Walking in God’s Promises

Lenten Devotions for Reflection and Renewal

Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and Schools
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Lent 2018
FOREWORD

Friends in Christ along the journey, grace and peace to you this season of Lent. This year we will explore together how we are Walking in God’s Promises. Year B of the Revised Common Lectionary offers texts through Lent that explore the theme of covenant in stories of promise, blessing, and transformation. As you journey through Lent with writers from the community, be invited into a Holy conversation and spend some time in silence, prayer, and wonder. How is God speaking through Scripture, the church, and your heart to proclaim God’s promise, offer God’s blessing, and inviting the transformation that is a life lived in and with God?

Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and Schools offers this Lenten Devotion, Walking in God’s Promises, as a conversation partner on the journey through Lent. Read it together as a family in the home, read it silently as part of your daily devotions, or form a small group to gather around God’s word and prayer.

From our youngest writers to our most experienced, this devotion encompasses many lifetimes of faith and diversity of experience, and each day offers a lens for reflection and prayer on the way. Journey together this Lent as we experience God’s promises of transforming and saving love in Christ.

Continued blessings on the journey!

R. Adam Berndt, Lead Pastor
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

What a wonderful way to start 2018, “Walking in God’s Promises.” Just think of traveling this year and years to come knowing that God is with us at all times. That is His promise and what a reassuring thing to take with us.

I hope that all of you will feel that promise as we go through the Lenten Devotions. Our writers have brought all of that to life. A big thank you to all of our writers. We are truly blessed to have you.

Thank you also to Nancy Brunson who organizes everyone and follows up with all of our writers.

Also a big thank you to Nancy Morrison who takes everything and puts together the final product.

May God bless all of you as you Walk in God’s Promises during this Lenten season.

Diane Carrico, Editor
Walking in God’s Promises—Walking Counter-Culturally

...whenever you give... whenever you pray...
whenever you fast... (v. 5, 16)

Our Lenten journey together begins this day, Ash Wednesday, a day in which we gather as a community to confess our deep need for God in our lives and in our world. We mark ourselves in ashes with the cross of Jesus on our foreheads and speak the words, “remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” There is a rich Biblical tradition in the symbolism of ashes we use on this day—judgment for sin (Genesis 3:19), human fraility/our complete dependence upon God for life (Psalm 104:29), humility (Genesis 18:27), repentance (Jonah 3:6), and finally cleansing and renewal. As if this isn’t counter-cultural enough—to proclaim and celebrate our dependence on God and our shared need for transforming repentance—our reading from Matthew calls us deeper into a counter-cultural journey.

Jesus’ words for us today call us to Walk in God’s Promises by shaping our journey around giving to God and others, praying every step of the way, and finally fasting from the things of this world that claim to bring us meaning and purpose. We are called to a journey with God that looks very different than if I was the one making the road map! And we are called to this counter-cultural journey not so that others take notice and give us praise, but rather so that our lives may be filled with joy as we together Walk in God’s Promises during these 40 days and beyond.

Will we risk giving of ourselves and our resources to God’s work in the world? Will we risk praying for God’s will in our lives and in the world? Will we risk fasting, refraining, from the things of this world that promise fulfillment and turn instead to God for meaning and purpose? Thanks be to God for this counter-cultural journey . . . I look forward to bumping in to you along the road during these 40 days!!

Lord, give us courage and hope for this amazing journey you call us to. Amen

Prayer concern: For each of us to be a vessel for God’s work in the world.

Pastor Matt Powell
God’s Covenant with Noah

I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. (v. 11)

As children in Sunday school we all read and learned the story of Noah’s Ark. It was usually presented with God asking Noah to build a wondrous boat, to be packed full the world’s creatures who will arrive two by two, to be saved along with Noah’s family from a great flood. Once the rain stops and the sun shines again, we are told of God’s promise to keep us safe and never flood the world again, accenting his words with a beautiful rainbow to remind us of that promise. The craft that day was usually a construction paper rainbow punctuated with fluffy cotton ball clouds and a teacher reassuring us God promised never to destroy our Earth with a great flood ever again.

The meaning of this passage becomes multi-faceted as we become adults and read about the promise God made the human race and all creatures living on the Earth. There were three parts to God’s covenant with Noah that day. His promise was unconditional (v. 9), universal (v. 9-10, 17) and eternal (v. 12, 16). We have to bring that simple children’s story to mind to keep from being overwhelmed by the gravity of those words. God in all his power and might, is promising to us, never to wipe us all from existence because of our thoughts, words, or deeds no matter what havoc we create.

Though we get little rain in Albuquerque, it isn’t uncommon to see a rainbow arcing beautifully over our home. As discord causes worry about what may happen next, we can look up and see a reminder, that God will never destroy our world in a great flood again.

Lord, thank you for promising we will never be unredeemable in your sight.

Prayer concern: Those who do not look above to see the rainbow and remember God’s promise.

Kathy Bramley
The Trials of the Trail

Make me to know thy ways, O Lord, teach me thy paths.
Lead me in thy truths and teach me. (v. 4, 5)

Years ago, my husband and I, together with a few others, took a map and compass reading course from a hike leader of the NM Mountain Club to which we belonged. We felt that a serious outdoor experience needs more skills than just following a group. The test was a minor trail in the Sandias. Our leader told us that a largely unused trail runs parallel to ours some ways up. We should find and follow it to the confluence of the two. A set of whistle sounds were agreed upon for communication. Then we were dropped off, one by one about 100 paces apart. None of us found the trail, but in time located the cottonwoods...all but one. Finally we heard the distress call. The answer was swift: “Stay where you are. We will find you.” And we did. We all realize that finding the right way is not always easy.

Life is like that. From our first day until our last, we are on a journey. God, our Creator, gives us a life to live and a longing to return to our loving Father. Many are the paths we find ourselves on. Sometimes the road is open and easy to see. Other times the trail is obscured. There seems no way out. We run in circles. Then we cry with David: “Make me to know your ways, O Lord, teach me!” Jesus points us to our loving and gracious Father: “I am the way, the truth and the life,” Scripture and sermons and fellowship of believers are guideposts to help us. And when I am lost, I remember: “Stay where you are. I will find you.” Then I stay and trust and know.

“Be still and know that I AM GOD.”

Loving Lord, teach our hearts to trust you fully,
through Jesus Christ. Amen

Prayer concern: comfort for those who feel lost.

Ruth Hinkel
Symbols

... and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. (v. 21)

Each year I take a verse to write about for this Lent Devotional. And each year, it is uncanny how the verse matches something that has affected me greatly during the year. In 2018, the verse was about baptism. I was baptized a long time ago, and I really don’t think about it much. Pastors do, however. We often have a Thanksgiving for Baptism.

So, I got the verse, 1 Peter 3:21, and I wrote about baptism being a symbol of our salvation just as my wedding ring is a symbol of my marriage to Jane. In thinking about this, I studied my well-worn ring. After 44 years, its original design and engravings had worn smooth, yet it was dearer than ever. I thought I had an appreciation for the analogy.

Then, during the same week, Jane and I took a hike through the vast Bisti Wilderness. When we returned after sunset, my ring was gone. There was no going back. It was gone forever. I was devastated. “My wedding ring is gone,” I said plaintively. Jane said, “That’s terrible! But... we’re still married.”

