

LOVE AND LIGHT

Lenten Devotions for Reflection and Renewal

Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and School
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Lent 2026

FOREWORD

The 40 days of Lent mirror the transformative journeys found in Scripture from Jesus in the wilderness, to the years God's people spent wandering the desert from Egypt to the promised land. The journey of formation and transformation is a clear theme of our faith, and Lent is an opportunity each year to return to God's work in your life with intention and reflection.

This year, we are inviting you to consider the images of *Love and Light* as both a grounding and goal of the season. Christ reveals the steadfast love of God that becomes light to the world wherever the journey is challenged by temptation, uncertainty, separation, loneliness, or death.

We hope the devotions in the pages to follow will bless your Lent this year with the presence of God's love and light. Written by members of the faith community at Cross of Hope, may the Holy Spirit use them to deepen devotion and commitment in your faith, spur conversation and discovery in our community, inspire and encourage us to persevere as we walk in the light of Christ. They are the reflections of unique individuals called and sent in baptism to experience joy in communion with God, to love one another, and to live in harmony with creation. God bless you on the journey and join me in thanking all these writers who have shared a time of devotion, and Sherrie Simek, Diane Carrico, Nancy Morrison and John Lacher for putting this all together!

R. Adam Berndt
Lent Devotion 2026
Love and Light

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

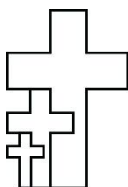
We all lead busy lives, and it is often hard for us to sit down and just relax. Often, we find ourselves coming and going. It's nice to sit down and have a few minutes with the Lord. Our Lenten Devotions helps us to find that time, to sit, have a cup of coffee or a glass of iced tea and connect with our Savior.

A BIG thank you to anyone who participated in this year's Lenten Devotion. It takes time out of your day, but it is well worth it. A BIG, BIG, thank you to anyone who wrote more than one devotion.

A special thank you to Nancy Morrison who puts everything together for us.

Many blessings to all of you this Lenten Season. May you be love and light along your journey.

Sherrie Simek
Diane Carrico



Virtue Signaling

Watch out! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired by others, for you will lose the reward from the Father in heaven. (v. 1)

Virtue signaling: one of the most used terms in 2025. From the many lapel ribbons at the award shows, to companies doing the right things for all the wrong reasons, this verse seems to be all the rage still. Or at least accusing people of being guilty of virtue signaling is all the rage!

In Matthew 6:1-6, Jesus offers profound guidance that challenges our motivations in pursuing righteousness. He warns, "Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. I suppose that also means, don't act godly just to be seen by God as good, he will know our hearts.

This is a difficult lesson because our society often celebrates accomplishments with public recognition, making it tempting to perform good deeds for the affirmation we all seek. However, this passage challenges us to examine why we do what we do. Are we motivated by a desire for praise, or are we acting out of genuine love for God, Jesus' worldly mission and care for our neighbors? My resolution in 2026 is to live and act focused on pleasing God rather than impressing people. I think it should work out, now on to Lent!

Let the quiet moments of genuine faith shape who we are, trusting that our Father in heaven cherishes every unseen act of love and devotion. Amen

Prayer Concern: those who need to understand God's word

Karen Schwartz

Humble and Vulnerable Repentance

When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. (v. 6, NIV)

Repentance is a reorientation and recalibration of our hearts - aligning our hearts with God. At its center is humility and vulnerability. The king of Nineveh removed all the representations of his status, power, and wealth to join the other men. In the dust of the earth and their sin, they sat seeking God's forgiveness.

When my kids were young, other kids had the habit of quickly say, "I know" as a way of avoiding embarrassment and the discomfort of facing what they did wrong. The king models humble vulnerability in facing his wrong doing. God taught me this lesson years ago. During prayer, I was reminded of something from my past. I felt Him ask, "did you do this?" Previously, explanations and excuses surrounded my prayer of forgiveness. "Yes, but this is what was the context and reasons." This went on until I finally said, "yes." No excuses, justifications, or explanations – only humble and vulnerable brokenness. At that point, I finally experienced a release and complete forgiveness.

C.S. Lewis states that what we need is forgiveness of the inexcusable: "God knows all the real excuses very much better than we do. If there are real "extenuating circumstances" there is no fear that He will overlook them. All the real excusing He will do. What we have got to take to Him is the inexcusable bit, the sin. Real forgiveness means looking steadily at the sin, the sin that is left over without any excuse, after all allowances have been made, and seeing it in all its horror, dirt, meanness, and malice, and nevertheless being wholly reconciled...To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you."

In Joel 3, God says, "rend your hearts and not your garments, return to the Lord for he is gracious and compassionate".

May we remove the robes of excuses, justifications, and explanations and approach You in humble vulnerability trusting in your compassion, grace, and love.

Called to the Light

*To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
(v. 7, NSRV)*

I find myself increasingly burdened by the state of current media - how so much of it is shaped to serve one side or another, how often it distorts truth, amplifies outrage, and feeds fear. Rather than informing, it provokes; rather than uniting, it divides. I feel the pull to anger and frustration, and I recognize how easily my heart can be drawn into that same spirit.

As a Christian, I am reminded that my first allegiance is not to a party, an ideology, or a cultural narrative, but to Christ. Before I am anything else, I am His. That calling challenges me to examine what I consume, what I dwell on, and what I allow to shape my thoughts and actions. The media of this world often thrives on darkness—conflict, suspicion, and resentment—but Christ calls me to walk in the light.

Living as a Christian first and foremost means choosing a different posture: one of humility instead of outrage, discernment instead of reaction, and love instead of fear. It means guarding my heart and mind, seeking truth with wisdom, and refusing to let anger become my guide. It means remembering that every person I encounter—on a screen or in real life—is made in the image of God.

Lord, I am called to reflect the light of Christ; showing grace where there is hostility, peace where there is chaos, and hope where despair dominates. Amen

Prayer concern for those seeking Light.

Lynne Bagby

Forgiveness & Joy

“...Give me back my joy again; ...Don’t keep looking at my sins...” (v .8-9)

In this psalm, David is asking for forgiveness for his sins (adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband). We have all sinned. As humans we often wonder where God is in our life. While God may, in His grace, forgive us He will not remove the consequences of our actions. That fact leaves us with challenges.

Knowing God in His grace has forgiven us, we can continue to demonstrate our love and joy for God and others through our actions. We can find joy in the littlest things – a bird singing, a pet sitting with us, getting a doctor’s appointment.

I think of the joys that come through our ‘prayer warriors’. We ask for prayers for someone and later hear they have been granted. Two situations come to mind:

- Being scammed and having church friends step up to help me beef up my Norwex business. I truly feel God’s presence in doing this while earning money to help pay bills.
- A friend of my niece had open heart surgery. There was waiting for a heart, then successful surgery and suddenly, rejection. The doctors changed all her medications with positive results. Now she is doing very well. At this writing, she should be nestled comfortably in her home. The doctors learned (for their next patient) what to do for a patient whose heart is in backward.

With God’s forgiveness for our sins, faith in Him and knowing we are on the right path, we can find joy and sing His praises every day.

Heavenly Father, thank you for forgiving our sins. Guide us in all we do so we may sing songs of joy.

Prayer concern: Those who question God’s grace.

