



LENTEN DEVOTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND RENEWAL

Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and Schools
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Lent 2020

BE TRANSFORMED BY JESUS

*[B]e transformed by the renewing of your minds,
so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good
and acceptable and perfect. Romans 12:2*

Transformation is an expected part of the faith journey. To know God is to be transformed into seeing others and the world as God sees. To confess faith in Jesus is to allow your life to be formed by the Holy Spirit in ways that you could not accomplish on your own. To be transformed is to change and to change is to be vulnerable. Welcome to Lent! This season of the church year is often experienced as a time of vulnerability. During Lent, we are invited to go deeper into our own need for God; our own need for change; our own need to be transformed by Jesus.

The pages that follow are devotions written by members of Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and Schools. Be invited to join your prayer and reflection this season of Lent with your fellow sojourner walking in the way of Jesus. We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another (Rom 12:5). Thank you for sharing with each other, being vulnerable with one another, and inviting us all to be transformed by Jesus.

Peace,
R. Adam Berndt, Pastor

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is good to have these 47 days (Forty days plus the seven Sundays) to focus on God's transforming work in us and in our world. We can get busy with life and forget about taking time to read and hear God's words. This Lenten Devotional Booklet gives us an opportunity to do that. It also gives us a chance to hear from our friends at Cross of Hope Church and Schools.

We want to thank all who volunteered to write a devotion or two. A special thank you to "first time" writers. Letting God work in and through you is a blessing.

Besides the devotion writers, we want to thank Nancy Morrison for all her time in putting the booklet together. You are a gift to us and to Cross of Hope.

We pray this Lenten Season will be a time when all can

BE TRANSFORMED BY JESUS.

Diane Pressel
Cheri Sorensen

Giving to the Needy

But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your father who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (v. 3-4)

Though we aren't as sharp as we used to be, we try to live responsibly. We recycle, we try to be generous, and we save for goals instead of buying on credit. Each payday we put cash into four envelopes: "Gifts", "Vacation", "Household Needs" and "Here We Go Round the Mulberry Bush" (money to have fun with). We keep these envelopes in a plastic coffee container. About a month ago, I came home from having a payday and went to put our usual amounts in the envelopes.

"It's gone!"

"What's gone?"

"Our coffee can."

"No! It can't be!"

"Let's look more. Maybe it's behind something on the shelf. No, it's gone. What could have happened?"

"Oh! Could you have . . . could it be possible that . . . you recycled it?" I must have. How could I have been so dumb? All that money, saved for so long!

Then we had a thought that surely was from God that transformed our thinking. The can was not sent to the landfill, but to the recycling center where a worker that God had in mind found it. This thought immediately changed our frustration to joy!

Maybe our giving should be just that removed from any hope of others thanking us. Not only did our left hand not know what our right hand was doing; our right hand did not know either!

Dear God, thank you for transforming our minds to be able to discern your presence in our lives.

Prayer concern: That we are ever-mindful that all our provisions, blessings, and choices belong to God.

Charlie Anderson

Humble Yourself

When God saw what (the Ninevites) did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them; and he did not do it. (v. 10)

The thing that stood out to me about this story was that Jonah was impudent enough, after hearing exactly from God what he was supposed to do, to deliberately do just the opposite. He got up and went in the reverse direction to get away from God.

It was Jonah's attitude that I didn't like. I judged him . . . thinking to myself, "What a fool! Who would react like that? Who does he think he is anyway?" Then I stopped short and thought again, "Wow, that's exactly what I've done frequently in my own life." And I'll bet you have too.

Have you ever thought about the choices you've made? Think about the times you've been quite certain about the results if you follow through with what you're pretty sure God intends you to do. You see, Jonah hated the Ninevites, and he knew there was a decent possibility that if he did what God wanted him to do, there was a better than even chance they'd actually listen to him. And the last thing he wanted was for his enemies to change their ways and turn to God's plan.

What Jonah needed to do, what you and I need to do, is to humble ourselves and surrender our wrongheadedness to God. It's a daily task that might even grow a little easier the more we do it. Begin doing it today. Don't do what Jonah did. Learn from his arrogance and obstinacy. It will probably be good for you and others as well.

**True humility is not thinking less of yourself;
it is thinking of yourself less. – C. S. Lewis**

Prayer concern: God's love for all people.

Philip Wangberg

Prayers Unceasing

. . . Without ceasing, I remember you always in my prayers. (v. 9b)

Prayer . . . regular, daily prayer, is important. St. Paul knew how important prayer is in our Christian lives. That's why, in his letter to Rome, he mentioned right up front, in the introduction, that he was praying for them continually.

Prayer connects us to our Lord Jesus Christ, but it's much more than that. It connects us to one another, too. I can remember once when I was going through a difficult period, it was of immense comfort to me to know that friends and family who love me told me that they were praying for me. Even in tough times, or maybe especially in tough times, their intercessions demonstrated their love and their bond, both to me and to our Risen Savior.

When we confront dear ones with seemingly unsolvable problems, we feel their pain and we tend to feel powerless to be of any constructive help. But we can do something constructive and helpful . . . we can pray for them unceasingly, and we can communicate our love by telling them that they are in our prayers. Paul, who practiced the endless power of prayer, is our example. A strong prayer life truly helps us to be transformed by Jesus.

**Lord, you taught me to pray, and you gave me powerful examples,
like Paul, to follow. Help me to be ever mindful of the
needs of others, and to lift them up in prayer.**

Prayer concern: Those who need our love and our prayers.

Duane Meneely

Ease for a Burdened Soul

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. (v. 10, NRSV)

When I read Psalm 51, I imagine the anguish David must have been going through. His remorseful words tell us the weight of his sin was excruciating. He describes his bones being crushed and longs for a return to joy. David valued his relationship with God so much it devastated him to know that he let God down. I believe we have all been there as well when we give in to temptation. In these instances, all we want to do is crawl back to God and tell him we are sorry. David begs God to cleanse him of this iniquity. When we are dirty, we just want to be clean again.

We can take solace in the fact God loves a repentant person. David, often called a man after God's own heart, knew he needed not only restoration but also complete transformation. He asks God to cleanse him with hyssop so that he will be whiter than snow. David not only wants to be transformed himself, but he wants to be used as God's instrument in the transformation of others. He writes, "I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn back to you."

Fortunately, for the times we blow it, God created a perfect remedy for us in the transformative cleansing blood Jesus shed on the cross. While our intention is to live a sinless life, the shortcomings of our humanity sometimes gets in the way. It's in those moments, when we can look up and confess to our Father, and don't even need a Middle Eastern plant. We know that God will immediately forgive us without the need for any further action on our part. We just have to take and receive this forgiveness, thus easing our burden.

**Lord, we thank you for Christ's sacrifice on the cross,
which brings much needed cleansing and transforms us
into people striving to live worthy lives.**

Prayer concern: Those living with the burden of guilt.

Tempted by the Devil

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." (vs. 4)

A verse I can totally, well mostly, relate to. I have been fasting now for forty days and we do live in a desert! Main difference is I fast just 12 hours a day and I don't wake up starving as Jesus must have. I also relate to the temptation of turning stones to bread, however, I am much better at turning bread to stones, not on purpose, mind you.

"Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted" (Hebrews 2:18).

That pretty much says it all. Jesus' mission on this earth was and is to save us from the many temptations that would lead us away from goodness and His light. There never comes a point in our lives when Satan decides tempting us is futile, as he did with Jesus. We need to be vigilant in recognizing God's will for us and listen for the right voice to follow!

Understanding the word of God will help us stay on His path just as Jesus' understanding of the things of God trumped Satan's misuse of scripture. By having an eternal perspective, He could not be tempted.

Our loving Father, give us the faith and understanding to know your voice and to listen when you answer our prayers. Help us to discern temptations and avoid the wrong paths. Amen

Prayer concern: Those who struggle with temptation and aren't sure they hear Jesus.

