayer* – Holy One, there are many times I take advantage of situations for my own benefit, refusing to even consider others in my actions. I cut in line at the store because I am in a hurry. I speed home from work zipping in and out of traffic. I ask others to look away while I take more than my share. Forgive my self-centered ways. Amen.

## April 4 - *Holy Tuesday*

### **The Church commemorates the withering of the fruitless fig tree**

Matthew 21:18-22 – *“Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, ‘May you never bear fruit again!’ Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. ‘How did the fig tree wither so quickly?’ they asked. Jesus replied, ‘Truly I tell you, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, ‘Go, throw yourself into the sea,’ and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.’”*

*Prayer* – Lord of Life, you have shown your supremacy to create the world. You have shown your power to put down evil nations. You give us free will to choose your way or our own. We know all things are possible with you, yet many times our faith is not strong enough to do your will. We pray for your mercy to pardon our omissions. Amen.

## April 5 - *Holy Wednesday*

It is also called Spy Wednesday, or Good Wednesday, and Great and Holy Wednesday.

**Commemorates the Bargain of Judas as a clandestine spy among the disciples.**

Matthew 26:14-16 – *“Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, ‘What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?’ So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over.”*

*Prayer* – Forgiving Christ, I am susceptible to so many temptations; accumulation of wealth so that I may have many creature comforts, delectable food, and amusing entertainment with my friends. There are times when I am selfish in giving even a small amount of my time, energy, and money to those who are in need. But you, O Lord, did not bow to the devil when offered bread when famished. Be patient with your disciple. Amen.

## April 6 - *Maundy Thursday*

Also called Holy Thursday.

### **Commemorates the washing of the disciples' feet.**

John 13:1-5,12-17,34 – *“It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist.*

*After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. ‘Do you understand what I have done for you?’ he asked them. ‘You call me “Teacher” and “Lord,” and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.’”*

*Prayer* – Gracious and loving Lord, you have shown how we are to live by your example. You even stooped low to wash your disciples' dirty feet. We are thinking of times when we have boasted of our successes, shown off as we achieve something that we consider to be a miraculous achievement. Help us to love one another by being humble, willing to do the unthinkable task for someone who we consider below our dignity. Amen.

### **It also commemorates the Last Supper of Jesus Christ with the Apostles**

Mark 14: 12-17, 22-25 (NIV) – *“On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, ‘Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will*

*meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, "The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.' The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take it; this is my body.' Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. 'Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.'"*

*Prayer* – Gracious God, what a privilege it is for us to be able to take part in this Holy Sacrament still today. Thank you for inviting us to the table with you. May I always come before you with a clean heart and pure thoughts. As we remember your beautiful sacrifice for us when we take part in Communion, let us also remember the words of your parables teaching us how to live a fulfilling Christian life. Thank you for your perfect example. Amen.

## April 7 - *Good Friday*

### **Commemorating the crucifixion and death of Jesus**

It is observed during Holy Week as part of the Paschal Triduum.

Mark 15:21-39 (NIV) – *“A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means ‘the place of the skull’). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. The written notice of the charge against him read: THE KING OF THE JEWS. They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, ‘So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, come down from the cross and save yourself!’ In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. ‘He saved others,’ they said, ‘but he can’t save himself! Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.’ Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him. At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, ‘Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?’ (which means ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’). When some of those standing near heard this, they said, ‘Listen, he’s calling Elijah.’ Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. ‘Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,’ he said. With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last. The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, ‘Surely this man was the Son of God!’”*

*Prayer* – Jesus, I stand at the foot of the cross and realize you died for my sins, my numerous sins of commission and omission. I bow down before you. I shed tears of sadness. I cannot imagine the pain and desolation you feel, dear Jesus. Have mercy and forgive me, grant your holy compassion on me, your child. Amen.

## April 8 - *Holy Saturday*

Also known as Great and Holy Saturday, the Great Sabbath, Hallelujah or Easter Eve, and called "Joyous Saturday".

**Holy Saturday commemorates the day that Jesus Christ lay in the tomb after his death on the Cross.**

Mark 15: 42-47 (NIV) – *"It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid."*

*Prayer* – O God, you chose a powerful man to lovingly care for Jesus' body. Thank you for the times we have been blessed by others taking care of us. Give us the courage to act on your behalf. May we humble ourselves to care for those who are spurned by the world. Amen.

## April 9 - *Easter Sunday – Hallelujah, He Lives!*

### **Psalm 148:1-14**

*Praise the LORD!*  
*Praise the LORD from the heavens!*  
*Praise him from the skies!*  
*Praise him, all his angels!*  
*Praise him, all the armies of heaven!*  
*Praise him, sun and moon!*  
*Praise him, all you twinkling stars!*  
*Praise him, skies above!*  
*Praise him, vapors high above the clouds!*  
*Let every created thing give praise to the LORD,*  
*for he issued his command, and they came into being.*  
*He set them in place forever and ever.*  
*His decree will never be revoked.*  
*Praise the LORD from the earth,*  
*you creatures of the ocean depths, fire and hail, snow and clouds,*  
*wind and weather that obey him,*  
*mountains and all hills,*  
*fruit trees and all cedars,*  
*wild animals and all livestock,*  
*small scurrying animals and birds,*  
*kings of the earth and all people,*  
*rulers and judges of the earth,*  
*young men and young women,*  
*old men and children.*  
*Let them all praise the name of the LORD.*  
*For his name is very great;*  
*his glory towers over the earth and heaven!*  
*He has made his people strong,*  
*honoring his faithful ones—*  
*the people of Israel who are close to him.*  
*Praise the LORD!*

*Prayer* – Thank you, God, for your Son, Jesus. Like the people long ago, we also praise Him along with all of creation because of His unfailing love and mercy. **Hallelujah, Jesus lives forevermore!** Amen.

## *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 next seven weeks following Easter:

*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, Father, Son and Holy Spirit;  
Blessed be God forever.*

*Happy Eastertide everyone!*

**“Being Easter people is knowing that God is at work all around us and goes before us in mighty ways.”**