Wilderness Survival

Away with you, Satan! For it is written: Worship the Lord your God and serve him only (v.10)

Being an avid reader, I enjoy books about expeditions to dangerous or exotic locations. I've read books about people climbing Mt. Everest, hiking through the remote rain forests, and wild river rafting. Often, these expeditions into the wilderness test the boundaries of human endurance requiring the adventurer to plan for a variety of challenges whether they be extreme weather, deadly snakes, and/or criminal activity along their journey. Preparing for food, water, medicine, and shelter becomes paramount.

Today's scripture tells us about Jesus's own journey into the wilderness where he faced a significant challenge in the form of the devil's temptations. The devil's motivation was simple. If he could cause Jesus to succumb to sin, his ministry and mission would be jeopardized. In doing so, he tried capitalizing on Jesus's humanity by using food, trust, and power to cause Jesus to stumble.

For us, lent reminds us of our own wilderness adventures. Our own sin nature presents us with many challenges along the journey. Just like he tried to cause Jesus to stumble, the devil seeks the same for us along our own faith journey. His goal is to have us question our ourselves and our worthiness to live a Christ centered life. He may try to question our desire to love our neighbor or serve others. Anything that shows we are a follower of Christ.

Jesus was prepared for his own wilderness adventure, primarily through his knowledge of Scripture to counter the devil's schemes. Likewise, we are not alone either. We have access to God's word, fellowship with our church family, and daily prayer to help us survive our own wilderness adventure. And we have God, who we worship and serve as our ultimate guide along the journey. Take advantage of His ultimate peace and joy along the way!

Prayer Concern: People taking trips

John Valdez

Discouragement out, Peace in!

Then Jezebel sent a message to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more so, if I do not make your life like the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid; he got up and fled for his life.
(vv. 2-3)

Discouragement is a scourge that can derail us and keep us immobile. Elijah was threatened with death and he gave into fear. He let that fear take away his courage and trust in God. He believed those threats were bigger than God's protection in spite of the fact that God had already shown his protection and provision in the past. How often do we let fear convince us that God isn't enough? How often do we let negative thinking rob us of peace and purpose. These bouts of 'what if's' and worry sap us of strength and reveal a lack of trust. In times of discouragement we forget God's ability to provide, protect, and save. As it says in Isa. 51:13 "'You have forgotten the Lord, your Maker...' You fear continually all day long." Isa. 51:12 offers us this important reminder, "I, I am He who comforts you; why then are you afraid..." What then do we do to combat fear and discouragement? It is simple, however it requires some effort to stop digging these pits of despond! Gratitude is the simple answer (simple, not so simple!). It's necessary to our wellbeing that we stop every thought that indulges fear. We must put an end to every 'what if', laying down every burden of worry and anxiety before the Father. This sounds simple, but it's not easy. Becoming aware of these thoughts, excising them, and replacing them with gratitude and thankfulness takes daily effort. So, do not let threat or fear derail you from doing what God leads you to do. He will make a way for you. Now the benefits of gratitude are enormous. You will have renewed peace, courage, and clarity of purpose. It will even improve your physical wellbeing. So, remember to trust in God, for you are his beloved, the ransomed of the Lord!

Merciful Lord, the path before is not always easy. Help us through the challenging times, protect and lead us by your grace and mercy. Amen.

Prayer concern: For those struggling with fear and worry.

Searching for the God Who Loves

So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it.
(v. 16, NLT)

For much of my life I didn't find God very approachable. He lived up and heaven and I was down here. Sunday was a holy day of obligation and I was required to attend. I also had to confess my sins at regular intervals to a priest who sat in God's place.

Someone was always telling me who God was and what was expected of me. The first time this happened I was 7 years old when the Sunday School teacher declared that only Catholics went to heaven. I cried myself to sleep that night because my Dad was a Methodist. In college the Baptists told me I had to say a specific prayer and be "saved" or I wasn't going to heaven.

In my middle years I read and studied the Bible, practiced regular prayer time and attended and became involved in church because I wanted to. But I always was trying to prove something and do the right things to be worthy of God's love, and to be sure that I was going to heaven. And yet each time, deep in my heart, I felt I was loved, that we are all loved, just as we are.

I'm old now and I don't care much about proving anything. I've settled, in my heart, with this truth that I've chosen: "GOD IS LOVE." And I'm trying to look at the world through this lens. I now find myself searching for, and finding Him in the heartbreak, the suffering, and the scary things happening in the world. I'm starting to see His mercy, hope, forgiveness, grace and love abound, everywhere, in everything, and everyone. No exceptions. Whether or not it's the "right" path, I can't tell you. What I can say is that I am finally at peace in my heart.

Dear Lord, there is no one path into your mercy and your love. Open my eyes to the path you are on with me today, right where I am now.

May each of us discover God's voice of love in the unique way he is reaching out to us in our lives.

Patty Westerfield

Yahweh

Yahweh! The Lord! The God of compassion and mercy! I AM slow to anger and filled with unfailing love and faithfulness. (v. 6)

Here's what we know. We can call on Yahweh – he does not get mad when we ask Him to help us. If we turn away and make mistakes, He does not get mad at us. He loves us with unfailing love. God is always there even when we say/do stupid things. He wants a relationship with us and loves us.

In our daily life we often as kids say/do stupid things after our parents tell us not to. Even though we make our parents angry they still love us with unfailing love no matter what.

God teaches us to love everyone with unfailing love even when we don't agree with the stupid things that people do. Even if we are angry at them, God tells us to forgive them.

We often ask God for foolish things. We pray for things that we don't need and complain when God does not give us the things that we often want. Even though we are blessed with the things we have. We often focus on the things that we want and not the things that we need. With God's unfailing love he forgives us and to reminds us to be thankful for what we are blessed with.

Yahweh! We call on you to send us your unfailing love through those around us, like our parents and families.

Prayer Concern: for those that care for us and look out for us.

COH Senior High Youth

Our Rock and Quarry

*Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness and who seek the LORD:
Look to the rock from which you were cut and to the quarry from which
you were hewn; look to Abraham, your father, and to Sarah, who gave
you birth. (v 1-2a, NIV)*

To whom do you listen when you seek the Lord? Friends on e-mail, Facebook, tv? Do you read books, listen to sermons, or ask your husband or wife? So many places to turn, but Isaiah tells us to look to the rock from which we were cut and to the quarry from which we were hewn. Not places I would have looked! But then he gives us names – Abraham and Sarah, Israel's ancestors. He tells us we were cut from hard and strong servants of God.

I started thinking about the rock and quarry of my ancestry. I have always thought of God as my Rock, but He also gave us a part of Himself in our ancestors, from Abraham and Sarah to mothers and fathers. I know I learned to pursue righteousness from my parents, who were cut from God's rock and quarry, and they learned from theirs. God's Word was in them.

Through Isaiah, God gave promises to Zion, His people, and I believe that as descendants of Abraham and Sarah, we also receive these promises of comfort, making our deserts like Eden, and wastelands like God's garden. He promises that joy and gladness, thanksgiving and the sound of singing will be found in Zion, and thus in us through all those ancestors before us.

Thank you for the love and light of our ancestors, oh God of Abraham and Sarah! Amen

Prayer concern: Those seeking righteousness.