I believe God had me lose my ring to make this devotional truly meaningful. Baptism is a symbol, but it is not “just” a symbol. Pastors are right to lead us to revisit it and cherish it. For as we do, we realize how precious Christ’s sacrifice for us is.

Dear God, thank you for baptism.

Prayer concern: That we all cherish the symbols God has given us and the truths behind them.

Charlie Anderson
Temptation! Oh, temptation!

And he was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him. (v. 13)

There’s a lot more in this passage. First, Mark tells us about Jesus’ baptism. Then he moves right into the temptation in the wilderness, and finishes by telling us about the beginning of Jesus’ ministry. His narrative raises a lot more questions than it answers.

The part that spoke to me was the part about the temptation. Since Mark is so succinct, I took a peek at the passages in Matthew (4:1-11) and Luke (4:1-13). Those passages tell us that Jesus was tempted by 3 things: food, worldly power, and flying. When I was a child, I would think about these passages (yeah, I was a Very Weird Child). I could understand being tempted by hunger. I could really understand wanting to fly! But worldly power? Why would Satan think Jesus could be tempted by worldly power? First of all, why would Satan think he had more control over worldly power than Jesus did, since Jesus was the Son of God and Satan was a fallen angel? Secondly, why would Satan think that the Son of God would not already have all the power over worldly events that he needed? Or wanted? It seemed to me that Satan missed the mark on that one.

And isn’t that just like temptation? I’m tempted by chocolate and I’m addicted to reading, but have no interest in coffee. You can’t tempt me with coffee. So many people I’ve talked to said they were able to kick their addiction to alcohol or cigarettes partly by deciding they would no longer allow themselves to be tempted by it.

O God, help me to see clearly the things that tempt me and give me strength to turn away from them.

Prayer concern: Those with addictions of any kind (yeah, even reading).

Keri Sutter
Why me? Why now?

Is not your reverence your confidence?
And the integrity of your ways your hope? (vs. 6)

Twenty-four years ago on the Thursday after Easter I lost the use of my legs. I was 46 years old and I’d been in ministry for 9 years. All was well, and then this. I remember thinking, “This is going to be the most difficult thing I’ve ever done.”

When the chaplain arrived those two questions were gnawing at me. We chatted for a bit, and just as he was preparing to leave, he suggested that I read the Book of Job. I remember balking at the idea, because I knew the story of Job. God and the devil used Job as a pawn in a little power play. Then there’s the friends – with friends like Job’s, who needs. . . Nope that’s the last thing I intended to read. The chaplain replied, “Well you might just find it helpful right now!” And off he went.

Grudgingly I decided to try his suggestion. And there it was. In this very chapter, Eliphaz was advising Job to take his own advice. It was counsel that Job had effectively shared with others. And because he had been successful in comforting others in their desperation, Eliphaz chided Job to practice what he preached.

Eliphaz had correctly diagnosed that part of Job’s problem was a loss of confidence. And even though he thought that there was a little karma at work – that Job may have deserved some of his troubles – he gave him some common sense advice. God will finally help, because God is good and acts with justice in mind. Eliphaz told Job to be hopeful because God’s righteousness finally prevails.

So, then I had to reframe those original questions to read: Why not me? and Why not now?

O Holy One, grant me the ability to encourage others and have hope for myself when “times of trial” appear for whatever reason.

Philip Wangberg
When we have days of trouble disrupting our lives, we search for God to guide and heal us by our cries of prayer. We sometimes become frantic and overwhelmed with grief, as though He has deserted us during our time of need. This psalmist cries out thinking God does not hear and becomes frantic. Has God abandoned him and will things become even more devastating?

We often feel the presence of God when things are going well. All is right with the world. When we are in dire need and have a sense that God has abandoned us or does not hear our requests, panic often prevails. We begin to question how our troubles even appear when God is constantly present. The urgencies of our needs seem to bring with them impatience for quick all resolving responses from God. Should we expect a rapid timeframe for response? Should we continue to pray? Verses 4-9 question if God does indeed hear us. The news I find astonishing and to me, even more important, is the second portion of this Psalm. “I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD”; (v. 11). The psalmist remembers previous deeds of God as he has been just and forgiving with his people of the past. We must all continue our prayers to God because He is ever present. He hears our prayers and does act on them. We just need to remember to be patient and faithful.

As stated in Deuteronomy 31:8, “The LORD himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”

**Heavenly Father, thank you for always hearing our prayers.**

Prayer concern: Those in need during times of trial in their lives.

Vivian Dee Gutierrez
Hide and Seek

But we have to celebrate and be glad because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and found. (v. 32)

You remember when you were younger and would play hide and seek? Well, that’s kind of how our faith needs to be. We can hide from God in the hard times, but he will always find us. Instead of hiding and running away from God’s never-ending love, we should seek it. We can go looking for it.

In a game of hide and seek, everyone is always found, right? Well, God will always find us no matter how far we run from him. God will never leave you no matter how far you wander from him. Just like the father and son in the Bible story. The father was so happy when his son found his way back to him. God will never leave you no matter how far you wander from him. He is waiting for you with open arms. Learn to seek him even in the hard times.

Dear Lord, please help me to remember to come running to you. You love me no matter what. You want me to see you in the hard times. Thank you for finding me when I am hiding from you. Amen.

Prayer concern: Anyone who is running from God or having a hard time seeking him right now.

Adelle Adams
SHY (Senior High Youth)
God’s Covenant

*The Lord appeared to Abram, and said to him,*

“I am God Almighty, walk before me, and be blameless.” (v. 1)

At the age of 99, Abram receives a message from God of his covenant for him. God has mentioned this covenant before but this time he is very specific about how the covenant would be carried out. 1) God would change his name to Abraham meaning Father of Nations. 2) God would give Abraham millions of descendants, and kings will come from these descendants. 3) God will establish this covenant to be everlasting, not only between himself and Abraham, but to Abraham’s offspring throughout generations. All Abraham had to do was to have faith in God and obey him.

Usually, when we enter into an agreement, the gains and sacrifices are somewhat equal. Yet, when we agree to become part of God’s family, we are guaranteed gifts and blessings far greater than any sacrifice we make. God has the power and ability to meet our every need.

**Lord, thank you for the covenant you offer to us**

Prayer concern: Lord, I pray that all your children have the faith to know the abundant blessings of the covenant you offer to us.

Lisa Jones
God Has Taken Charge

...generations yet unborn shall hear of all the miracles he did for us. (v. 31)

All of us know people who only turn to God in the midst of illness or trouble of some kind. They turn to God when the going gets tough. These same people then get upset if things do not turn out the way they had planned.

God has a plan for each of us. We might not agree with it. It might not go exactly the way we want it to, but here is where we have to realize it is not our way, but the Lord’s.

Since moving to Albuquerque, we have met a wonderful family. The Davis family. Grandpa and Grandma have 3 sons and 7 grandchildren. Son #1 has pancreatic cancer. Son #2 has a brain tumor. Both of these young men are now in remission. Son #3 has a four year old daughter who is battling leukemia. This is definitely a family that might question God’s plan. You might hear “why me?” Instead, they praise God, worship Him, but above all they know that God is in charge no matter what the outcome is.