Karen Schwartz

Into the wilderness...

"But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness..." (v. 4)

Every morning at Cross of Hope Elementary School we begin our day in chapel and each week this year we've been learning about a different journey story found in the Bible. It's probably not too surprising that this particular journey of Elijah fleeing a death threat from Queen Jezebel did not make our list of journeys!

In this passage we read that the prophet Elijah, upon hearing news of this threat, was afraid and fled for his life with a trusty servant in tow. The two escaped and reached the town of Beersheba, in Judah, a relatively safe territory and out of reach from Jezebel. But this passage tells us that from here Elijah continued on by himself and "went a day's journey into the wilderness..." While there he begged God to take his life, exclaiming, "I am no better than my ancestors." But, God did not listen to his plea. Instead God twice sent an angel to provide him with food, water and encouragement. With this sustenance Elijah continued on his journey for 40 days and 40 nights until he reached Horeb, the mount of God.

Now, there is another story in the Bible that also mentions a wilderness journey of 40 days and 40 nights and we did learn about this one in chapel! This is the story of Jesus being tempted in the wilderness after his baptism by his cousin, John the Baptist. As I reflected on both journey stories I found it interesting to note that while Elijah fled into the wilderness to escape a death threat, Jesus was "led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil." (Matthew 4:1) The juxtaposition is so striking! Elijah was strengthened by the sustenance he received and Jesus, strength embodied, was able to resist the temptations and "...the devil left him, and angels came and attended to him." Both men, wilderness wanderers, were comforted and strengthened by God's angels.

Gracious God, please help redirect us on our faith journey when we wander off and lose sight of you.

Prayer concern: That we would reach out and provide comfort to those who are wandering in fear.

Debra Alba

Perfection

Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in time of need. (v. 16)

“Therefore” in verse 16 refers to verse 15, which describes a “perfect” high priest, one who has experienced life just like us. And in 15:8-9 Jesus is described as having been made perfect (by learning obedience through what he suffered).

So much of our culture demands perfection from us: in our jobs, school, in politics, sports and entertainment there is an ideal held up for us to try to become. And it’s never possible for us to live up to those expectations. The only way I’ve been able to maintain any sanity has been to “re-define” perfection. In Matthew 5 Jesus commands us to be perfect, so it must be possible. And there’s a note in my Bible pointing to that verse defining perfection as “having attained the end or purpose.”

Therefore we achieve perfection when we fulfill the purpose God has given us, not the earthly ideals others try to press on us. Jesus was made perfect (a process, not an event) because he became like us, broken and weak. And through that humanity he fulfilled God’s purpose for him: giving mercy, grace, and help in time of need (v. 16) and being the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (5:9).

Our purpose may be feeding the homeless, or organizing a fundraiser, or making a quilt, or it may be silently setting an example for someone who needs to see God in their world . . . Whatever it is, we can be perfect if we seek out God’s will and then just do it, with the help of our great high priest.

Gracious Lord, thank you for proving that perfection is possible. Thank you for being one of us, and for being there for us whenever and wherever we need it. We love you and want to make you smile. Please help us to see your will and do it. Amen.

Kevin Perkins

Obedience

“Prepare two stone tablets.”(v. 1)

God your 10 commandments

A beautiful road map

For My life

Oh how to function

Along Life’s junction

BELIEVING

RECEIVING

ACTIVATING

GENERATING

A blueprint of rules

Solid and cool

Wrapped in God’s LOVE

Blessed by God above

“Trust and obey for there’s no other way”

Prayer concern: Help me obey your rules

Wendy Harrison

Change in Plans

***For the Lord will comfort Zion; he will comfort all her waste places,
and will make her wilderness like Eden . . (v. 3a)***

As a child, one of my favorite dolls was Thumbelina. She was so realistic! Later on Chatty Cathy and Barbie became favorites. In the backyard of our Albuquerque home, there was a playhouse with a little kitchen unit where I would pretend to be a homemaker. Sometimes the playhouse would become a schoolroom, where I would be the teacher. Maybe that's what I would become one day, I thought; but of course I'd become a mother. That's what all girls eventually become.

As I grew up I realized that motherhood was not something I wanted right away. So when I became unexpectedly pregnant in my early twenties, I was more stressed than happy at the time. However, the stressful feelings subsided as I began adjusting to the fact that my husband and I would become parents, just sooner than expected. We became excited as we contemplated names. But several weeks into the pregnancy I miscarried. We were devastated. Within the next several years I became pregnant twice, even seeing a fertility specialist at one point, but I miscarried both times. Later two attempts at adoption fell through. Apparently, God had other plans for us.

Author Joseph Campbell once said, "We must let go of the life we have planned, so as to accept the one that is waiting for us." Now many years into my career as a counselor, I know that God made me a different kind of mother. And He made my husband, Dave, a different kind of father; a fun and generous uncle, who also became a hot-air balloon pilot several years ago, bringing joy to many, kids and adults alike. (Just ask Pastor Adam!)

Transforming Father, please help us accept Your purpose in our lives.

Prayer concern: For those struggling with altered life plans.

Kathy Albin

God's Way

For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law. (v. 28)

It is hard to choose one or two verses in a passage such as this! It all goes together! It is one of the passages that brought Luther to his understanding of God's putting us right with Him, rather than our having to be perfect or doing enough good works to be right with God. I love the way *The Message* puts this verse: "God does not respond to what we do; we respond to what God does. We've finally figured it out. Our lives get in step with God and all others by letting him set the pace, not by proudly or anxiously trying to run the parade."

Having been a marching band member for most of my school life, this made me giggle. I can't imagine what it would have looked like if there was no drum major to keep us going the right direction in parades – everyone going in a different direction. Our lives need to be right with God by His doing – His Son, Jesus Christ, taking on our sins and dying for us. Faith in Jesus' work for us, as opposed to our work to do God's will, is a hard concept for us, especially in our society, where we learn to work to get ahead. Our works are indeed important, but not to earn God's favor, but to show our thankfulness to Him. Verse 31 (*The Message*) puts it in perspective. "But by shifting our focus from what we do to what God does, don't we cancel out all our careful keeping of the rules and ways God commanded? Not at all. What happens, in fact, is that by putting that entire way of life in its proper place, we confirm it."

Blessings as you switch from deeds to earn God's favor to deeds to thank Him!

**Thank you Lord for putting me right with you.
Help me show You my thankfulness. Amen**

Prayer concern: Those who have difficulty trusting Jesus for salvation.

Janet Wormwood

Security

My help comes from the Lord. (v. 2a)

Daily I rise
My Lord to meet
My Lord to greet

TRANSFORMATION

RESTORATION

AFFIRMATION

God and I
Walk this land
Hand in Hand

A sweet treat
That can't be beat
An awesome feat

Lord you're my rock

Prayer concern: Keep your focus on God.

Wendy Harrison

Reborn to Love

***Do not be astonished that I said to you, you must
be born from above. (v. 7)***

Born from above? What the man didn't understand was that Jesus came to bring new life that required a rebirth. This begins for us with baptism. As the water flows and the sign of the cross is made, we are declared dead to the old way of selfishness and reborn to love. Some of us were old enough to remember. I can still see the light from the stained glass windows, the splash of water, and the old font of porcelain and carved wood. I remember the smell of the candle being lit to mark the occasion. I recall the pastor's alb and colorful stole. However, the one sensation that always stood out was what I felt. At six years of age I didn't fully understand, but when the pastor made the sign of the cross on my forehead I just knew then that God loved me. I felt a flood of warmth. It was a sensation that spoke to my heart and left no doubt. It was so simple – God loved me! Whether you remember that day or not the reality is that you were raised with Christ in baptism and given a new birth. How often we have made things so complicated, letting worry, fear and guilt confuse the simplicity of God's love. He already knows all about our broken parts and in His knowing He does not condemn us. (3:17) He is continuously loving us. "Do not be afraid, let not your heart be troubled." (14:24) Allow God's love to wash over you. It is that simple. God loves you!