Janet Wormwood

Inspired Works

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. (v. 28, The Message)

Paul's Letter to the Romans has always been a difficult book for me to fully accept and understand. For example, I have difficulty with Paul's implication that doing good *works* could be viewed as something negative. Martin Luther's teaching of Romans 3:28 that humans are justified through faith alone, apart from works only complicates my quandary. Hopefully, this exercise has allowed me to reflect on the full context of Paul's words to overcome my problem with Romans.

When we allow our eyes and ears to see and hear, God shows us the needs, issues and concerns of our local community and the world. Our prayerful response to those needs engages our gifts to be employed to meet those needs appropriately. Sometimes the response can be as simple as taking the time to listen to someone. Other times the response can be a prayer with or for someone. Of course other responses can include providing help in the form of physical assistance or money. The response can also take a much greater form of action done alone or in concert with others. All responses as good works should be inspired by Jesus's example of healing, love, mercy and peace – paced by God – and given freely without the expectation of reward or public accolade.

Dear Lord, thank you for the community of Cross of Hope Church and Schools who respond to the needs of our local community and world as a reflection of the Love and Light of God.

Prayer concern: Our immigrant community

Rich Neely

Answering our Prayers

"I lift up my eyes to the hills. From whence does my help come" (v. 8)

This has always been one of my favorite Bible verses. I really never knew why, but there was something that appealed to me. After reading this verse in several different Bibles and Bible study guides, I think I understand it a little bit more.

No matter what our problems are, there is always someone who will listen to us, someone who will come to our aid and maybe someone who will help solve that problem. I think many times we forget God is always ready to listen to us. There is always an answer to our prayers. Now, that answer may not be the one we expected or the one we want, but we'll always get an answer.

When I think of God answering our prayers, I always think of a country western song by Garth Brooks. The name of the song is Unanswered Prayers and he sings about a girl he had a crush on in high school. He prayed to God that the girl would be his but that wasn't God's plan and he met a different girl. He realized the girl in high school hadn't been the girl for him after all. Let's face it, we don't always get the answers we thing we want or need, but the Lord does. He knows what's best for us.

**Lord, help me remember that You know what is best for me and that
You will always answer our prayers.**

Prayer Concern: Children who do not have enough to eat.

Diane Carrico

The Gospel in a Nutshell

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

This is, of course, one of the most well-known verses in the Bible. They are Christ's own words to the Pharisee Nicodemus. Nicodemus acknowledged Jesus' connection with God and sought him out by night for an interview. Nicodemus soon became befuddled by Jesus' remarks about "being born again" and the "mysterious movements of the wind". Jesus surely perceived Nicodemus' frustration when at last he spoke the straightforward 27-word declaration that is John 3:16. We have no record of Nicodemus' reaction to this, but I like to think that it shed light on what Jesus is all about.

Today marks 51 years of marriage for Duane and me, so I have been reflecting on what this verse means in our life together. Duane grew up in Moscow, ID worshiping at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in the 1950's. My family, in the meantime, attended Emmanuel Baptist Church in Tucson, AZ. I believe what Duane grasped in confirmation class, and what I understood at my profession of faith, were rooted in the promise of John 3:16. We have lived in 4 cities and have been members of 5 faith communities. Each of those churches lighted our path by living out the Gospel. It's the one Jesus classically distilled for Nicodemus one night long ago.

Lord, help me light the path for those who seek you.

Prayer concern: Equip us to live out your Gospel

Glenna Meneely

Snake Bites

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)

In the previous chapter, the Israelites complained to Moses that he led them out of Egypt to die in a place that had no grain, figs, grapevines, nor pomegranates, but especially no water. Moses talked to God, and God provided water from a rock. In this chapter, the Israelites again complained that they were going to die where there was no food or water, and they were tired of the food God provided. God responded by sending poisonous snakes that bit the people, and many people died. The Israelites realized it was better when they were not dying from snake bites. They confessed that they were wrong to speak against God and asked Moses to pray for God to take away the poisonous snakes. Following God's instruction, Moses made a bronze snake, put it on a pole, and everyone who was bitten had the option to look at the bronze snake and live.

Every time we experience a hurt or disappointment, it is a poisonous snake bite. Moses experienced frequent snake bites with the continual complaining of the Israelites and recent dying of both his sister Miriam and brother Aaron. Each of us experiences poisonous snake bites every time we face health issues, family disappointments, work challenges, mental health struggles, random annoyances, petty differences, and on and on. We can let those snake bites destroy us, or we can turn to God.

Looking to the cross is our equivalent of the Israelites looking to the bronze snake. When we face decisions, challenges, and troubles, we need to remember to look to the cross. God is always there ready to provide us with help, guidance, comfort, and strength. It is our responsibility and privilege to turn to the cross and God.

Lord, help me to turn to and trust You in both the good times and challenging times.

Prayer concern: That we remember to turn to God in our need and thank God for His blessings.

Bonny Arseneau

A Gift of Faith

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (v. 13, NRSV)

True confession time...a few months ago I got caught speeding by one of Albuquerque's automated speed enforcement cameras. The speed limit on that stretch of Golf Course is 35, but they will give you a 10 MPH "fudge factor," meaning anything up to 45 MPH would be OK. And...wouldn't you know...I got clocked at 46 MPH. That's right, exactly 1 MPH over what's acceptable!

Why the ticket? Because it's the LAW! But, in his letter to the Romans, Paul reminds us that it isn't obeying all the rules that counts with our Creator. We are loved...cherished even...by God, not by what we do to earn His love, but by His infinite love for us.

Paul calls this the righteousness of faith. God freely gives this priceless gift to those who trust him. Laws, including traffic laws, are important, of course. But we need to remember that our relationship with God is based, not on what we do, but by what He has already done for us.

Lord, thank you for this priceless gift of faith you have given me.

Prayer concern: Those who have not yet experienced God's unconditional love.

Duane Meneely

Hearts of Stone

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. v. 26

This passage reminded us of a story from a coach. This particular coach told the team and players that they were not moving enough and looked like statues. “There is no life in your game,” he said. “Once you put life in your game and you take control over it, and show initiative, you will succeed.”

This is a lot like having a stone heart. We have shut out God. We have a bad attitude. It’s hard to see blessings. If we ask God for a living heart, we can share with others. We have a purpose. We can focus on the greater good of others.

When we allow God into our souls, we tend to begin to look at the positives within our lives. Sometimes we look at the negatives within our world and focus on what drags us down and doesn’t help us rise. We become more self-centered and don’t look at the whole that the world has to offer us. If we allow God to replace our heart that is God-willed, we will begin to be grateful for our blessings. With a new spirit, we can help ourselves rise and grow a closer relationship with God and even with others around us by spreading the word that is taught. God will replace this negativity within us and begin to walk with us along the path that he has made for us and that is right for us.

Lord, we ask that you bless us with living God-filled hearts so we may appreciate our blessings and be a blessing to others.