So follow their lead. Worship, pray and always know that the Lord has a plan for us. You don’t have to always be the one in charge.

Lord, watch over me. Help me to realize that you, not me, are the one in charge.

Prayer concern: Pray for those people who think they always have to be in charge. Let them turn that responsibility over to God.

Diane Carrico

My child, you worry too much. I’ve got this, remember? God
Faith Like Abraham

…but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (v. 16)

There comes a time in your life when you walk away from all the drama and people who create it. You surround yourself with people who make you laugh.

- Forget the bad and focus on the good.
- Love the people who treat you right, pray for the ones who don’t.
- Life is too short to be anything but happy.
- Falling down is part of life.
- Getting back up is living.

Lord, thank you for lifting me up.

Prayer concern: Those who have no faith.

Doris Herrmann
Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me

Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (v. 34)

The verse I picked is one that is often quoted by many Christians. I, for one, have always assumed the disciples knew what Jesus was talking about when He said this to them,

“Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take their cross and follow me.”

But the more I think about it, I bet the disciples and the crowd hearing this message just shook their heads in confusion. Remember Jesus said all of this before He entered Jerusalem in triumph, instituted the Last Supper, or was even put on trial. A cross wasn’t even on the disciples horizon or in their vocabulary. I bet they thought Jesus was saying something really weird. Crosses were for criminals. Why would Jesus say that?

We have the luxury of knowing the ending to the story as we read this account. They were actually living it in “real time”. We know Jesus was destined to carry His own cross up a hill after being taunted, scourged, and crowned with thorns. They had no idea. So imagine their confusion. Yet they continued trusting Jesus for the answers to their questions and the outcomes to the situations presented to them.

Sometimes I put myself in the disciples place. Would I have as much faith as they did? I don’t know. I struggle with trusting God for outcomes of situations far less important. And I have the luxury of knowing the end of the story. I pray to have the faith and simple trust of the disciples to follow Jesus even if I don’t always know what it always means to “take up my cross and follow Him.”

Lord, thank you for granting us faith, for putting up with our shortcomings and failures to trust you in all situations. Bless us and grant us all a measure of your grace in our faith walk with You.

Prayer concern: For those struggling to trust God

Nancy Lacher
Live

And she said, ‘Who would ever have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.’ (v. 7)

My dad was one of the original health nuts. He became one when he watched his father die at an early age. I always thought his notions were kind of crazy until I watched my own mom die way too young. Then it hit me: “I need to break this pattern!” But it’s not just up to us, is it?

God made a promise to Sarah and Abraham. They had Isaac when both of them were in their extreme old age. Nowadays this is unheard of. But health is what we make it. After my mom died, health became the focus of my life. I researched alternative diets, changed my fitness regimen, and sought ways to relieve stress. In the beginning all was radical change, but now healthy living for me has become a gently evolving process. My mom died when I was 35. Now, 9 years later, I am in better shape than I was in high school.

It saddens me that my mom’s death was the catalyst for living a healthy life. But who knows what God’s plan is in all of this anyway? I believe that we owe it to God to live our lives the best and healthiest we can, so that if it is His will, amazing things may happen to us…even in OUR old age!

Lord, help us to make healthy, happy choices.

Prayer concern: Those who are struggling with illness and are striving for better health.

Amy Ellis
Keeping Promises

He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded...(v. 8a)

Delivering the Israelites out of Egypt through his servant Moses, God made a deal with them. If they would only obey His laws, He promised them their own land where He would provide for and protect them. God’s laws included not only the Ten Commandments but hundreds of rules and regulations (apparently 613 of them I found out!). As the Old Testament teaches, the Israelites struggled greatly to keep up their end of the deal. This is not surprising, of course, given the overwhelming expectations. As we know, perfectly keeping all Ten Commandments alone is challenging enough!

As I learned, God set out a system of atonement through animal sacrifices to handle the problem of human failing; that is, sin. Such blood sacrifice was required by God to atone for sin, and though practiced for hundreds of years, was intended only to be temporary. Needing a more permanent solution, God would send His own Son to be the final blood sacrifice that would be the ultimate atonement for all time. Thus, Jesus Christ became the New Covenant, a one-sided deal by God to redeem and reconcile us to Him without any requirement from us.

So what better deal is there than this? We are unable to completely keep up our end of the deal and wind up in debt; but God sends His own Son to pay it! I’ve been a Christian for quite a while, and this is still difficult to comprehend. But I guess I don’t have to understand it any more than this: God promised to love and provide for us, no matter what it takes. We just have to accept His grace.

Thank You, Generous Father, for always keeping Your promises.
Help us to keep ours.

Prayer concern: For those needing to know God has already forgiven them.

Kathy Albin
The Word to Live By

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. (v. 1-2)

We live in a very unquiet world. From morning ‘til night, we are inundated by words…spoken, blared out, shouted. We are bombarded by messages trying to dictate to us what to think and do and buy and believe. In desperation, we attempt to drown out those voices with yet more diversion until we find God’s word is unimaginably powerful, now more than ever.

In our scripture today, the writer John calls Jesus the Word that was with God forever and IS God’s Word in human form. His life is the light of God brought down to us, and it can never be extinguished, for the light will always be stronger than evil.

I tremble at the power of a word spoken with conviction: “Lord, I believe,” “I trust in you.” They dissolve the din of fear and doubt. Through Jesus, God empowers us to see words of life to share with…and receive from…one another. By grace we are set free, and thus are free to give.

God of light and power, guard our words that they may be true and right before you, for Jesus’ sake. Amen.

Prayer concern: Souls yearning for words of life.

Ruth Hinkel
Laws, Laws, Laws! Hard to follow Laws!

I am the Lord your God...you shall have no other gods before me. (v. 2)

The 10 Commandments have always brought to my mind a harsh and judgmental God. But just like a loving parent, God seeks to tenderly guide and correct His children. When we were but toddlers God provided these Laws for us to keep us safe and close to Him. Then as we mature and we are ready, (In the fullness of time, as Paul states in Galatians 4: 4-7) Jesus comes! As was God’s plan from the very beginning. Jesus was born at the first perfect moment that we could understand his coming. He came to show that the 10 Commandments true purpose was to prepare us for His arrival.

The first four Laws teach how to relate to God. To love and respect Him. The last six Laws teach how to relate to one another. To love and respect each other.

Jesus was asked in Matthew 22, “Which of the Laws was the greatest?” He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul and with all your mind and love your neighbor as yourself.” This perfectly encompasses all of the 10 Commandments and also intertwines our relationship with God and our relationship with each other. You can’t have one without the other. We must practice both love for God and love for one another. For everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love, does not know God because God is Love. (1 John 4:7)

This story of the 10 Commandments, told in its fullness, is perfect. The Law becomes liberating! It also manages to mirror our own story. Take for example the teenager that rebels against his parent’s laws then moves on and out only to come to the realization, in his maturity, that his parents only loved him. Deeply!

Lord, thank you for loving us and teaching us to love you and each other.

Prayer concern: For those who do not know love.