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

Prayer concern: That we let God love us and in return share that love with others.

Chris Morgan

Grace in a Snake

So Moses made a serpent of bronze, and put it upon a pole; and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live. (v. 9)

“We don’t like this food – nothing but bird meat and bamana bread!” (My interpretation.) The Israelites were complaining because they were tired of the same old food and little water. There was no end in sight for their wanderings, and they were frustrated with God and Moses for taking them away from the good food in Egypt. How quickly they forgot the imprisonment of slavery and oppression of the Egyptians. God dealt with the grumbling by sending poisonous snakes to bite them, and many died. Icky, slithering, poisonous, biting snakes! This makes my skin crawl because I hate snakes. But this did get attention and apologies, and the Israelites asked Moses to pray to God for them to have relief.

God forgave this grumbling people, and he gave them grace – through another snake! – to save those who looked upon the bronze snake Moses erected in the desert.

I believe we are very much like the Israelites when we complain about not having what we want, when we want it. “I don’t like this food! There’s nothing to eat in this fridge. The neighbors have a new car and I want one.” Sound familiar? We tend to forget the blessings God gives us each day – His grace by sending Jesus to die for us, the Holy Spirit to guide and lead us, house, clothing, food, family, friends, church family. Even when we forget our blessings and grumble, we have grace through Jesus – when we look upon His suffering and death for us. I’m thankful we look to Jesus and not a snake!

Thank you for Jesus! Forgive my grumbings and lack of thankfulness for all You provide. In Jesus’ name. Amen

Prayer concern: Those who choose not to turn to Jesus for forgiveness and life.

Janet Wormwood

Faith in Christ = Righteousness

It was not through the Law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. (v. 13, NIV)

In this passage there was discussion that Abraham's faith had come before he was circumcised, which was a big deal in their day because of Jewish law. However, in v.11 Abraham "received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised."

I love how the book of Romans explains scripture using fine early scriptures (in this case PS 32:1 and 2 NIV) that reflect the very learning process Luther used in the Small Catechism. "What Does This Mean?" This statement does help with the heart altering head knowledge on gains when discussing RIGHTEOUSNESS among classmates both "back then" for me and also these days in the Faith Formation Sunday School classes led by Patty Westerfield and Pastor Adam. The whole re-reading and discussion therein reminds me of the sealing of my faith when I was young in Saturday morning confirmation classes at Redeemer Lutheran Church in Fremont, MI.

That learning process nailed my belief in Jesus as my Lord and Savior. So many things clicked for me about serving others out of gratitude for what Jesus did for us all. He Lived and Died and Arose from the dead to atone us all from our sins! I discovered that all that I am and have is from the Lord. Serving HIM is thankfulness in action. It is not earning me a place in Heaven.

I've learned since my young faith awakened that praying includes waiting for God's answer and knowing that His answer will come. The Lord is with me always, even in the waiting.

**Lord, help me share the Gift of Grace in my every moment
of the life that you have given me.**

Prayer concern: Those who are uncertain of God's Presence each moment.

A New Beginning

***And I will give you a new heart with new and right desires
and I will put a new spirit in you. (v. 26)***

What is the purpose of our lives? What is God teaching us in the Bible and through the life and teachings of Jesus? How can we make a difference, a difference that matters in the world, in our country, in our work place and in our families?

Henri Nouwen says, "The whole message of the Gospel is this: Become like Jesus." Deep in my heart I feel this is the truth I've been searching for—do you feel it too? But how do we make this a reality in our lives?

Ezekiel points us to God. First and foremost, we start with Him and the gifts He offers us. A new heart and a new spirit. In accepting these gifts, we are given a new beginning and find ourselves on a path to 'Become like Jesus.'

It all begins with prayer, and inviting God into this present moment of our life. Thanking Him for this new heart that wants to please Him, love Him and bring honor to Him. And how do we do this? By becoming like Jesus. With God's love and help, we start by living out of love. The love Jesus had. A love that puts others first, listens with compassion, and forgives the wrongs done to us.

It's a love that recognizes in order to bring God's love to others we must live moment by moment recognizing God's presence is with us, just as it was with Jesus, each day of his life. When we do this, we will find we have been given a new heart beating inside which is longing to reach out to heal just one of the hurts in front of us. That's all really, just one. And as we proceed, step by step, our life will begin to grow and then overflow with a spirit of love and thanksgiving for this life we have been given, and the opportunity to love and care for others.

That's the simple path to 'Becoming like Jesus.' And it's one that God promises to be with us, right now, and in this present moment. Isn't it time, to begin now to transform our lives into what they were truly meant to be?

Dear Lord, thank you for showing me that all I have to do is to turn to you now, and you will transform my life into what it was meant to be, a life like the one Jesus lived. I love you Lord. Amen

Prayer Concern: For each one of us, to experience God's transforming love in our lives.

Patty Westerfield

You Whiner!!

“...Who are we in all this? You haven’t been complaining to us—you have been complaining to God” (v. 8, The Message)

I don’t know about you, but I complain occasionally. OK, well maybe more than occasionally. I complain when the sun isn’t shining, or if my schedule gets messed up, or if my husband leaves a mess in the kitchen. Maybe I want it to be summer when its winter, or winter when its summer. Or if someone else is complaining, why I’ll just join right in. It seems like it’s human nature.

Well today’s scripture is about the Israelites complaining in the desert. When I read it, I identified with them. There they were in the desert, having left a place where their needs were being met. They may have been slaves but they were comfortable with their condition. Or perhaps their memory of their condition was what made them comfortable.

What a reminder, today’s passage is. When I complain, the bottom line is I’m complaining to God. It’s a hard reminder. I know personally, how I try to avoid people in my life who constantly complain. They get on my nerves. Does God feel that way, ever? Do I get on his nerves when I complain or ask for things to be different, instead of thanking him for all the blessings in my life?

My prayer after reading this passage is that God will be gracious with me and my state of being and grant me contentment and peace, knowing He’s got this under control. There’s a reason for the situation I’m in, or the weather conditions, or whatever else it is I like to moan about.

Those of you that know me well, know I have a prayer canister on a necklace I wear daily. It has my favorite Bible verse. “Be still and know that I AM God” Ps 46:10. God’s got this! Thanks be to God! Stop whining!

Lord, thank you for being patient with my grumbling, whining, and complaining. Help me to experience Your presence every day in Your glorious creation, in those around us, and in all You have done for us. Amen

Prayer concern: For all of us to look for the blessings in our lives.

Nancy Lacher

Christ is our Peace

***It was also Christ's purpose to end the hatred
between the two groups. (v. 14)***

I read these verses in numerous translations and kept coming back to the same theme. That theme was Christ tearing down the walls that we build and trying to end the hatred between groups.

A few years ago I saw the award winning film, *The Help*, with my teenage granddaughters. This movie deals with racism and racial inequality in the 1930's and 40's. My granddaughters couldn't believe that we had really treated people like that because of the color of their skin. Sadly, I can remember examples of that in my childhood. Visiting some of the southern states of the U.S. with grandparents, I can still see the signs over the segregated restrooms stating "Whites Only". Racial equality is just one example of the walls men build that can separate us into groups hating one another.

Look around you and you will see this sort of division everywhere. It's not just the color of your skin. Maybe it's where you worship, or who you marry, your gender or even where you live. Maybe it's time we remember Christ made the supreme sacrifice for us so we could live in peace as one. Let's start tearing down those walls and live as Christ would want us to.

Lord, help us to see that we are all the same in God's eyes.

Prayer concern: Those who fight to tear down the walls that separate us.

Diane Carrico

Joyful Worship and Obedience or...