Prayer Concern: For those in our world with stone cold hearts, that they may come to know Jesus

COH Senior High Youth

The T

God said to Moses: "I'm going to rain bread down from the skies for you. The people will go out and gather each day's ration. I'm going to test them to see if they'll live according to my Teaching or not." (vv. 4-5, The Message)

The Israelites are about 45 days into what will turn into a 40-year journey. Their memories of the "the good old days" are of sitting around the fleshpots eating their fill of meat and bread. They don't remember their treatment at the hands of Pharaoh. They are traveling into an "unknown" future. They want to tap their heels and be in the Promised Land of milk and honey. They are more than unhappy – they are "hangry", not only with Moses and Aaron, but God.

The people do not go to God, they tell Moses to go. Moses has led them out of Egypt and the Israelites want Moses to fix things *now*. And so, Moses goes to God who listens. God is not surprised by what He hears; He already knows about their unhappiness – and their ungratefulness. He has been with them all along – from the beginning as John would later say. God tells Moses that He will provide manna in the morning and meat at night. And as a test, the people are to collect only as much as they need for each meal, the exception being the sixth day, when they are to collect enough food for two days to honor the Sabbath. They have no need to hoard the food; God will provide.

This is more than a listening-skills test. It is a comprehension test. God has been with the Israelites since the beginning. He has promised to provide what they need on a daily basis. Yet they want more. Am I so different from the Israelites? I often forget to listen, to do what You ask me to do, and to express my gratitude. Yet You are present and continue to provide more than I need.

Dear God, Please help me acknowledge your presence and your loving kindness throughout the day.

Prayer Concern: Help me turn my gratitude into action as my way of thanking You.

Rosemary Neely

Peace Permanent!

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. (v. 14)

Christ bought with his own sacrifice a permanent peace that reconciled both those who were under the law and those who were without the law. God's chosen people could not keep the law and we Gentiles could not conform to the law written on our hearts. We both knew what was good and right, but failed to do so. Our weakness and our sinful nature prevented us. We could all cry, "Woe is me!" As David lamented, 'Indeed, I was born guilty!' (Ps. 51:5) But enough doom and gloom! All is not lost. Jesus is our peace, giving us a permanent peace, granting us salvation and restored fellowship with the God who redeems. We are washed clean by the blood of the Lamb and we are made righteous by faith as a free gift. Our response is to love this great and glorious God who loves us! We have been made children of God through the work Christ performed on the Cross. This work has given us a lasting hope, a permanent peace.

**Gracious God, thank you for pursuing us out of your steadfast love.
Amen.**

Prayer concern: For those needing confirmation of God's love.

Chris Morgan

God's Creation

He owns the depth of the earth, and even the mightiest mountains are his. The sea belongs to him, for he made it. His hands formed the dry land, too. (vv. 4-5, New Living Translation)

Reading this psalm, I found it difficult at first to fit it into this year's theme of "Light and Love." Although it begins with joy (v.1) and seems light-filled, it ends with anger (v.11), not a loving tone! What did stand out were verses 4 and 5.

When I was a child, my father and uncles worked in the coal mines of Western Pennsylvania and went "Into the depths of the earth" to provide for their families. It was a difficult and sometimes dangerous job. This became apparent when my father was seriously injured in a mine cave-in when I was 10 years old. Through much prayer and therapy he survived and was able to start a new career at a local hardware store but those many years in the mine lead to his developing pneumoconiosis (black lung) and he died at age 78.

As an adult, living in beautiful Alaska, I marveled at the "mightiest mountains" (v.4) and have amazing memories of my 30 years spent surrounded by the majesty of them and the opportunity to live in and enjoy nature at its best.

In retirement, we chose "the dry land" (v.5) of New Mexico for our home and have the luxury of spending time near "the sea" (v.5) when visiting family in Washington State and North Carolina. What stands out for me in this psalm, is that throughout my life, God's marvelous creation, this beautiful earth, has filled me with joy, light and love. It has provided a place where I traveled and, through these experiences, I have grown to have a deeper faith in God.

Lord, you have blessed us with the many ways we have been able to marvel at your creation.

Prayer concern: Climate changes that are altering the beauty of your creation.

Lois Casto

We Believe

They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world. (v.:42)

When I first started teaching at COH School in 2022, I would include a Bible verse at the end of the parent newsletter I was sending home for the month. One verse I remember using was Matthew 5:1. “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.” This verse also came to my mind as I read the narrative of the woman at the well John 4:5 - 42.

After her life altering discourse with Jesus, which revealed many things about who Jesus is and His Kingdom she learned:

- Jesus breaks barriers (speaking to the Samaritan women) and loves all people
- Jesus is the Living Water that satisfies
- Jesus proclaims that all who worship must worship in Spirit and truth
- Jesus reveals to her that he is the Messiah, “Jesus said to her, “I am he...”
- Jesus knows us personally and all we have ever done

Upon hearing all of this, she leaves her water jug and returns to town and shares her testimony with the people. “Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done!...”

I imagine that her demeanor and confidence changed such that her testimony of a few words brought the townspeople out to Jesus. In turn they asked him to stay with them and he stayed two more days. The narrative ends with the townspeople saying, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world.” John 4:42

The Samaritan Woman’s light was shown so that others believed and gave glory to God. The Samaritan Woman made a difference in the lives of others because of her testimony.

All knowing God may our lives show Jesus to others and may we make a difference for others in our community. Amen

Prayer Concern: All who testify to your great love

Debra Gonzales

What if I don't measure up?

*But what if the woman refuses to leave home and come with me? (v. 5a,
The Message)*

Servant: Abraham, my master, is putting a lot of pressure on me; all of his hopes. He doesn't want his son to marry outside his clan. I sure hope his family will remember him kindly. After all, he's had no contact with them for years. What if I don't measure up?

Rebecca: I know I'll have to get married to somebody my father and brother choose. And I sure don't care for any of the boys around here. I'd like some adventure! But to go live in a strange country with family I don't know.... What if I don't measure up?

What if I don't measure up? What if I can't do it? The eternal cry of the artist who says, "Sure! I can do that!" in order to get a commission and then thinks, "Oh, golly, what have I gotten myself into???" Every time I get myself in that predicament, I have to dig deep. Find a new approach. Learn a new skill. Figure it out. And, often, it turns out to be some of my better work.

And, on the flip side of that coin, sometimes the "no-brainer" work turns out to be what connects with people. I was talking with a priest yesterday. He'd seen the ecumenical service celebrating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation back in 2017. I hadn't seen him since. When I mentioned Surgite had danced for that service and mentioned the ribbon sticks we waved, his eyes lit up. He'd remember that simple little dance for Eight Years!

I guess we measure up more often than we realize.

**God, help me remember that, when I'm doing Your will, I will always
"measure up."**

Prayer concern: May we all help those we meet realize that they do
"measure up."

God Provides

"They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink; for they drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ." (v. 4, NIV)

Even before Christ was born, he cared for and provided for his people. Manna was provided as was water for the people of Israel as they traversed toward the promised land. Moses saw this as spiritual food and water because God had provided for them in the wasteland. People thought this provision was awesome at first, they rejoiced and praised God for their provisions.

As people typically do, they began complaining, no longer satisfied or grateful for what God provided. Even after experiencing God's divine provision, many still failed to willingly obey God and were judged accordingly.

In what was perhaps a cautionary tale pulled from history, Paul reminds the Corinthians to not take God's provision lightly and remain obedient and faithful.