Linda O’Neal
God's Glory in Creation and the Law

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (v. 14)

Anyone who knows me or has even spoken to me for three minutes knows I am a preschool teacher. Being the director of a Christian preschool is one of my jobs. My favorite time for interaction with the students is chapel, talking about various Bible stories. (“Yes, I know your family is Jewish, which is why we talked about Esther today!”) Psalm 19 states “Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge.” As important as Bible stories are, it is our follow-through, our active knowledge about what God’s expectations are for us, that make us his and Jesus’ followers. As Psalm 19 describes the results of the law, the decrees, the precepts, the commandments, and fear (awe) of the Lord, it also describes how to be a good teacher, parent and person.

As a Christian, God’s word provides the basis of my teaching whether or not I can use God’s or Jesus’ name in my public school classroom. Within the structure and routine I provide at school, my students feel safe. In feeling safe and loved, my students learn how to interact and play with each other – how to “love their neighbor as they love themselves”. We talk a lot about feelings in our class, helping students understand happy, sad, angry, etc. Moreover, we talk about how to react to our feelings. To my students, it is not important that it was James in the Bible who said, “You must understand this, my beloved, let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to anger” [and slow to hit…], it is important to learn to take 3 deep breaths before reacting with harsh words or hitting. Whether they realize it, or not, they are following God’s word.

Lord, help me to take 3 deep breaths and follow through on your word.

Prayer concern: That we recognize and thank teachers for teaching our children to love one another.

Rosemary Neely
The Wisdom of the Wise

*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and the cleverness of the clever. *I will thwart.* (v. 18-19)

When Peter wrote this first letter to the Corinthians he was writing to the Corinthians who had become misled and were forming different caustic groupings.

Some Corinthians who were Jews believed in and revered power. The Greeks honored wisdom and the educated. They did not believe that God would send the Messiah, without power, wealth, and without scholarly knowledge. They were referring to Kings and the highly educated.

The Corinthians were beginning to question why God would send his son to become a criminal and to be hanged on a cross as our savior. They imagined that the Messiah would reign with nobility and would be the most scholarly of all.

Contrarily, Jesus was born to a stay at home mom, a working father and lived in a humble home. As an adult, Jesus was tried, convicted and sentenced to death, in the most inhumane way I can imagine. The irony is that our Jesus, though innocent, died for us in this most vile, cruel, painful way, freeing us to enter the kingdom of heaven. Logically, it is hard to understand this. That is the point. Logic is the enemy of faith and trust.

I believe that God does want us to learn everything we can. I think it delights him as we discover all the hidden secrets of the world he created for us. But, He also wants us to develop wisdom from our knowledge without thinking that what we learn makes us wiser or more intelligent than others. If we have power over others, God wants us to be honest and fair, and not believe that our power gives us power or dominion over others.

*Lord, help us to be filled with your wisdom to discern our pride in what we know and what we have. Amen.*

Prayer concern: Those who feel prideful in their knowledge, wealth and status.

John Chavez
Cleansing Our Temple

Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.” (v. 19)

Jesus is upsetting the “apple cart.” He tells the money changers “to get out of here, stop making my Father’s house a marketplace.” His actions upset the Jews so they asked, “what right do you have to do this?” Jesus answers. “Destroy this temple and in three days, I will raise it up.” Their response was disbelief. They did not understand that he was talking about his body as a temple.

The Bible reminds us that our body and mind are temples where God’s Spirit dwells. Jesus’ symbolic cleansing of the temple is a reminder that it’s the time of the year when we should be cleansing our temples. All the anger, greed, and violence of our world clutter up our temple. Jesus’ actions show us that we are responsible for cleansing our own temples by asking Jesus to come and to help us cleanse our temple.

Dearest Father, create in us a new heart and renew a right Spirit within us as we daily cleanse our temple.

Prayer concern: Cleansing our temple.

Don and Beth Cretsinger
God's Promises Are For Real

He began to build the house of the Lord. (vs. 1)

The Temple of the Lord was built to signify authority, God’s Holiness, God’s covenant with Israel and forgiveness. It prepared people for the Messiah, and it was a testimony to human effort and creativity, and a place for prayer.

God’s creation is also a temple and he is present everywhere and always…in the quiet of the sunrise or in a spectacular New Mexico sunset, the breathtaking changing colors of fall and the beauty of new blossoms in spring…clear blue skies and dark threatening storm clouds. God is always with us. He is present when our journeys are smooth and problem free and when we struggle due to poor choices and difficult circumstances.

God’s promise is the assurance that we can walk by faith while we wait for him to work. He promises to listen when we cry out to Him, to give us strength when we are weak and to comfort us when we are sad. He promises us forgiveness and unconditional love. What an AWESOME GOD we have.

Thank you Father God for healing our brokenness, for your grace, your mercy, your love and the sacrifice of your son Jesus for the forgiveness of our sins.

Prayer Concern: Those who do not know God or believe in his promises.

Wendy Sylvester
A Place of Springs

Happy are those whose strength is in you... As they go through the valley... they make it a place of springs... they go from strength to strength... (v. 5-7)

As I write this, we’ve had over ninety days of no measurable precipitation at the Sunport. Both valley and mountain lands are very dry. Springs -- or snow -- would be a welcome sight.

Sometimes life is like that, so parched that any glimpse of joy, of healing, of peace seems a far distant hope....

Psalm 84 begins and ends with a focus on the joy of worship in the temple of the LORD. In the middle, however, the psalmist reminds us what happens when the faithful are on the move: they follow the highway of faithfulness implanted on their hearts, going from strength to strength as pools of refreshing waters spring up in the places around them.

I experienced these “springs” in a very real way the year my father was dying of colon cancer. Phil and I lived in Iowa at the time, my folks in California. Even in the middle of the school year my elementary-teacher spouse would take charge of our toddlers so I could be with my parents. Friends from church and our community stepped in to help. When I had to miss work my insurance company coworkers covered my responsibilities. Dad died at age 58 less than a year after diagnosis. Thirty-four years later I remember that time like it just happened, still feeling the cool waters of those “springs” who showed up to help us during that very difficult time. God’s strength is in us as we seek those refreshing springs in our own lives, as we seek to be those springs for others. God’s strength is with the Church as we wrestle together for guidance in our community and our nation. In these literally and figuratively dry times we walk together trusting God’s promise: springs will well up in surprising ways, by the grace of God granting joy and hope to those in need through those called to make a difference now. Thanks be to God.

O God, in the midst of dry and difficult times, show us the way to the Springs of Life. Keep us faithful to your promise to be with us no matter what, and empower us to be a place of refreshment in word and deed for those in need. Amen.

Prayer concern: People who lack life’s basic necessity of clean water
I Will Never Be Thirsty

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty again.” (v. 13-14)

Too many times had I found myself thirsty, over and over again. It was time for a change. I started going to church when I was seven. At that time, I didn’t know who or what God was. My parents first took me to church and tried to explain it to me. I nodded, not really listening to what they were saying, because I was seven. For that year I listened and did what I thought was praying and continued on with life.

Suddenly I switched schools and I thought that the God I had come to know was punishing me for not worshiping him when I was younger. I went down my own path of selfishness and deceitfulness. It wasn’t until I was ten when my mother had recently passed away when I had fell to my knees and asked for forgiveness. Right then, I heard God say to me, “My child you will never be thirsty again, I am here for you.” Ever since then I have never doubted God. You may not make it to church or read the Bible as much as you should, but continually pray and talk to God and share his word, and you will never be thirsty.