Oh come let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. (v. 1, NRSV)

I chose Psalm 95 for my devotional because I love music and I consider music to be praise and worship to the Lord. But this turned out to be very difficult for me as I studied further. The first part of the Psalm invites us into praise and worship of God. We are to be joyful with noise and songs to Him. This invitation sounds so welcoming and appealing! After all His hands have created all things high, low, far and wide on this earth. But are our hearts aligned with God within our praise, our joyful noise, or are we just creating a noisy sounding gong?

In the second part of the Psalm God speaks directly to us! He asks that we not harden our hearts, do not let them go astray. He warns us not to test Him and then becomes angry and says those who do not regard his ways will not enter His rest!

What an ultimatum! Harden your heart against the Lord and Perish! So the lesson for me in this wonderful Psalm is that no matter your form of worship, your heart should be aligned with God in that worship. Is your worship about you, attention for you or perhaps a worldly thing, maybe say a golden calf? That isn't worship and according to God, it's very dangerous.

Lord, prevent us from going astray and remind us always to let the music and dancing transform our hearts and turn them only toward You.

Prayer concern: For those who can't hear or see You in the music.

Linda O'Neal

Who Can Be Transformed?

The Samaritan woman, taken aback, asked, “How come you, a Jew, asked me, a Samaritan woman, for a drink? (v. 7)

The story of the woman at the well is one we are probably all familiar with, but I think it is particularly interesting if we look at it in relation to our theme this year, “Be Transformed by Jesus.” Who can be transformed?

Jesus chose to speak to this woman. That in itself may seem unusual. At the time Jesus lived, women were not important in society – they were mainly ignored. But Jesus frequently talked to women. I guess they could be transformed.

In addition to this, she was a Samaritan - an outsider. Jews despised and looked down on Samaritans. So outsiders could be transformed as well.

We also see that she was a sinner – several husbands and a “live-in boyfriend.” So can sinners be transformed? Obviously!

So if we look at this passage, we can ask, “Who can be transformed?” The answer is simple – all of us! Everyone! Jesus includes us all in His saving grace.

**Help us to realize we shouldn’t discriminate.
All are worthy of the grace of God.**

Prayer concern: Those who feel they are unworthy of transformation.

Diane Pressel

Generosity Embodied

She said, "I will draw for your camels also, until they have finished drinking." (v. 19)

Imagine the moments of risk and vulnerability we hear throughout this story from the beginning of the story of Isaac and Rebekah. First, Abraham, old and now a widower, is trying to fulfill promises both to his child and God by finding Isaac a wife from his own people. Secondly, the unnamed servant is entrusted with this crucial task to journey afar and find the right spouse for the family he serves. Lastly, Rebekah is living her ordinary life, doing her usual work to gather water for her family as many women still do today, when suddenly a stranger appears with a need.

And in the midst this is a divine thread of promise running throughout, whispering that something remarkable is about to happen. There are no angelic visitors as Abraham and Sarah had when they learned they were going to become parents despite their advanced age. There is no word from God to build an ark to escape the flood as Noah and his family encountered. There are no dreams like Joseph will experience while in Egypt, telling him to store grain for the coming lean years that will save his family. All this story tells us are the hopes and dreams of faithful people, trying to follow God who has been faithful to them.

Rebekah shows the servant that she is the right choice for Isaac by a simple act of generosity: in a desert climate, she not only shared her water with him, but she was also willing to share with his camels too. By her embodiment of God's generous abundance, Rebekah did the will of God and offered with open hands what she had to share. We can look to her example and be transformed by God to share all that we have with strangers and neighbors alike without question, without hesitation, and without qualifications. There is enough for all at God's table.

**Giver of life, help me to live this day with generosity
to share your abundance.**

Prayer concern: The working poor and all who do not have enough water, food, shelter, or employment.

Let's Not Forget

Remember our history, friends, and be warned. All our ancestors were led by the providential Cloud and taken miraculously through the Sea. (v. 1, Message)

When I attended Sunday school as a child I remember having to read scriptures from the Old Testament. I could not understand why we had to read about the land of the Hittites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Then there were individuals, Amminadab, the father of Nahshon, Jehoshaphat, the father of Joram, Jehoiachin, the father of Shealtiel, the father of Zerubbabel, to name a few examples. I am certain my class laughed as we struggled to read the names and questioned their relevance to our lives. This scripture of First Corinthians helps to explain the significance of studying the past. Paul implores the church in Corinth and us to remember that our forefathers ate of the same spiritual bread and drank the same spiritual wine as us. The lessons of our forefathers are powerful stories of faith not to be forgotten.

My grandfather told me about his father, my great grandfather, who was an "undertaker" in Western North Carolina. According to my grandfather, the burial business in the early 1900's was very busy because of the deadly flu epidemic that had afflicted so many in the United States. Wealthy families were able to purchase expensive coffins for their departed loved ones. It was from profits made on those coffins that allowed my great grandfather to provide services to those who could not afford to bury their spouses, their infant children, and other family members. My great grandfather felt it was his duty to provide low cost or free services to the poor. I am grateful for this history as my great grandfather ate of the same spiritual bread and drank the same spiritual wine as has been given to us.

Lord, thank you for the history that provides examples of what Your Son would have us do.

Prayer concern: That we remember the faith of our forefathers

Who Needs Jesus?

Who needs a doctor, the healthy or the sick? (v. 12, Message)

This is one of my favorite verses. It so defines Christ's mission to us. His mission is not just to strengthen believers, but to reach the unchurched. He wants to reach out to all of us.

As a church, we do much to help others. We help with Family Promise and other programs. This is all wonderful, but we need to do more. We need to invite and encourage the unchurched to join us. We need to invite people to worship. We need to have a strong outreach. Who needs Jesus? Everyone!

Dear Lord, please help those who need Jesus but don't realize it.

Prayer concern: Those involved in outreach.

Diane Pressel

I Did It My Way

Why, then, did you not obey the voice of the Lord? (v. 19)

Once God delivered the Israelites to the Promised Land, they began to clamor for an earthly king. God reluctantly relented. God chose Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. He was handsome and “stood head and shoulders above the rest.” Samuel anointed Saul and was appointed to be his mentor. God blessed Saul with a new heart. Saul set out to be a good king, obedient to God. Under God’s protection, Saul was triumphant on many battlefields. Along the way, Saul began to amend God’s commands and work things to his own advantage. When he got caught, he blamed others. Samuel repeatedly brought Saul to task for these weaknesses. Finally, God rejected Saul. His 20-plus reign came to a sorry end.

American pop culture anointed a king in the 1950’s. Blessed with a fantastic voice and good looks, Elvis Presley was a sensation, performing blues, rock and more for over 20 years. Given his epic career, it is interesting that Elvis won just 3 Grammys: two versions of “How Great Thou Art” and “You Touched Me”, both Gospel songs. Friends remember Elvis’ tender heart and his fervent search for spiritual truth. Elvis acknowledged his struggle to know God amid fame and temptations. In the early ‘70’s, I saw Elvis perform at Albuquerque’s Tingley Coliseum. By then he’d gained weight and looked haggard. But when Elvis took the stage, he gave the music and his fans his all for 2 hours. I recall thinking, “Now I know what ‘charisma’ is!” Over the next few years, Elvis’ self-destructive tendencies took a toll. The King of Rock and Roll was dead at 42.

Lord, forgive me when pride and desires lead me away from your will.

Prayer concern: God transform our hearts through Your grace.

Glenna Meneely

Lord I Want To Be Just Like You

Follow God's example in everything you do just as a much loved child imitates his father. (v. 1, The Living Bible)

A number of years ago we organized an all male choir to sing at church on Father's Day. The song they sang was "I Want To Be Just Like You" by Phillips, Craig and Dean. I thought of the lyrics to this song as I read this verse in Ephesians. It tells the story of a father who is asking God "Lord, I want to be just like You 'cause he wants to be just like me."