He reminds us repeatedly throughout scripture that just as he's been with us from our mother's womb, as far as the east is from the west, he provides and cares for us on a day-to-day basis. Just as Moses encouraged the Israelites to be obedient and remain faithful, so did Paul admonish the modern crowd. If we remained obedient and faithful habitually in our lives, stress would possibly be at an all-time low.

Rejoice in the lord always and again I say rejoice! (Sunday School song)

Prayer concern: Pray for this people going through uncertain times in their lives for Gods faithful touch.

Julie Morgan

Love Like Jesus

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. (v. 10)

When asked why Jesus stayed for dinner with people who were not making good choices, the youngest evening campers at Camp@COH had plenty to say.

They shared that Jesus loved everyone “no matter what”. Most shared that we are supposed to love and try to get along with all people, even when they do things we think are bad. The best way to explain this was by giving examples that began with the words, “One time, I was nice by playing with someone who wasn’t kind, or someone who was a bad friend. . . Why? “That’s what Jesus wants us to do!”

The best way to share what this looks like is to simply allow the children to make a collage. Most of their pictures show what it means to love people who are not the easiest people to love or be around. The jest of their pictures, writing and discussion shared how to do this.



Dear Jesus, Help us to be friends with people who are not nice, say mean things, or listen to the rules. Help us to keep trying to do this all the time like you did. Amen

Camp@COH Kindergarten-second grade

POWER

“I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments” (v. 11).

What is it about power that changes people? As a manager for several McDonald's stores, I had the opportunity to promote crew members to a management role. This provided an increase in salary, a sense of reward for hard work as a crew member and a sense of accomplishment for those that wanted to advance. In some cases, no matter the thought, time and effort, I placed in my decision, it wasn't the right decision. Just as the Lord did, I came to regret those decisions. Sometimes, those promoted thought they could change the rules, like Saul, and do things the way they wanted. They allowed their emotions to take control, forgetting to treat crew people with kindness, dignity and respect. No, they were not kings, although some of them acted as such. Unfortunately, they lost the respect of their team, and their management career was short-lived.

No matter our position in life or the power we yield, remember the love and light we are meant to share with all.

**O Great Councilor, grant wisdom and patience to those in “power”
May they serve with empathy and compassion. Amen**

Prayer concern: People in charge.

Sherrie Simek

People of Light

*... but now you have light from the Lord. So, live as people of light!
For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true.
(vv. 8-10 NLT)*

I find it curious that when we do something wrong or bad, we try to hide it, or we go in a dark place to do the wrong thing. I'm reminded of things I did as a child, like sneak chocolate chips from the kitchen cabinet. I always went and hid in my dark closet to eat them. Why did I do that? I guess I thought if I was in the dark, no one would see or discover that I was eating the "forbidden fruit", and I wouldn't get in trouble. But my mom usually knew what was going on. And she would come and find me, shaking her head as we headed out of the closet into the light to return the chocolate chips to the pantry.

This memory makes me think about Adam and Eve. They tried to hide from God after eating the forbidden fruit too. They knew it was wrong, but somehow thought if they hid it, God wouldn't know. The thing is God knows everything. How silly we must look to God. How disappointed God must feel that we do this over and over. I can almost see God shaking his head and muttering under his breath, "These people, they really think I don't know what they are doing?" And God forgives repeatedly and leads us back into the light.

We are living in the light of the Lord. So we need to live as people of light. Ephesians tells us "For this light within you produces what is good, right, and true." God grant us the courage and ability to live in His light and love.

Lord, help us to live in your love and light. Help us to share your light and love with those around us.

Prayer Concern: That people may see God's light shining in us and through us.

Nancy Lacher

Goodness and Love

“Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”(v. 6)

When I saw this verse was available for Lenten devotions, I thought that should be OK for me to write and the date was just beyond our March 7 anniversary. We were married on March 7, 1981 in Alexandria, Virginia. At our wedding, it was just the two of us along with Pastor Beaver and Robert’s daughter and our real estate agent because he was a person we knew who could be a witness. We had moved to Virginia/Washington DC for Robert to work in the Forest Service’s Washington office.

God lead us to this mission church— Lutheran Church of the Abiding Presence— that was meeting in the elementary school just out our back door across the wooded brook and the grassy playground. Instantly we had a church family because they, like us, were new to the area too.

And so it was with each of our moves. God led the way to a new Church home and fed us with his holy communion and new friends. “Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (v6)

While this verse is often used in the memorial services of our loved ones as it was for Robert, it is also a verse for us in our current lives in the kingdom come here on earth in this time with Christ now and forever.

Lord, help us to remember that your earthly kingdom is here now with your Son Jesus walking with us each day. Amen

Prayer concern: that we may know Christ’s love every day and share it with those around us.

Carolyn Bye

Blind Belief

For most of my life, I lived with severe myopia. Without glasses, the world was a blur—shapes without clarity, movement without detail. I depended completely on lenses to see, and I accepted that limitation as normal. When cataracts entered the picture, what felt like another loss became, unexpectedly, a doorway to healing. Through surgery and new lenses, my sight was restored in a way I never imagined. For the first time, I no longer needed glasses. I could see clearly—freely.

When I read John 9, I recognize myself in the man born blind. His healing was not only about sight, but about transformation. As his vision cleared, so did his understanding of who Jesus was. Step by step, he moved from being healed, to testifying, to believing—until finally he said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped Him.

That progression speaks to me deeply. Physical sight taught me something about spiritual sight. Just because something is loud, confident, or familiar does not mean it is clear—or true.

As a Christian, I am learning to ask a different question: Does the outside world help me see Christ more clearly? If it fuels fear, anger, or division, then it may be sharpening blindness rather than sight. The man in John 9 did not need a perfect argument—he needed honesty and faith. He simply testified to what Jesus had done and allowed worship to be his response.

Having once lived with blurred vision, I do not want to return to spiritual myopia. I want to see clearly—to live as a Christian first and foremost, shaped by Christ. In a culture drawn to darkness and outrage, I choose light. Like the man who was healed, my response is simple and enduring:

“Lord, I believe.” And in believing, I worship Your Holy Name. Amen

Prayer Concern: Those who do not see the light of Christ.

Sin, Confession and Redemption

So, justice is far from us, and righteousness does not reach us. We look for light, but all is darkness: for brightness, but we walk in deep shadows. Like the blind we grope along the wall, feeling our way like people without eyes.” (vv. 9-10a NIV)

I love to read books. The current book I am reading is *Amazing Grace The Life of John Newton and the Surprising Story Behind His Song*, by Bruce Hindmarsh and Craig Borlase. John Newton worked in the slave trade in the 1700's and was known for his profanity, cruelty, drunkenness, disrespect, and mockery of Christianity, so much so that he was known on ship as a wretch. After many years in the slave trade, God brought him to salvation. He was convicted of many sins but stayed in the slave trade. He thought of it as a business. Later, he repented of that as well. The first verse of “Amazing Grace” says “Amazing grace how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

Isaiah speaks to people who are religious but just going through the motions, their hearts not truly desiring God. He describes the consequences of our sin:

First, it separates us from God. We experience violence, deceit, injustice, death, chaos, spiritual blindness and darkness.

Next, he describes confession and repentance, a turning back to God.