Dear Lord, help us find the lost souls and show them your everlasting word.

Prayer concern: Those who are thirsty and lost.

Aubrey Zimmer
SHY (Senior High Youth)
God’s Promise of the Bronze Snake

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live.” (v. 8)

The Israelites grow impatient and complain about the condition that they live in. Then God sends venomous snakes who kill many of the people. After this happens, the Israelites ask Moses to pray to God for forgiveness for their sins. God tells Moses to make a snake out of bronze and to put it on a pole and anyone that looks on it will not die.

This shows how powerful God is and His promise that if you have enough faith, He will be there for you.

My sister Linda complains about a lot of things in her life, and I find it is hard to talk to her. I feel if she could find something that makes her happy and concentrate on positive things, she would be happier.

**Lord, thank you for your promise of forgiveness and always letting us come to You.**

Prayer concern: Those who do not know the Lord’s forgiveness and need His love.

Julia Ann Hawkins
We have all been fools one time or another, bound by the hands of our enemies. Who might those enemies be? There is an obvious choice close to home. I remember hearing the old saying, “You are your own worst enemy.” When it comes to transgression (vs. 17), that is so true. We deliberately act in ways that we know are wrong, causing ourselves deep affliction and regret (see Romans 7:19, 20). And the pain doesn’t always end there. We often take that misery out on those around us, especially those closest to us. What can we do to stanch the suffering we cause ourselves and others? As Paul put it, “Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24).

First and foremost, recognize just what God has done for us. He has sent His Word and healed us, and delivered us from our own destruction (Ps. 107:20). Jesus not only expressed the Father’s love for us, He demonstrated it. As we cried out, we got relief from somewhere, someone, Jesus took that deep affliction upon Himself. With all encompassing mercy, He reached out to you, and to me, and redeemed us out of the pit of misery. That was the Father’s promise to all of us. Know that you are forgiven 100 percent. Know that you are now the Father’s beloved child. You don’t belong to the hand of the enemy anymore.

Sing the song of the redeemed! It is an amazing thing to know that you are loved by God who created the universe! His mercy and redemption have no end, “His mercy endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so…”(Ps. 107:1,2).

Lord, help me to live in the love you have so freely given to me.
   In Jesus name, Amen.

Chris Morgan
What Changed?

*For it is by God’s grace that you have been saved through faith.* (v. 8)

This is a mystery. I know all about the being steeped in sin part and disobedience, but what changed? These verses make it very clear that there was a change and it was brought about by grace which was God’s free gift. But when did it happen, why did it happen and why me? That it actually happened I know is true because I changed just as described in the verses and later as I grew Spiritual Gifts were confirmed by others. (Gifts of the Spirit are part of that Grace we talked about earlier and are part of God’s witness on your behalf.) I know many lifelong Lutherans that claim that they had no noticeable change, but I suspect that they may have been too young to remember. As you think back to your school days, you will probably realize that you were different from many of your school pals. That was the change. For the rest of us I think the moment of change happened when we actually acknowledged our sinful nature.

What unbelievers hate most about God is sin. They don’t want to deal with the idea of sin. Once we get over that idea, it becomes easier. If there is sin then there is God and we need his help. The Good News is that he is right there waiting for us to know that. The second part of this grace is believing God and even that is a gift of the Spirit. God does it all! But what about all the people who don’t accept this free gift? The answer is simple, God gives the gifts, but we do not have to take them. It is the one unforgivable sin…rejection of God’s Spirit. If you have not received God’s grace yet, give it a chance It’s FREE.

**Lord what a concept Grace, our ticket into your presence and Kingdom. Wow thank You!**

Prayer concern: those that don’t know their need for grace.

Pete Wormwood
Live in the Light

*For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, so that everyone that believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.* (v. 16)

John 3:16 is probably the most well-known verse in the Bible. It has been used as a trademark to simplify one version of the Christian Gospel into a quick sound bite. It so happens that my devotion goes to verse 21, and there is more to the message than the promise of eternal life. There is no eternal doom awaiting those that believe in Christ, but those who reject or ignore him completely have already been tried and condemned.

This scripture goes from one of the most encouraging messages in the Bible, to some of the scariest messages. Don’t be discouraged. Keep praying for those living in darkness. And trust in God by recognizing the insufficiency of our own efforts, and ask Him to do his work in us.

**I pray that I am able to live a life worthy of your promise of eternal life.**

Prayer concern: For those living in darkness that they may see how much better it is to live in the light.

Sam Jones
Complain, Complain

So the people grumbled at Moses saying, “what shall we drink?” (v. 24)

Three days in the desert without water. Now that is something to grumble and complain about, right? I have tried to envision myself among the Hebrew people in the desert without water. I am pretty sure I’d complain to somebody. Yes! Moses!

Israel wasn’t in the habit of trusting God to supply their needs. He had brought them out of Egypt and through the Red Sea, but now no water in this dryness! They complain and grumble to Moses who then cried out to God. Moses cried out in faith. Their need was met with fresh water, not to mention dates to eat! God heard them and responded. This is so reassuring to me for my life’s journey.

To me, complaining means we don’t trust God to know our needs. But, He does. We cry out to God for various reasons: fear, helplessness, desperation, frustration (think politics) and as King David and Moses did, in faith. And God hears every cry. He knows our needs and carries our sorrows. And His timing is always perfect. Maybe not to our thinking, but it is for His purpose in our lives.

It is so good to know that I can cry out to God and He will listen. Crying out in faith might be the best way to go. He hears our cries and our prayers, knows our hearts and our needs. After all, He created us, is ever present in our lives and sometimes, we just need to be still and hear and trust His answers no matter what the world says. God’s answers are always His best. So NO MORE COMPLAINING! Maybe this can be our 2018 resolution.

Lord, turn our complaints into faith in you.

Susan McWilliam
The Lord Protects Believers

Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble; He delivered them out of their distress. (v. 6)

The LORD aided those in distress. After they prayed and asked for help. He delivered them to an inhabited area, where food, water and shelter were readily available.

There were those among them who rebelled against the word of the Lord and who stumbled without anyone to help them, but when they finally cried out to the LORD, they were saved along with the others.

How many of us have felt as if our troubles were overpowering and without a solution? I have felt this way at times in the past, but with prayer and asking the Lord for help, answers seemed to appear from nowhere. Sometimes they took a while to appear and required patience, but everything has a way of working out when one believes in the Lord and asks Him for help.

We have to remember what happened to those who rebelled and spurned the council of the Most High…”They stumbled and there was none to help,” until they accepted the LORD.

Lord, we pray that you hear our prayers and keep us in the fold.

Prayer concern: Those who do not ask the LORD and reject his teachings.

Charles Hendrickson
Follow the Leader

...the sheep hear his voice. (v 3b)

God tells us that we are His sheep and He is our shepherd. The sheep will only follow the shepherd’s voice and no one else’s. I feel that this ties into the first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me. We have to only listen to God’s voice. A hired hand represents false gods and wrong paths that always lead to a dead end.