The father goes on to tell of the trials of daily life, including mistakes he makes that can get in the way of being a Godly example to his child, but he continues to ask God to help him be a holy example for his child's "innocent eyes to see."

We live in a tough, secular world that can overtake us at times, especially when we are trying very hard to be the best Christians we can be. There are people in leadership positions that do not conduct themselves in Christlike ways, there are bullies, there are negative messages on social media, television and the internet. How can we stay positive on our journey of faith?

I find that constant reminders of my faith are imperative to me. Going to church services, Bible studies, fellowship with brothers and sisters in Christ, reading Christian novels, and listening to "Positive, Encouraging" KLOVE radio. I think they play the songs with the lyrics I need to hear!

We have to live in this broken world, but do not have to succumb to the nastiness that the next few verses in Ephesians warn us about. Keep your heart "...full of light from the Lord and your behavior should show it! Because of this light within you, you should do only what is good and right and true" (v. 8-9).

**Lord, help me to be a mother and grandmother
that our children can look up to.**

Prayer Concern: That all of our leaders will model God's love.

Healing

He restores my soul. He leads me in the right paths for his name's sake. (v. 3)

When first approached to write a devotion, I wasn't sure if I should commit as I have never done anything like this. However, as I stood at the column contemplating which Bible verse to use, Psalm 23 jumped out at me. (I utilize Psalm 23 as my nightly prayer.) I believe this was a God wink or a push by the Holy Spirit. I believe Psalm 23 is one of the most healing passages in the Bible. Healing is defined as: "To restore to health or soundness." Life is constantly throwing us curve balls. We all need rejuvenation, restoration and healing. Jesus is our Healer.

Two months before my mother passed away, we placed her in a nursing home. She was under Hospice care as she could no longer swallow correctly and was bedridden. Her roommate was another elderly woman who made sharing a room virtually impossible. She would not allow us to utilize the bathroom in the room, turned her TV up as loud as it would go when we visited, and switched the lights on and off as if to say "It's time to go." Eventually, we thought it best to request a move, however my mother emphatically said no. She told us she believed she had been placed in the room for a reason. The evening before my mother passed away, I found a wringing wet washcloth on the table beside her bed. When questioned, the nurse explained that her roommate had been sitting by her side all day, holding that washcloth to Mom's lips so she could have a little water.

Through my mom, her roommate had been transformed by Jesus and her heart healed.

**Gracious Father, thank you for the healing
and restoration you provide.**

Prayer concern: For those in need of healing physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Gaining Spiritual Sight

Jesus heard that they had driven him (the man who had been blind) out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. (v. 35-38)

As newlyweds, money was tight and learning how to live on a budget was a challenge. One month while I was balancing our checkbook, I just couldn't make the numbers work. We were \$200 short, which is what we needed to pay one of our utility bills. Not knowing what to do to come up with the extra money, I played, "God, we need \$200!"

Now I was taught to love God from a young age and as a teen I found my own way to Christ through baptism. I understood God to be the one to Whom I prayed and praised in song. Until, a few days later we got a check in the mail from our cell phone company – for a \$200 refund. We had overpaid our bill and the money was being returned! (Who overpays a cell phone bill?) We paid our bill and Jon and I learned that our God is a God of action.

Similar things have happened in our 20 years together, and each time I tell our story, I am forced to organize and analyze what Jesus has done in my life. As I organize and analyze, I have gained new insight, which then gets worked into my story in a new way. If you want to go deeper with your relationship to Christ, then tell your story, even if your story is far from over. With spiritual growth come a change in attitudes, a change in behaviors, and a change in the stories you tell. Your story is worth listening to. Your story is not complete and is always developing. God is drawing you ever closer to Him each time you tell it.

Lord, continue to reveal Yourself to me as I walk with You.

Prayer concern: That we may share our stories of our encounters with Christ with all we meet.

No Justice, No Peace

We all growl like bears; like doves we moan mournfully. We wait for justice, but there is none; for salvation but it is far from us. (v. 11)

Isaiah has always spoken to me with its friction between people longing for justice and their seeming unwillingness to do anything other than push it away. As a retired professor of US History, I spent a very long time studying how the quest for justice has never been smooth or easy. Justice for one group may actually result in injustice for another. But Isaiah reminds us over and over again the effort is worth it. God wants us to keep pushing and not just to growl or moan. God's justice demands we act in order to transform the world and ourselves.

I spent much of my career studying the rise of the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War. However, it was not the evil of the Klansmen that got my attention. It was the amazing courage of those who testified against them. Hundreds of freed people testified in public, naming those who had abused them. Just imagine the courage it took to speak truth to power, knowing it would cost them everything (sometimes including their lives). And just like those people moaning in Isaiah, justice seemed to move farther away at first. But after a while (unfortunately for too brief a moment), justice came in the form of new laws and new opportunities. It came at a horrible price, but it came. Their courage continues to inspire me as it also hopefully inspired a generation of students.

Isaiah tells us the Lord is displeased by the lack of justice, but he also promises there will come a time when it will come, sped up by the birth of a Savior. It is not for us to sit and growl or moan, but for us to act in order to continue the transformation that Jesus started two thousand years ago.

Lord, help us all be bringers of justice to your world

Prayer concern: Lift up all those beaten down by injustice.

Living a Life Worthy of the Lord

We have not stopped praying for you . . . so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way; bearing fruit in every good work. (v. 9-10)

What would you like people to say about you? That you're smart? That you're pretty or good looking? That you're important? Paul prays that God will fill us with the knowledge of his will. Why? So that we may "live a life worthy of the Lord." Can you imagine someone saying about you, "I know she lives a life worthy of the Lord!" Can you imagine anything greater that could ever be said about you?

What will our lives look like if we live in a manner "worthy of the Lord"? For starters, imagine Jesus watching us and saying things like these: "Look, there's a young boy being kind to an injured classmate. I would have done that myself!" "There's a business leader who just made a decision based on what is best for his employees. I like that!" "There's a woman who faces one crisis after another, but continues to trust in God with all her heart. That's worthy of me: I had to do that too!"

These words from Paul will help us understand how we can "be transformed by Jesus," if we are willing to live a life worthy of the Lord. So, first of all, do I want to live a life worthy of the Lord? Do you? Will the Lord see reflections of his life in the way we live?

Dear Lord, what a meaningful, gracious, loving life you lived! I too want to live my life as you lived yours. Father, today as I walk with you, help me to live a life worthy of you, pleasing you in every way and bearing fruit in every good work. Amen.

Prayer concern: As we aspire to live lives worthy of the Lord, that others will see and know we are Christians by our love.

Grace

“Sin is no longer your master, for you no longer live under the requirements of the law. Instead, you live under the freedom of God’s grace.” (v. 14, NLT)

Grace. God’s grace for us is never ending and will always be there no matter how many times we mess up or forget that it is there. He is there to love us and pick us back up when we fall down just like our parents do for us as children. He holds us tightly in his grace in order to transform and shape us into the people he had planned for us to be.

In the summer of 2018, I was given the opportunity to join the Rocky Mountain Youth Council. As a member of that council, I have been able to plan events about God’s transforming grace and for me the biggest take away from those meeting was that God's grace transforms us from our sins into new and abundant eternal life. He takes us from what we were before and makes us new. He loves us through our worst moments and turns us into the new transformer people he wants us to be. The people he calls to leave sin behind, and go forth into the world and do the baptism work that he wants us to do.

**Lord, thank you for your grace that you have given to us.
Please help us to remember your grace every day
and learn to embrace it. Amen**

Prayer concerns: People who do not know God’s Grace.

Adelle Adams

Finding God through Adversity

Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. (v. 1)

It happened to young Zeke. He was uprooted from his comfortable life, driven out of his home and all his reality, was exiled and deported, together with his relatives and all the people he knew. Why? He was not aware of wrong-doing. How could God allow this?