Finally, he describes redemption which results in peace, justice and light which gives us the ability to see our condition clearly.

Dear God, when we see the darkness the world is in, help us to see that we all add to it when we sin against you.

Prayer concern: That we may walk in the light.

Charlie Anderson

God's Transforming Love

*We ask God to give you a complete understanding of what he wants to do in your lives, and we ask him to make you wise with spiritual wisdom.
(v. 9b, NLT)*

On more occasions than I like to admit, I find myself praying for things I want God to do, instead of opening myself up to discover the hopes and dreams He has for me. Perhaps this is true for you too.

So, what are these desires that God carries in His Heart for each one of us?

I believe the first one is that we grow to know Him “better and better.” Allowing God free access to our hearts allows God to wake us up to the unconditional love He has for each one of us. Think of the Father in the story of the Prodigal Son. God is just like that. He loves each one of us just as we are in this moment. There is nothing we can do to earn His love, or to make Him fall out of love with us. How freeing is that?

The reason I believe this is important is because once we are immersed and grounded in His love for us, it naturally spills out into our lives. And as our hearts open they become conduits of His Love and Kindness to the world. This is how healing happens.

I think the “spiritual wisdom” God wants to give us is the same He gave to Jesus. And that was to be aware of each moment as an opportunity share His love. All we have to do is ask ourselves, “What is the next, most loving action that I can take in this moment God?” By being present with God to what is going on around, and in us, we will find the meaning and purpose he has for each one of us in our lives. God's love will first transform us, then through us the world around us.

Lord, Thank you for always being there for me, whether I am aware of your Presence, or not.

Prayer Concern: That we may truly experience God's unconditional love for us.

Patty Westerfield

Don't fall for sin! Live in God's freedom of grace!

Do you not know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life.(vv. 3-4)

There's a saying that comes to mind here, 'out with the old, in with the new.' It is most often used to describe a time of transition and change. I wonder if Holy Baptism can be seen as such a time? This seems to be the image that Paul uses in his description of the holy bath that conveys the covenant of baptism. This image came onto focus for our Mid High Camp @ COH bible study group as we reflected on this passage from Romans. Be invited today to use their words and phrases for your own contemplation in devotion:

- Everyone will have a new life and will leave the old life of sin. – Colton
- We have a new life free of sin and full of the Holy Spirit. – Halle
- When you get baptized and raised from the water you have new grace, and a new life resurrected from your sins. – John
- You will be resurrected from your sin. – Sam
- I will be home in Christ – a paraphrase of Atlas
- God gave us a second life and took away our sins. – Jonny
- We find freedom in Christ – a paraphrase of Addy
- Live a new life under the Holy Spirit. – Jacob
- Thus a Christian life is nothing else than a daily baptism, begun once and continuing ever after. – Dr. Martin Luther, Large Catechism

Gracious God, we bless you for the gift of Holy Baptism that proclaims new life in Christ. Help me remember my baptism, confess my sin, and walk in newness of life in Christ. Amen.

Prayer concern: for those preparing for baptism and those preparing to affirm their baptism.

“Eating” God’s Word

He said to me, Mortal, eat this scroll that I give you and fill your stomach with it. (v. 3:3)

There’s the story of the policeman who pulled over a driver, ordered him out of the car and unceremoniously searched him. The driver was incredulous. “Why,” he asked. “I wasn’t speeding or doing anything illegal.” The policeman explained that he had observed the driver exhibiting extremely rude behavior to other drivers. The cop said, “I saw all the Christian bumper stickers and assumed the car was stolen!”

I can remember when one of my kids caught me doing something I had told them not to do. “Do as I say not as I do” didn’t carry any weight at all. I was expected to be a good example for my kids to follow. By telling the Prophet Ezekiel he must “eat” the scroll, he’s saying that, before Ezekiel can prophesy to Israel, he must internalize the message and let it become an integral part of him. And, just like Ezekiel, our credibility and authority as Christians come, not from what we say, but by living fully in God’s Word.

Lord, help me always to let Your Word shape my life so that others may see your love through me.

Prayer concern: People who are struggling to understand God’s place in their heart.

Duane Meneely

Kingdom Shift

The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah and he will reign forever and ever. (v. 15, NIV)

A kingdom involves laws, rules, a culture, a telos, and a purpose. The rule of this world's kingdom is survival of the fittest, the strong and ruthless win, and those with the most have power. The telos (the ultimate aim and vision of the good life) is that of prosperity, comfort, and status at any cost. This kingdom results in oppression, suffering, and death.

In Romans 8, Paul tells us that all of creation is groaning and longing for the day of God's kingdom because it has been subjected to "frustration". In Greek, this word means aimlessness, lacking purpose and meaningfulness. This is the reality of this world's kingdom – meaninglessness.

This past year, we have undergone dramatic leadership changes at work. Leadership creates a form of micro-kingdom. Those who were in the "inner circle" of the first leader are now "out". As it will be with the New Kingdom shift. Those in power now, those who oppress and do evil, will be judged and those who are "last shall be first".

This kingdom shift will be astounding – darkness to light, chaos to order, and death to life. This is our hope, the light and life of Easter. A complete kingdom shift to God's rule fully lived out throughout all creation reflecting God's love and goodness. This kingdom shift began with Jesus' resurrection and will be fully manifest when heaven and earth are one. As we await His coming, we are to reflect this coming kingdom through our lives. When we see so much chaos, oppression, and death this passage tells us to hold on because the King with his kingdom shift is coming.

For hope, courage, and perseverance for all who are suffering under this world's kingdom. May we be the light of Easter hope in the world.

Learning to Wait Without Chasing

“I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I hope.” (v. 5, NRSV)

Psalm 130 begins with a simple, honest truth: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.” The psalm does not explain how the speaker arrived in the depths, nor does it rush toward resolution. Instead, it names waiting as a faithful response to uncertainty, loss, or unanswered prayer.

Many of us are familiar with a kind of waiting that feels heavy—waiting for circumstances to change, for clarity to arrive, or for relationships to become more balanced and life-giving. Psalm 130 offers a different understanding of waiting. It does not describe waiting as effort or persistence directed toward others, but as a posture directed toward God.

The psalm reminds us that we are not asked to secure outcomes or manufacture redemption. Our role is to speak honestly to God, to remain attentive, and to entrust what we cannot control God’s mercy. Waiting, in this sense, is not passive, but faithful. It is a decision to stop striving for resolution on our own terms and to rest in God’s steadfast love.

During Lent, Psalm 130 invites us to practice this kind of waiting. We are called to release what is beyond our power, to listen for God’s voice, and to trust that forgiveness and redemption belong to the Lord. Even in the depths, God’s faithfulness remains.

Dear loving God, thank you for Jesus ’example of trusting you fully and not striving where love is not received. When we cry to you from the depths, help us wait with hope and place our trust in your mercy. Teach us to release what we cannot change and listen for what our hearts need from you. Amen.

Prayer Concern: For all who are waiting for clarity, healing, or peace, that they may feel held by God’s steadfast love.