So, you know when you are in school and you follow trends? I cringed when my dad said that he wore parachute pants and my mom said she had hoop earrings that she could fit her fist into. That made me shiver. You also know how people will say, “I don’t know where I’m going, so I’ll follow them.” That might work, but what if they accidentally fell off of a cliff? Then, you’ll be even more lost.

When you are following God, it’s the complete opposite, really. You know that He is 100% certain where He is going. He will lead you to the point at the end of the line segment: Heaven. And, He is a straight shot there. Yeah, there will be bumps in the road, but who can draw a straight line. He helps us draw our line of life as straight as possible. It is also said that the shepherd will welcome sheep that are not of his pen. Those are all the people that turn away from God, and people that have sinned and pretty much anyone else. Once you let God live in your heart, you are in His pen. He is your ruler. He is eternally your leader.

Forgiving God, help me to let myself be led by you. Help me to be trusting in your might and power and kind leading hand. I know you will always protect me. Amen.

Prayer concern: Try to let God lead you, and trust that He will find the right path for you.

Carly Adams, Kaley McClain and Kiersten Hielkema
MHY (Mid High Youth)
God’s New Covenant

To Know Him! No Longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me,…(v. 34)

Imagine your thoughts as you listen to Jeremiah proclaiming - God is going to make a new covenant with you by putting His law within you, and writing it on your heart. He will be your God. You shall know God! God will forgive you and not remember your sins. I am so thankful that Jesus fulfilled this promised covenant by showing us how to have a personal relationship with God and for leaving us with the gift of the Holy Spirit! The blessing of my ‘up-close’ and personal relationship with God came through loud and clear when Don was having by-pass surgery last year. What a joy it was to feel God’s loving arms surrounding me in comfort, strength, Love, and peace! And to feel the power of prayers from our Cross of Hope family and all who were praying!

Awesome Father, thank You for placing the joy of Your covenant in our hearts. Thank You for being our best friend! Amen.

Prayer concern: For those who are running away from a personal relationship with God.

Beth Cretsinger
A Prayer for Forgiveness

Wash away all my evil and make me clean from my sin. (v. 2)

It seems so simple to say, “wash away all my sins.” Do we think that God has nothing more to do but wash away my sins?

Had we not sinned, then we would not have a problem. We should not sin and then God would not have a problem with us. But, I know that this is not possible for us. We are sinners. We should try not to sin so much so that we will do better in the eyes of the Lord.

So, ask for God’s forgiveness which we know He will lovingly give to us, bad as we are. Strive to be the best that you can be. This way you know that you are earning God’s forgiveness.

Pray to be saved from your sins.

Prayer concern: All sinners should seek God’s favor.

Stanley Socha
Jesus, the Most High Priest

In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death. (v.7)

In the time of Abram, God chose a man to be the high priest and to be the go-between between man and God. Only the most humble of men could be priest. Could there have been anyone more holy, humble, kind and compassionate than our Lord Jesus. God said to Jesus, "You are my son, Today I have begotten You." And then He said, "You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."

The text speaks of Jesus offering both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death. However, He was the chosen one to be our go-between.

There have been a few times (far too few) when I have stayed on my knees through the night crying out to the Lord for help, hope and intervention. Though they were few, it helped me to come to know the majesty of our God. Understanding who God is and who I am in my desperation has driven me to the cross of Christ. He is the kind of Priest I need - the only Priest I need.

Draw me near to your cross, precious Lord.

Prayer concern: For those around us who don't know about our High Priest.

Kay Hendrickson
A Message from John

The hour has come... (v. 23)

This is a parable and lesson about the upcoming death of Jesus. It shows that the message regarding the death of Jesus is to bring about the fulfillment of belief in abundant life for the believer. The Parable reads “except that a corn of wheat should fall on to the ground and die, it abides alone, if it dies however it brings forth much fruit”. This is a significant parallel to the death of Jesus because if Jesus dies his believers will bear much fruit through eternal life. Its meaning is to show that by dying Jesus will bear much fruit for His followers. As well as this gift of eternal life will glorify God.

Praise be to God!

Meditation: The faith of a mustard seed is enough to move an entire mountain.

Elisa Mclellan
God’s Love in Action

“You are my witnesses,” declares the Lord. (v. 10)

Have you ever felt the presence of God in your life? I have, and it’s been in places and in ways I never dreamed of. There was the time I was riding with my granddaughter Ella, and we gave a $5 McDonald’s gift card to the young woman holding a sign at the stop light. I felt God’s presence when she said, “Thank you and God bless you.” And I felt it again when Ella told me how good she felt after we did that.

God is everywhere, especially in large, and small acts of kindness. I read once, “We should be God to, or receive God from, every person we meet today.” It is through these acts of kindness that our actions become a witness to God’s love and mercy. And along the way our lives become a testimony to the living presence of a loving God who is always at work in and around us.

Dear Lord, as I go through my day, let me be open to doing kind things for those I come in contact with, as a way of sharing the love you have given me, with others. Amen

Prayer concern: For those in need of food and shelter today.

Patty Westerfield
Psalm 119:9-16

With One’s Whole Heart

With my whole heart I seek you; do not let me stray from your commandments. (v. 10)

Psalm 119, the longest Chapter in the Bible, at first glance appears to have been written by one of the Pharisees. The Psalmist speaks of multiple references of what appears to be an insistence of adherence to the decrees, the statutes, the commandments, the ordinances, the precepts, the law, and the judgment— the favorites of the Pharisees? But a second in-depth reading reveals that the Psalmist has woven in between the verses, the inference to meditate on these things. It is this meditation, this call to prayer, which may provide the essence of this psalm rather than the call for strict adherence to the law. Meditation provides the way to seek God with one’s whole heart. Meditation allows one to treasure God’s word in one’s heart. Meditation connects one’s eyes on God’s ways.

My children attended a Lutheran elementary school where they were required to memorize many Bible verses including the Ten Commandments and other “laws”. In addition to memorizing, they discussed the meaning of each commandment and their application to their lives. We are grateful to their teachers who, with love, taught them these important biblical tenets, but also showed and demonstrated to them the importance of prayer and meditation. While knowing the law is important, it is far more important to connect with God on a daily basis and to seek God’s guidance in all things.

Lord, help us to meditate daily.

Prayer concern: Our under-appreciated teachers.

Rich Neely
Trust in the Lord

*Did I tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God? (v. 40)*

In these verses of John 11:28-44, the Lord raises Lazarus from the dead. Jesus came to a village and Mary the sister of Lazarus said, if you had been here, Lazarus would not be dead.

Jesus has referred to us as his followers and to believe in him for he has died for our sins. Being a follower, I have always believed this and I am sure many other people do too.

The closest I have related to being Mary in these verses was when I was about 11 years old. Recently one of my friends had been put in the hospital, and I began to think that if the Lord was protecting them, they wouldn’t have been so sick. I began to forget His presence, but He was there and He knew how to help my friend. The next day my friends were at school. They were weak, but they were healthy and it truly seemed to be a miracle by God.

**Lord, thank you for forgiving us and protecting those who are ill and weak.**

Prayer concern: Please show people your presence so they also do not forget you and your forgiveness.