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel feels called by God to bring a message to his people. He describes it as a fully written scroll, naming the broken promises of his people as they hardened their hearts against God. Ezekiel is told to **eat** the scroll – to internalize the message – and he finds it as sweet as honey! He hears in it God's promise of forgiveness, new hope. Ezekiel is willing to preach to his people until they understand and repent.

If we are honest, most of us will have had at least one experience when suddenly all breaks down and we feel utterly alone, forsaken: a serious illness – a broken relationship – a wayward child – death of a loved one – some hidden guilt. We struggle and can't find a way out. Then we remember our Lord Jesus. He cried out to God. And God was right there.

God is always there when we let our hearts break. Then Jesus can reach in to make us whole – to change us, to transform us.

**Be with us, Lord, through all the problems life brings.
Thank you for loving us. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who struggle with seemingly overwhelming problems.

Ruth Hinkel

Day of the Lord is Coming

Tis time to open our eyes, ears and heart to the words of John the apostle as he speaks of the coming of our Lord, Jesus Christ in the book of Revelation. "Prolonged waves of judgement is coming for the ungodly." The day of the Lord is coming to all of us in this world. The Lord is coming to claim the earth as it is in heaven. No longer separate. For this world is our Lord Savors'. Heaven will no longer be invisible, rather, be completely visible for those who believe. This can only become true through the Son of God, Jesus Christ to walk upon the earth. It will be a presence like never felt before. Let the heavens open and lightning, thunder and earthquakes spread across the earth for the wondrous coming of Lord. Praise the Lord.

Sherri Lesch

Who Will Remain Standing?

**If you, Lord, should mark iniquities, Oh Lord, who could stand? (v. 3)
O Israel, hope is in the Lord; for with the Lord there is lovingkindness
and with Him there is abundant redemption. (v. 7)**

As I flipped through TV channels one night, I happened on a game show and saw competitors standing each on a floor space. If they answered a question incorrectly enough times, the floor gave way and they plunged down a chute! The winner remained standing. I would never compete on this show because I would always go down the chute! I could not stand.

In real life God hears our pleas and we can stand before Him because of His great mercy and abundant redemption. God's greatest act of lovingkindness and mercy was providing us a Savior, Jesus, who transformed us by washing us clean with His precious blood.

The author of this book of Psalms was begging God to hear his cries. He was in despair and felt hopeless. I can count a few times in my life when I felt this way. If any of you reading this feel this despair, there is hope in our great God. This hope is a gift already given. I count myself blessed to live in history on this side of the cross. I know Jesus. He has given me "standing" room before His cross. There are no chutes here. Just redemptive grace, mercy and peace.

**Lord, you heard our pleas for mercy and saved us from the chute!
We thank and praise you.**

Prayer concern: Those who are in emotional despair and need to feel God's lovingkindness.

Susan McWilliam

Look Up to Heaven!

The Death and Resurrection of Lazarus proved to be one of the greatest miracles. Today I want to talk about 6 amazing parables 4, 15, 25, 26, 41 and 42

Jesus (The Teacher) (4) was told someone he loves was ill. He said, “This illness does not lead to death; Rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” I would have said, Teacher could you explain this to me?

Now Jesus told his disciples “Lazarus is dead. (15) For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe.” Again, could you explain? (25) Jesus said to her (Martha) “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, (26) and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

Jesus told them to take away the stone. (My favorite parable) (41) And Jesus looked upward and said, “Father, I thank you for having heard me. (42) I know that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me”.

Well over the past seven years my son Dante has undergone 18 surgeries. The second being the scariest, Genie and I were in the surgical prep room when Dante went into a massive seizure, I thought he was dying, they quickly whisked us out of the room. For three hours I looked up and prayed, prayed, prayed to God. They finally came out and said everything went well. When they rolled Dante into his room he pointed up and said “God saved his life.” I looked up, smiled, and said, “I know that was you God. Thank you!” God knows you and God loves you!

Look up, ask him! He is there for you!

Faith Stronger Than Fear

O Lord...Let this boy's life return to him. (v. 21b)

When tasks that once were easy, become difficult and fatigue sets in, doctor's orders usually are: **exercise!** It's not easy. It takes effort. And determination. There is fear of failure and disappointments.

It seems to me that faith is something like a "spiritual" muscle that needs to be exercised by facing fear and difficulty, lest we become weak.

Today's scripture tells of the prophet Elijah and the widow of Sidon, who feeds him the last food she has before she and her son face starvation, simply because she recognized Elijah as a man of God. The consequence is that oil and cereal never run out as long as the famine lasts.

Now her only son lies limply in her arms. In desperation she cries out to Elijah. Is God punishing her for all the sins she's ever done by taking the life of her son, who is her only hope and support? Elijah takes the boy from her and carries him up to his room and bed. He is perplexed. He questions: would God punish this woman for having been self-sacrificing and only good to him? Then he gathers his faith in God. Sheltering the child with his own body warmth and his breath he asks in confidence: "O Lord my God, let this boy's life return to him." And it happens. Elijah's faith is strengthened and the widow finds trust in the God she did not know.

God's ways are not our ways. But God's love is ours forever.

Loving Lord, keep us ever close to you. Amen

Prayer concern: caregivers and caretakers

Our Way of Life!

***For we are what God has made us, created in Christ Jesus
for good works, which God prepared beforehand
to be our way of life. (v. 10, NRSV)***

Her name was Esther. She was one of many I have known through the years who helped me picture the grace filled and creative daily work of God. Esther was a member of Bethany Lutheran Church in Arco, Minnesota, a town of 100 people, 10 dogs and assorted cats. Bethany was one of two churches I served as a new pastor. Being a young pastor, I hungered for the stories about celebrating God's grace as a gift and embodying that grace as a gift of life for others.

Esther worked hard through her life and growing family to help with their farm expenses. In younger days, Esther also worked long hours at the café. In her ordinary and genuine life of 70 years, she shared her love and faith with others. In the end, she even lived God's way of life as she dealt with cancer.

Esther knew confidently, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God . . ." God's gift of grace flowed in her own life. She lived across the street from Bethany. I loved the phone call invitations for lunch with Esther in her small kitchen. "Just a few leftovers," she would say. But in her hands, the leftovers became a feast of food and stories!

Then I got it! With skilled hands, the ordinary becomes extraordinary. In God's grace-filled hands our lives and work become extraordinary blessings for others. Luther said, "God doesn't need your good works . . . your neighbor does!" It is our way of life!

**Lord, help me to love you as a gift through the ways
that I show love to my neighbor. Amen!**

Prayer concern: That we may reflect God's love every day in our hurting world.

The Sacrifice Remembered

Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you . . . " (v. 26-27, NRSV)

Scattered around our house, on shelves and in keepsake chests are objects turned memorials. They serve as a focus for the memories of a special person or the commemoration of an important event in our life together. A pocket watch and a cowboy hat remind us of a beloved grandpa. A daisy pin and a crocheted baby blanket bring recollections of loving grandmothers, and a cross necklace calls to mind a past baptism. When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we are observing a similar memorial. This "supper" helps us remember the sacrifice of the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ and commemorates the decision we made in our baptism to follow Jesus.

Jesus held out to his disciples the bread and the cup; it was right there before them. Each of them had to respond personally by deciding what they were going to do with it. They each had to make the personal decision to reach out and take it for themselves, and we must do the same thing with the salvation He offers us. We must each decide if we are going to "eat of the bread" or "drink of the cup" and take our share in what Jesus did for us. Our Heavenly Father does not impose the most important choice of all upon us. The choice is up to you. You must make your own personal response to Him.

Lord, help us to follow You as our Lord and Savior.

Prayer concern: That we may confess our sin and receive forgiveness.