Anticipation

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?” (v. 25-26)

I had not planned on writing a devotion for this scripture, just as our sister in Christ had not planned to be hospitalized and unable to write her devotion. Lazarus had not planned to become sick and die. Martha and Mary had not anticipated or planned for Jesus’s delay in coming. We often confuse God’s delay with denial. Jesus had a deliberate plan in his delay. Lazarus had been dead for four days by the time Jesus arrived, an seemingly impossible situation. Why did Jesus delay? He loved Lazarus, Martha and Mary. His deliberate plan was to reveal a glory far greater than a simple healing... He was not just a healer but the **Resurrection and the Life.**

Jesus did not put aside the pain and grief that Mary and Martha felt. Jesus was moved deeply by their pain and “Jesus wept.”(v35) God shares our pain, our grief, our sadness and walks with us in love through the journey of challenges and hurt. Jesus feels our sorrow.

We often build our faith on a planned timeline, anticipating answers to prayers . We want things to go along smoothly, without obstacles and sometimes the way we think it should go. Faith is calling upon our God to journey beside us in light and darkness trusting “it” is in His hands. Anticipate His love and walk in His light!

Good and Gracious God, thank you that You are the resurrection and the life. Help me to trust in your perfect timing. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those living in darkness.

Sherrie Simek

A Miracle and a Prophecy?

Then he stretched himself upon the child three times and cried to the Lord, "O Lord my God, let this child's life come into him again" (v. 21, NIV)

This story certainly declares God's power over life and death. But I see more in it than just a miracle. I see a prophet acting out a prophecy.

In some African cultures of that time, lying on the body of a dead person was a way of paying respect for and the acknowledging the death of that person. The fact that Elijah did this three times is significant. The Jews believed that a person was legally and physically dead only after three days. Elijah's actions of lying down on the child's dead body three separate times is, perhaps, symbolic of the three days Jesus lay in the tomb. Then, as we know, the widow's dead child comes back to life.

In any case, the message is clear that God controls both life and death. We, too, shall die. And we, too, shall be raised to life eternal. Praise God!

Heavenly Father, Thank you for the truth of your word which tells us of your great love for us. Thank you for the indwelling of your Holy Spirit which testifies to us in a most personal way, your presence with us and your love for us. May we always feel your presence hear your voice and follow your leading. Renew us each day so that we might live out your presence before others. In Jesus' name, AMEN

Jerry Burton

Mess in the Masterpiece

“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”. (v. 10)

YOU ARE GOD’S MASTERPIECE! I know someday it just doesn’t feel like that. You say the wrong thing, you feel you are not quite good enough, you are never right, or you feel overwhelmed and over your head, or in other words, you are a mess! Paul reminds us in his letter to the church in Ephesus, we are an intentional creation by the Divine Craftsman.

The Greek word for masterpiece is *poiema*, the root of the English word poem which is defined as a piece of art filled with imagination, and love. You are a deliberate work of art, handcrafted by God designed with love and care intentionally created for specific works. Each one of us have been given gifts from our Lord, to use to love and serve others with humility and grace. We each have distinct qualities...our talents, our passions, our dreams. Embrace the differences in each of us and celebrate the uniqueness. Accept our neighbors as they are.

So when you are having “one of those days”, look in the mirror and say “I am a masterpiece created by God!” Show love and light to those you meet along this journey.

Dear God, guide us to remember “We are the World”, created with our own uniqueness and gifts to go out into the world and be a light!

Prayer concern: Those feeling unworthy.

Sherrie Simek

Jesus' Last Sip

'Mark my words--I will not drink wine again until the day I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom.' (v. 29)

Milo was on a hike with his family in Badlands National Park in South Dakota. The trailhead had a sign warning travelers that there was no water available on the trail. However, Milo was equipped with a water bottle, so he did not contemplate the importance of the sign. The hike lasted a few hours. He was so engrossed with the hike and exploring, that when he sipped his last drop from his water bottle, he was unaware of the danger. The family continued forward. Milo's tongue became dry. His mouth tasted dusty. Step after step, his body felt hot and heavy. The thirst caused his head to feel foggy. Finally, the family returned to the visitor's center. There he found a water fountain. The first sip of water was glorious. He drank until he was refreshed, and all his hurting was over.

The upper elementary school students imagined what the first drink in Heaven would be like after life on Earth. Words like *glorious*, *astonishing*, and *refreshing* were used. One student said it would be like eating your favorite food and drink for the first time. What an experience it will be! Jesus was there at the Last Supper on Earth, and because of Easter, He will be there with us for our first meal in Heaven! Jesus yesterday, today, and forever!

Dear Lord, Thank you that we have better food waiting in Heaven than on Earth. We look forward to life in Heaven with you in glory.

Prayer Concern: Please help keep our food and water on Earth clean and healthy.

Wednesday Night Camp 3rd, 4th, and 5th Graders

God Will Equip Us For His Calling

He is tending the sheep" (v. 11)

Tending the sheep in David's time was not a low status job. Caring for and protecting the sheep was a hard and dangerous job. The sheep were representative of the master's entire wealth. Through this "domestic" responsibility, God was preparing David to accept responsibility, develop courage, and learning to love his wards, the sheep. David also learned to trust and depend on God.

David's older brothers were fit men of war, but God had prepared David to be brave and compassionate. He also had learned that God was faithful.

God equipped David for God's calling. In like manner, God prepares us for His calling so that we will hear and obey.

Almighty God, Prepare us each day for your service. Where we are weak, make us strong in You. Where we lack discernment, give us Your insights. Where we are reluctant, give us the strength of Your presence. Give us your love for our neighbors. Make us ambassadors for Christ, our Savior. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Jerry Burton

To Live in Christ is Lasting Peace in Uncertainty

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (v.21, NIV)

Life is hard. Even as a person of faith, life is hard. Even when just about everything is going well in our personal lives, our hearts are always going out to someone else who is suffering. For that is the beat of a Christian heart...when one suffers, we all suffer. But here, the Apostle Paul isn't speaking out of suffering, depression or despair – "I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" – he just wants to see what is behind the curtain. He wants that day to come when hope won't be necessary because our deepest hopes will be fulfilled. That day when only love is left. I want that day too. I look forward to all of that...or whatever will be. If I didn't believe in life after death, if I didn't believe in the resurrection, my future would be bleak and hopeless.

But Paul knows he still has work to do. "But to remain in the flesh is more necessary for you." People depend on him. He has a calling to fulfill. He is living God's purpose for his life and that is all Paul can do. The rest of the stuff, the ever-after stuff, is up to God. For now, Paul must do what only Paul can do, for the good of all those yet to come. It is the same for us. Only we can do what only we can do. One day at a time. One step at a time. One action at a time.

Knowing all of this puts life in perspective: Generously giving one more item that will be useful in the life of someone else. Listening to a hurting friend. Even changing a baby's diaper takes on a certain holiness, a "give us this day our daily bread" kind of spin. All of it, every moment of every day, is one step closer to that day at the end. But there is no way to get there without all these little steps along the way.

Dear Lord, may we be persistent and faithful, even in the face of all that is hard and discouraging. Thank you for the promise of eternal life and for the reality of that eternal life breaking into the little moments of each day between now and then.

Prayer concern: I pray we can all wake up each day, free from worry about when or how we'll die, and instead be prayerfully asking for opportunities to share the gift of salvation through Jesus with others before their life ends.