Evangeline Hubbard
MHY (Mid High Youth)
Life is Not Fair

...to know the word that sustains the weary. (v. 4b)

The introduction states that the book of Isaiah “unveils the full dimensions of God’s judgment and salvation.” The Lord’s kingdom on earth, with its righteous Rule and His righteous subjects, is the goal toward which Isaiah moves. We all know this did Not happen without ups and downs. We all have experienced low times and happier, more productive times.

This thought brings to mind a comment my mother aptly shared when I was a teen when I stated, “that’s Not fair!” She turned and said, “LIFE is Not Fair, Janny Ree.” I have indeed experienced that truth. (I’m so thankful for God’s Grace!)

In verse 6, “I offered my back to those who beat me, …” I did not hide my face from mocking or spitting”. A rather low time, we would agree. However, earlier in verse 4, ”The Sovereign Lord has given me a well-instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary”. A very sustaining thought, as is noted in verse 9, “It is the Sovereign Lord who helps me. Who will condemn me?”

This Old Testament reading was an unexpected joy! This lesson of a human so long ago, who struggled, yet remained hopeful, and encouraged by our God. A similar New Testament message exists in Romans 8:31b, “If God is for us, who is against us?” God shows up and follows up! What a great example to emulate!

Lord, help us LISTEN to your words of guidance and love. Help us take the time required to HEAR your answers to our prayers.

Prayer concern: Those too busy to Hear You, Lord

Janice Marie Anderson (Janny Ree)
My Times Are In God’s Hands

My times are in your hands; deliver me from the hands of my enemies, from those who pursue me. Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love. (v. 15-16)

Suffering is a part of this life on earth. This Psalm of David leaves me realizing that I don’t have much to complain about! David is physically and emotionally falling apart; his eyes and bones grow weak, people conspire against him, friends leave him, enemies are all around him, he feels like a piece of discarded broken pottery! He cries out to God for mercy. Wow, how would we get through all these difficult times? I’m stressed out when I have to deal with only one or two negative issues.

I told a friend about a bad day yesterday, and I felt a weight lifted off of me when this friend told me, “God loves you and that’s all that matters.” Then I thought about the “rest of the story” in David’s Psalm. He put his trust in the Lord, he cries out to God, he realizes that his whole life (“times”) is in God’s hands. How often I forget to rest in those wonderful hands as He holds me. It is so easy to get caught up in thinking about the trials of this life, that we forget God has our times in His hands. He knows our every need and every desire, and gives us what we need, His salvation in His unfailing love. He lets His face shine on us and gives us peace. May I be continually reminded when I am faced with difficult times that my help comes from the Lord and that it is His love that keeps me in all times!

Lord, I put my trust in You. Remind me daily that You hold my times in Your awesome hands.

Prayer concern: Those experiencing anguish, distress, and grief.

Janet Wormwood
How Much?

...even death on a cross. (v. 8)

“Wait? How much does this cost again?” I remember being 11 years old and trying to buy my first record album. I saved my allowance for two weeks to purchase the soundtrack to South Pacific. Unfortunately, though I had enough money for the album’s price, I had forgotten to include the tax. The price on the label didn’t equal the total cost.

One of the basic tenets that Christians understand is that according to God’s promise of a savior, salvation is free. But we may underestimate what it means to be a disciple. Today’s text teaches us that serving God is not just about what price Christ paid for us on the cross, but that we also should assume the same posture of humility if we claim to be His disciples.

One important consideration about sacrifice is this: The “what” we sacrifice for is just as important as the “why.” Christ’s great love for us, even death on a cross, compels us to consider others more than ourselves. He demonstrates that our sacrifice can only be possible when we embrace a spirit of humility – and are willing to pay the total cost.

Dear Lord, please help me to see less of myself and, with a humble, spirit accept the grace for which You obediently died so that I may live.

Prayer concern: What shall I willingly sacrifice to God for all His blessings?

Sheri Phillips
Hosanna to the Heavens!

Blessings on him who comes in the name of the Lord. (v. 9b)

On that fateful day, later to be remembered as Palm Sunday, Jesus had healed a blind man earlier and was on his way to Bethlehem for the last time. He alone understood what he literally was walking into.

After he borrowed the colt, that he had directed his followers to find tethered by the side of the road, he rode the path to Bethlehem. The path that believers were strewing with their cloaks and brushwood to carpet it for his passage. They called out “Hosanna!” as he rode by. It was a joyful time full of hope for them. It would only lead to lamentation in the next days. Jesus knew His fate, but chose to fulfil it. He was born for it and went steadily on to Jerusalem.

Lord, we give you heartfelt thanks for coming, teaching and dying for us.

Prayer concern: Those who do not believe.

Carol Russell
It Was Worth a Year’s Wages

Why wasn’t this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? (v. 5)

Passover was near and so was the end of Jesus’ life on earth. Mary did not hesitate to anoint Jesus by pouring very expensive perfume on his feet. She knew his worth to all of us and recognized his life was ending. How can anyone, especially Judas Iscariot who, betrays him in the end, place a value on the gift of his life? Have you considered what Jesus is worth to you? I confess, I hadn’t really thought much about it. It is something I take for granted that HE knows without any gesture by me.

Jesus’ message to us exhibited by Mary’s actions is that we should all come to Him and waste ourselves and some of our most precious assets to demonstrate a true estimate of His worth to us. If we treasure him, it’s not a waste to devote all that we are and have to Him. He isn’t trying to diminish the seriousness of the needs of the poor and the imperative for charity but instead tells us that there will always be those of greater need who we should help. He was acknowledging that his time among the disciples was ending and they needed to understand this.

So how do we go about not wasting our lives and resources when they can be used to show how much we value the love of God through his son? This passage gives us permission to honor Jesus in extravagant ways, some of which might be by giving lavish donations to the church for its missions or to the poor.

A life spent in selfless devotion to God is not wasted, but a life spent dedicated to advancing yourself is!

Prayer concern: Those who struggle with how to show our appreciation of God’s Gift to us.

Karen Schwartz
Jesus Explains Why He Must Die

Anyone who wants to be my disciple must follow me, because my servants must be where I am....Put your trust in the light while there is still time, then you will become children of the light. (v. 26, 36)

This is a brief story of the great sacrifice that Jesus had to pay on the cross for our sins in order for us to have our salvation...question is, how many of us are willing to accept this gift and let this light shine upon us so we can become children of the light!

Jesus welcomes us all to take advantage of the security he offers us in heaven by being obedient to his word and being determined to stay away from sin. There are so many of us who have trusted God as our Personal Savior and know that he died for us, but yet we continue to live in rebellion against Him and continue to sin, even if we don’t mean to. Why do we still refuse to serve Him we ask, some can even say that we’re guaranteed and sealed forever if we have accepted our Lord as our personal savior. So why worry, right! However, salvation does not guarantee we will live a godly and fruitful life here on earth. We all need to be living under God’s will. We must submit to Him as the one in charge of our life and not us being the ones in control.

We have to remember that Jesus’ dying for our salvation is much more than that. He also came to be the master of our life for our good as well as for His glory. God wants us to trust Him completely and to wait on Him for peace and understanding. Pray, Pray, Pray, Speak and Listen to God’s word! This is all part of being obedient to protect us from evil, and it’s also a blessing and intimacy with our relationship with God.