Kaley McClain

Anointed, Transformed and Called

Then the Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one. (v. 12b)

The act of anointing is to signify a transformation into a new role, a new reality. When David was anointed by Samuel to be the next king, the action happened in the presence of his brothers and was powered by a force beyond himself. "From that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power." I seem to remember reading that the times when David went astray in his life were those moments when he forgot about that external source of his authority beyond himself. Clouded by that distorted perspective he drifted into thinking that the authority was in himself alone. Of course, it could be easy to think that this temptation to replace God's will with our own is only a problem with people "in power".

But, we too have been anointed, transformed and called God's people through our baptism in Christ. We are called to daily dying and rising with Christ as we remember the gracious gifts of God in our lives. We are responders to God's loving grace and we live our vocation as Christ followers in all that we do and say. The power of God's Spirit does not originate in our fragile will, but in the touch of God's hand each day.

Sometimes it seems like life would be easier if my focus was purely on what I want and what pleases me. Perhaps you have heard, "If you want something done right, just do it yourself!" Unfortunately, any of us can forget that the power for transformation comes from a source greater than ourselves.

Gracious God of Life, thank you for the reminder that you are the one who calls, anoints and equips us to bring transformation to our world through the gift of your great love! Amen

Prayer concern: For all who are called to positions of leadership in care for others that the broken and lost might not be forgotten, but instead be nourished in the warmth of God's love.

Choosing to Live

For he has graciously granted you the privilege not only of believing in Christ, but of suffering for him as well. (v. 29, NRSV)

This passage is particularly difficult to write about. There is no easy or obvious verse that stands out because the full story is more complex than one verse. Paul has been a prisoner. It would have been much easier for him to die in prison than to live on and continue to preach about Christ and the church. Paul's actions are Christ-like because he sacrificed himself for the good of the church.

The story of a young man comes to mind. He was still just a boy, really. As adults we understand giving until we can give no more for those we love and the rewards, even when it would be easier to walk away. It seems that in our world of instant opinions, activities from early morning until time for bed, religion and faith but not a full understanding of that religion, death and dying become an easy answer to all questions. The young man does not know the joy of getting past the struggle for the greater reward, only that death was the easy answer. If we believe in forgiveness, we know the young man is living free from pain in the heavenly kingdom. What would his reward have been should he have been able to look past the pain and suffering and continue his walk on this earth? Would he have been transformed into a great evangelist for Christ?

We are each confronted with these choices. What looks like the easy way out or the path that will help us be more Christ-like? Sacrificing our wants and needs for His wants and needs, giving us the chance to be more like Christ.

Lord, help me to look past the easy answer to the answer to transform me to live in Your image.

Prayer concern: That we may all take the time to live as Christ lived.

Kathy Bramley

Trust in You

But I am trusting You, O Lord, saying, "You are my God". (v. 14, NKJ)

A few years ago I was put in a rather uncomfortable place in my life. For a brief moment the thought crossed my mind, "Why is this happening to me?" Within seconds that thought was replaced with "Why not me?!"

We all face challenges in our lives that put our faith to the test and lately I have definitely been put through the ringer.

I came home from church today knowing my devotion was due and it was nowhere near ready--written, erased, rewritten and completely changed, it just didn't work. The radio was on in the house and as I entered, the words I heard were that the thief does not go into an empty house and I understood why the events of the past few months happened. Satan was trying to steal my joy, my faith, and my trust in my God. John 10:10--"The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life and have it to the full."

Through the music and inspirational messages on Family Life radio (I took the 30 day challenge over six years ago) along with daily devotions and prayer, my relationship with God has grown. I have learned to let go of the reins and trust in His plan and His perfect timing. I am human and admit to thinking I can help Him accomplish what I want and when I want it but ultimately I know He is in control and He does know best.

One of my favorite songs is "Trust in You" by Lauren Daigle. I have written the refrain but encourage you to listen to the whole song—it's beautiful. "When You don't move the mountains I'm asking You to move, when You don't part the waters I wish I could walk through, when you don't give the answers as I cry out to you, I will trust, I will trust, I will trust in You."

Lord, thank you for continuing to transform and bless me as I put my hope and trust in You.

Prayer concern: For everyone to know Jesus and be filled with the love, joy and peace that comes through faith and trust in God.

The Triumphal Entry

He was in the center of the procession, and the crowds all around him were shouting, "Praise God* for the Son of David! Bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Praise God* in the highest heaven!" (v. 9, New Translation) *Greek Hosanna

I am fortunate that my religious upbringing was diverse. My father was Russian Orthodox and my mother was Roman Catholic. This brought with it numerous traditions, especially at holiday times. The most striking was during Lent, Holy Week and Easter.

As I read this verse about Jesus processing into Jerusalem I was reminded of the times that processions were repeated during Holy Week in our church. Of course, Palm Sunday brought the procession with palms. On Good Friday we processed, while kneeling, down the aisle to the altar to kiss the reliquary holding a fragment of the Crucifixion cross. As a youngster my favorite procession was at the Sunrise Service on Easter Morning. We children, dressed in our Easter finery and carrying snapdragon stems, led the congregation around the outside of the church and into the service.

Family traditions during this week included days spent with my Aunt Julie who used the Ukrainian technique called pysanka that inscribed folk designs using beeswax onto eggs. My Czechoslovakian maternal grandmother and my mother would prepare Hrutka (We called it Easter cheese but it was actually an egg-milk custard molded in cheesecloth.), Paska bread with a braided cross on its top, and Polish Kielbasa and ham. These were placed in a basket lined with a linen cloth embroidered with religious symbols and taken to the church on Saturday to be blessed by the priest before being served for breakfast on Easter morning following Mass.

Lord, thank you for making this Holy Week special, in my memories and in my life, and to many others.

Prayer concern: Those who do not have religious freedom and have not been transformed by having faith in their lives.

Extravagant Love

Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. (v. 3, NIV)

I wonder...did Jesus' *well* ever run dry? I can picture him here, having just raised Lazarus from the dead, eager to dine with beloved friends in peace. Yet, just outside the door clamoring crowds want more. *Jesus, heal me! Jesus, teach me! Jesus, give me hope!* And there, rising in the midst of the crowd...the image of a retched cross...taunted him.

*What absolute balm Mary's gift must have been to the **man**, Jesus!*

Even so, Mary's gift made her guests uncomfortable. It was too intimate...she, too vulnerable. Imagine laying your heart and soul at the feet of another under the scrutiny of others. This was extravagant love, indeed!

AND...it is exactly this kind of love that transforms lives. It's a dig-in and get dirty kind of love. It's hands-on, heart-open kind of love. It's right here and right now kind of love.

Jesus admonished Judas' protests by saying, "You always have the poor with you, but you only have me for a little while." I wonder how often Jesus has stepped into my life and I was too self-absorbed to respond to his need? Or, worse yet, when have I actually see him and failed to respond because I was too afraid to carry the grime of his weary life on my own person as Mary did?

Only extravagant love can heal, protect, comfort and defend. It's hard. It's messy. It's scary. However, if everyone does his part it will ripple through our communities and change the world forever. *This* is the Truth of Christ...

**Help me, Jesus, to see and embolden me to act as swiftly as Mary did.
Amen**

Prayer Concern: The many souls we pass each day who need to hear these simple words: "I see you" and "I love you."

Grains of Wheat

Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (v. 24)

Greeks came looking for Jesus, asking Philip, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." They hear Jesus speak about how a grain of wheat must die so that it can bear much fruit, how the hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified, and being children of the light.

Whenever I read scripture, I am always amazed that God blesses me with new insights. As I read about Jesus speaking about how the grain of wheat has to die in order to grow and bear fruit I realize that Jesus was saying He had to die so that the seeds of His Love and Light would bring glory to His Name through each of His children.

I titled this Grains of Wheat because whenever I sing "*As the Grains of Wheat Once Scattered on the Ground*", I feel myself praying that all God's people from all the ends of earth would really become one in Him.