Even as our Lord feared his own death, he drew strength and wisdom from His father and the Holy Spirit just as we should. He’s always there, we just have to ask, trust and believe!

Let’s ask ourselves, is Jesus really the Lord of my life, am I growing as a Christian that pleases my Heavenly Father or am I a Christian by name only?

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Prayer concern: For those who are unsure of the Lord they are Serving!

Dolores Hughes
Jesus Predicts His Betrayal

...one of you will betray me. (v. 21)

At this point Jesus knew who it was who was going to betray him and was planning on “fixing” the game. He was setting the outcome in Pontius Pilates’ favor. He did so by hitting Judas with a Satan ball in John 13:27 with Satan entering into him. Then Pontus Pilate won the game, or so it seemed. Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was mocked, crucified and buried. On the third day he ascended leading the “press” straight to Pontius Pilate’s actions.

John 13:21 reminded me of a fixed game because Jesus chose who was injured with Satan and who would betray him. Pontus Pilate was like a desperate manager or coach needing a win. Also, Judas was a vital part of the “Team” and was injured so he could no longer play.

Lord, help us to stay true to your ways.

Prayer concern: Those who have strayed from the Lord.

Hayden Yost
MHY (Mid High Youth)
Walking in God’s Promise of Love

Jesus said: “If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them.” (v. 17)

As Thursday of Holy Week arrives, God’s promises become stark and clear. The first day of The Great Three Days we name Maundy Thursday for the new commandment God gives us to love one another just as God in Christ loves us. In the Gospel of John we see and feel Jesus’ great love for his disciples – his friends- as he takes the place once again of a servant washing their feet. With the detailed description of the act of foot washing (vv. 3-5), Jesus sets a clear and stark example (v15) for us to follow: A life of service in response to God’s great love. Jesus shows his love through a humble act of service and calls us to do the same. This is life-giving! Jesus tells us that we will know God’s blessing when we respond to God’s promise of love with a life of service to the neighbor. When we open ourselves up to others in humble service, we experience deeply God’s presence and know God’s blessings together. Worship on Maundy Thursday offers a time each year to experience and practice humility in the vulnerable act of foot washing. Tonight we are invited to embody Jesus’ call to wash and be washed. To share and know God’s love. To show and receive God’s blessing. Come and worship tonight and walk together in God’s promises.

Almighty God, as we journey into the passion of Christ in these great three days, transform us by your love to know your blessing and turn in service and love to show your blessing to our neighbor. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who long to know God’s love.

Pastor Adam Berndt
Honest words. Raw, pleading cry of lament. The Psalmist puts voice to what we have all felt if not cried ourselves at one point or another when we are honest. Is it comforting to know Jesus cried these very same words (Matt 27:46)? Does it give us permission somehow to open up the gates, to let down the walls and cry out to God in the midst of our pain, suffering, hurt? What do we do with our brokenness if we have no way to express it? The center of The Three Days, Good Friday, invites us to pause in our journey - even if but only for a minute – at the foot of the cross. Here we stop. Here we are still for a moment. Here our cries join those of Jesus: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Here as we empty our brokenness onto the cross, we are filled with God’s promise of hope. The cross of Christ contains the hope of the broken world to which Jesus died to heal all pain, suffering, and hurt. We know that death is not the end because the cross was not the end of the story, but the point on which the story turns. The cross is the hope for the promise of life beyond death. The cross is the hope for the healing once and for all for all people. The cross is the hope for the peace the universe longs for. The cross is the place that allows us to be still and to honestly cry out. As we pause together in worship tonight, we cry out from and for a place of brokenness, and in the stillness we discover our cry is not one of resignation and defeat. Our cry tonight is a cry of hope and anticipation for the grace and love of God. The promise of God’s hope found powerfully this night in the cross of Christ.

Holy God, we give you thanks for you are big enough to take our most fierce and honest cries. In the midst of our brokenness, fill us will your promised hope. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who feel hopeless.

Pastor Adam Berndt
On the Journey Again

Therefore we have been baptized into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (v. 4)

As night falls on the last of the Great Three Days, we know the dawn is near and with it the light of a new day. This new day is different as it carries with it the new light of the risen Christ in our midst. After the stillness of Good Friday, we prepare to journey on together in faith for the light and life of the world. We prepare now to step out from the season of Lent, from the week most holy, and from these great three days to live in the newness of life. How has this experience with God this year changed you? What things might you see or do differently now after journeying so close to God’s promises? Joined to Christ in the waters of our baptism, what does it mean to consider yourself dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus? This is the night. We gather in worship near dawn to welcome the new light of the resurrection, to share stories of the Christian faith, to remember and give thanks for the gift of baptism and the promise of new life in Christ. Come and journey again (or for the first time!) through the Vigil of Easter as we proclaim God’s promise of new life.

God of life, fill us with wonder and sustain us for the journey with your forgiveness, love, and life. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those baptized this night.

Pastor Adam Berndt
Encountering the Risen Jesus

Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you looking for?…” (v. 15)

The gospel writer John uses 18 present tense verbs to tell the story of Jesus rising from the dead in these verses . . . that’s one for every verse! Thus, if we were reading this story in its original Greek language, it wouldn’t read as it does in our English translation “Early on the first day of the week while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed . . .,” rather, it reads “. . . Mary Magdalene comes to the tomb and sees that the stone . . .” As the story continues, rather than “saw,” “said,” and “announced” it is sees, says, and announces! I believe John tells the story in this way to create a sense of urgency and immediacy as well as to draw us in to the story. Just as those followers of Jesus encounter the risen Jesus that day, John wants to make sure you and I continue to encounter our risen Lord each time we hear the story. That is, indeed the good news of Easter—we do, indeed, continue to encounter our risen and present Lord in countless ways on our journeys of faith. We encounter our risen Lord not only as we read these stories of the risen Jesus, but our risen Lord continues to disrupt our lives and world by tenaciously showing up all over the place. In prayer, Christian community, acts of service, the joy of giving, worship, reading the Bible, and in so many other ways the risen Jesus just keeps showing up! As we conclude this shared Lenten journey of Walking in God’s Promises, may we together continue to walk in these promises, as well as walk in the gift of resurrection life, each and every day! Where will the risen Jesus show up, present tense, in your life today?

Risen Lord, immediately and urgently show up in our lives and in our world! Help us to see your risen presence in our life today and in the life of others. Amen

Prayer concern: For whatever resurrection each of us needs in our lives this day.

Pastor Matt Powell
For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.

Ephesians 2:10
Ash Wednesday, February 14
   Elementary School Chapel – 2:30 p.m.
   Full Worship – 6:30 p.m.

Sundays, February 18-March 18
   8:30 and 10:45 a.m.

Mid Week Lent Worship
   Wednesdays, February 21-March 21 – 6:30 p.m.

Palm Sunday, March 25
   8:30 and 10:45 a.m.

Maundy Thursday, March 29
   Table Fellowship with Communion – 12:00 p.m.
   Worship – 6:30 p.m.

Good Friday, March 30
   Worship – 6:30 p.m.

Sunrise Easter Vigil, April 1
   6:30 a.m.

Easter Day, April 1
   Worship – 9:00 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.
   Egg Hunt – 10:15 a.m.