**Heavenly Father, may we be gathered into one in You, so that we may share Your wondrous gift of love and light to Glorify Your Name.
Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those living in darkness.

Beth Crestinger

God is Glorified in Us

When he had gone out, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him." (v. 31-32)

It took me a few times to read over these verses and finally realize what they really meant. Eventually after I read for perhaps the tenth time, I realized what they meant when I read, "Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him." As I read it I imagined this sentence in Pastor's voice, telling me that God has been glorified in me. It makes me feel more that I belong, that there is a reason for my presence on this earth and each time I take communion, God is reminding me of that. God is reminding us all that we belong and that we are loved and that he is glorified in us.

Lord glorified in us, help us glorify you in others.

Prayer concern: That we glorify you through our actions toward others.

Walter Hubbard

Acceptable and Perfect Love

The above Bible passage tells of the activities at the Last Supper. We have all seen depictions of this night. I, for one, have always been awe struck by Christ's act of humbleness and love when He washed his disciples' feet. The fact that he chose to do this on the last night he would be with his disciples made the act even more important.

At first Peter tried to stop Jesus from washing his feet and insisted he should wash the feet of Jesus. But Jesus was adamant about his wish to do this for Peter. In fact, He responded, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." Peter quickly acquiesced. The explanation in my study guide said, in part, that unless Peter submitted to him and allowed Jesus to minister in this way, Peter would never learn the lesson of Humility. Even more, the interpretation reads, "Jesus did not wash his disciples feet just to get them to be nice to each other. His far greater goal was to extend his mission on earth after he was gone."

Before the evening was over Jesus had taught his disciples a transformational kind of love. LOVE that changes us because it is not self-serving but of service to others. He said, "A new command I give you LOVE one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this Everyone will know that you are my disciple."

The Christian Fellowship we develop with others is much deeper than just recognizing other Christians. The support and sharing we experience is our strength through Christ's sacrifice for us and we are commanded to tell others of this Love.

Do you have someone in your life who has shown you this Christian Love? When we examine our behavior with people, are we filled with His all accepting Love?

Lord, may we see others as you see them. Thank you for loving us and trusting us to follow your example

Prayer Concern: That our Fellowship truly shows Christ's love to all.

The Robe

For He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (v. 12, NIV)

I have been reading "The Robe." It is a book written in 1942 by Lloyd G Douglas and made into the first CinemaScope feature in 1953.

Somehow I found it in our book collection and decided I needed a "real book" (not electronic book) to read at night. When I started reading it I had no idea what it was about. Soon, I realized the "Robe" is Jesus'.

Do you remember during the crucifixion, when the guards cast lots for sections of Jesus' clothes but they decided to keep the robe whole because it had no seams? Well, the main character in the book won the robe. The book is about his struggle with what he did. He was ordered to carry out the crucifixion. He could tell, even in the beginning, that Jesus was innocent of the charges brought to Him and it really affected this officer. How could Jesus stand there and take the brutal beatings and the crucifixion without anger? The Roman officer started a search for information.

What I have noticed is that as the officer searches, his life is being transformed. He comes in contact with the first century Christians and he becomes acquainted with who the Christ is and was. Christ's words come to him through many people touched by Christ and it is transforming his life.

Isn't that the same with us? We are transformed by Jesus through people we encounter. They tell us how they have been affected by Jesus. Let's do the same. Share how Jesus has transformed us to those we meet.

Lord, help us share how Jesus has transformed us.

Prayer concern: Give strength and peace to those wanting to share Jesus' love.

Cheri Sorensen

CSI Jerusalem: "Why are you weeping?"

. . . go to My brethren and say to them, I ascend to My Father and your Father. (v. 17)

This is really confusing! If you read the four accounts of the resurrection they are all different, significantly different. It would take a CSI expert to untangle it. In John there was Mary Magdalene, Peter and John and two angels. In Matthew 28:1-10, there were two Marys and one angel and the message was different. In Luke 24:1-12, there were two Marys and Joanna and two angels and the message was different again. In Mark 16:1-8 there were two Marys and Salome (Joanna) and one angel. Yikes! This is the turning point of the whole Christian story. How could this happen? Well, think back to the CSI TV shows you have watched. When they interview witnesses, the stories are different. Some of the witnesses were further away or saw from a different perspective. Our witnesses are like that. John is the only eye witness although Mark is writing what he heard from Peter. Matthew is second hand and Luke is even further from the source, although he may have talked to one of the Marys.

What a good CSI detective would do is find out what each story has in common. In this important story it is this: it happened on Sunday, the first day of the week. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive! And he told the women "go tell", not to the men but to the women. Jesus always does the unexpected. Jesus told them what he would do and then did it. We can trust Jesus to do what he says. Get ready for the unexpected.

**Lord, you said: My father and your Father, My God and your God!
I believe you!**

Prayer concern: Those struggling with their faith

Pete Wormwood

Foundational Transformation

Do not be afraid . . . (Jesus) is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. (v. 5-6)

Today we hear the story of transformation! Jesus, crucified a few days earlier, is no longer dead in the tomb. He has been raised! Alleluia!

The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is the foundational story of transformation in our Scriptures as well as our life of faith. We love to tell stories of *resurrection*. Stories that tell of someone or something we thought dead now given new life. "It's a miracle" we often proclaim as words of explanation are lacking the new life we now experience/see.

The saving hope of the Christian faith is anchored in this story of Jesus' resurrection that we encounter this year through the Gospel of Matthew. We believe that God brought Jesus back from the dead into eternal life and that through Christ, God is making all things new (Rev. 21:5). As we confess our faith, we confess in the great mystery of God because like most powerful things of God, the resurrection is mystery. Don't get me wrong, we can tell great stories of transformation using the language of this foundational story: On one side Jesus died and was buried in a tomb while on the other side an angel said from the now empty tomb that he's not there anymore because he has been raised. Even as Jesus confirms this news through his presence and words, the transformation of the resurrection remains hidden. We know it happened because here's Jesus. We can name countless details and influences along the way but the moment of change is internal. It is a gift of God. Newness of life now and always is the work of our loving, creating, and recreating God. Alleluia!

God of new life, we bless you for the gift of faith. Raise up in us the spirit of your resurrection and transform us to share this great news with the world. Amen.

Prayer concern: To experience and/or see the gift of new life somewhere.

Cross of Hope is a Spirit-centered community
that shares Christ's love
through worship, education and outreach
to develop and strengthen relationships with God.



Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and Schools
is a multi-generational Christian community that aspires to follow Jesus.

We Value:

A Warm Welcome

We embrace you wherever you are on your journey of faith.

A Diverse and Inviting Community

We want everyone to feel love and acceptance.

Dynamic Worship

We experience God's presence in a variety of ways.

Learning about God

We provide opportunities to learn and grow in faith.

Community Outreach

We share God's love with others.

Journal

Journey with Us in Worship

Lent - Holy Week - Easter

2020

Ash Wednesday, February 26, 2020

Worship with Imposition of Ashes - 1:00 p.m.

Worship with Imposition of Ashes - 6:00 p.m.

Sundays, March 1- 29

8:30 and 10:45 a.m.

Mid Week Lent Worship

Wednesdays, March 4 - April 1 - 6:00 p.m.

Palm Sunday, April 5

8:30 and 10:45 a.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 9

Table Fellowship with Communion - 1:00 p.m.

Worship - 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, April 10

Worship - 7:00 p.m.

Easter Vigil, April 11

Worship *at St. Paul Lutheran*

1100 Indian School Rd NE - 6:30 p.m.

Easter Day, April 12

Worship - 8:30 a.m. and 11:00 a.m.

Breakfast - 9:30-10:30 a.m.

Egg Hunt - 10:00 a.m.



CROSS OF HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND SCHOOLS



Loving God - Transforming Relationships - Serving Others