Sheri Phillips

Trusting God

But I trust in you, O Lord; I say, "You are my God." (v. 14)

I love how David begins verse 9 of Psalm 31 with an honest heart. He writes, "Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am in distress; my eyes waste away from grief, my soul and body also." I know without a doubt that I have cried out these very words, perhaps not as eloquently as King David, but I have certainly felt that I am at my end, devastated in both my body and soul. Going through a divorce with two small boys in tow found me grief stricken for years. Crying out for God to lift the weight of responsibility that I thought was on my shoulders alone, and then stamping my foot in protest as I foolishly carried the weight. Arguing with the almighty that he has it all wrong, that I cannot do what he is asking me to do.

Praise God that he did not leave me there, nor has he left you there if you find yourself crying out in agony. The hope comes in the small word found in verse 14, "but." But, I choose to trust (v14). I choose to lift my head so that God's face can shine on me (v16). I surrender my pain because I know your hand will deliver me (v15). I do know that you are the God that loves intensely. Do you know this as well? If you are wrestling, cry out to the God of hope and rest in him. Our honesty is needed, but so is our confidence that God is trustworthy!

Lord, help me to trust you when I am at the end of myself. Thank you for calling me your child.

Prayer concern: That we may trust in God's steadfast love.

Susan Rivera
COH Director of School Ministry

The Humble King Who Comes Near

“Tell the daughter of Zion, Look your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” (v.5, NRSV)

Palm Sunday marks the moment Jesus enters Jerusalem, fully stepping into his calling. The crowds expect power and spectacle, spreading cloaks and branches while shouting “Hosanna!” Yet Jesus comes quietly—humble, gentle, and faithful—knowing the road ahead will not be easy.

This day reminds us that God often works in ways that seem small or unexpected but are deeply powerful. When we look for certainty instead of surrender, we can miss how near Jesus truly is. He meets us in ordinary moments and invites us to lay down our fears, expectations, and need for control.

Palm Sunday has always held special meaning for me because it reveals Jesus’ desire to meet us exactly where we are. Though worthy of a crown, He chooses humility, making Himself accessible and welcoming. He calls us to come as we are—imperfect yet deeply loved—confident that no one who seeks Him will be turned away.

Beginning a new role as preschool director feels like stepping into such a moment: filled with excitement, uncertainty, and hope. This passage reminds me that God does not require us to have every answer—only a willing heart. As we move forward, Palm Sunday asks an important question: Are we welcoming the King who fits our plans, or the One who transforms our hearts?

**Faithful God, thank you for meeting us at the start of new journeys.
When the path feels unfamiliar, it helps us lead with humility and trust. Go before us and guide each step. Amen.**

Prayer concern: That we would serve others with wisdom, patience, and peace.

Trisha McClain
COH Director of Preschool Ministry

Contrasting Hearts

“Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair.”

(v.3)

Our actions reveal what our hearts have for Jesus. We possess many contrasting hearts for Jesus throughout our faith journey.

Our story in John shows Jesus attending a dinner party held by his dear friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus, in his honor. The atmosphere is one of gratitude and joy celebrating Lazarus, who is alive and well. Mary displays an extravagant, loving heart. She has given Jesus the costliest gift she has to offer. By anointing Jesus's feet, Mary shows a humble and generous heart. Her gift shows she treasures Jesus more than anything else in her world. Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples, displays a dark, heart filled with greed and hypocrisy. And as we know, later he displays a heart of evil and betrayal. His heart values money and views Mary's gift as wasteful. Martha displays the heart of a faithful servant honoring Jesus through her gift of hospitality and great devotion. Lazarus displays a heart of powerful loyalty and quiet witness as he sits in Jesus presence.

Our actions speak louder than words. Where we spend our time, where we spend our money and how we treat others tell the tale of our hearts. Do we lead with love and light or greed and pride? What is your heart motive?

Compassionate God, Lead our hearts to be loving and kind. Guide us to be the light in our community.

Prayer Concern: People that are hungry, without consistent shelter, and alone.

Sherrie Simek

Seeds of Wheat

“Unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds.” (v, 24, NIV)

I have unrealized visions of grandeur when it comes to gardens. My mom always had an amazing vegetable garden. I have tried growing from seeds. Have you seen a lettuce seed? It is so tiny. How could you ever guess that it would become lettuce? But that tiny seed holds the lettuce within it.

Wheat seeds hold the essence, the potential, the “wheat-ness” within them but they are not wheat yet. The seed must die. Dying is how the seed fulfills its purpose and becomes all that it was created to be.

This passage not only foreshadows Jesus’ death and resurrection, but more importantly, it is the hope and promise of Easter. We will be resurrected. Not like Lazarus. He just came back to life to continue living like he did before. But rather, it is the seed becoming wheat. “Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him” (1 John 3:2). We will become complete ‘wheat-ness’ – fully all we were created to become.

Jesus goes on to say, “now the time has come.” ‘Now’, in this passage, is a transition term. Like saying, “now, let’s talk about x”. You are not referencing time but rather saying ‘in light of all we previously talked about, let us transition to this conclusion’. Jesus is saying that now is the time of His kingdom both in time and as transition. We get to be a part of this kingdom now as we reflect His light in this dark world. A day is coming when it will become fully manifest. “He will come again to judge the living and the dead and His kingdom will have no end.” In that day we will be transformed and resurrected into all ‘wheat-ness’.

May the hope of resurrection grant us to courage to hold on and be light in the darkness.

Invitations

“Very truly I tell you, One of you is going to betray me” (v. 21, NIV)

As I reflect upon the experiences of betrayal in my life, I realize the greatest wounds came from those to whom I entrusted the most. If you knew ahead of time that someone was going to betray you, would you entrust anything to him or treat him differently? Jesus did both. Jesus knew that Judas was going to betray him. But Jesus loved him as all the other disciples, such that the other disciples had no clue to whom Jesus was referring. Just preceding this passage, Jesus washed his disciples' feet. This included Judas. Jesus knew he would betray him but still he washed his feet.

In John 12 we learn that as the keeper of the group's money, Judas would regularly steal. Yet Jesus did not take the job away from him. Each time they received money, it was an invitation to choose God's way over the world and self.

How many invitations has Jesus given me? How many times have I chosen self over God's way? As I reflect, I can think of times the invitation to serve another came at a cost to self and I accepted the invitation, receiving blessing and joy in return. But I can also think of times when I was given the invitation and I chose self – to protect myself from embarrassment, discomfort, inconvenience, or sacrifice.

The heart of God is so clear in this passage. Even knowing that Judas was stealing and would betray him, He continued to love him and to offer him invitations to choose God's way.

Tune our awareness to hear your invitations and grant us the courage and strength to choose your way.

Laura Burton

I never say the right thing

He (Jesus) came to Stands on the Rock (Peter), who said to him, "Wisdomkeeper, are you going to wash my feet?" "You do not understand how what I am doing, but later you will," he answered. "No! Stands on the Rock (Peter) lifted his voice. "This can never be!" Creator Sets Free (Jesus) looked deep into his eyes and said, "If you refuse this, then you have no part in who I am." (v. 6-8, First Nations Version)

I can't ever do anything right. I never say the right thing. I'm awkward. I'm stupid. I'm always behind everybody else. I'm the worst in the class. I'm slow. I can't "get" it. I always make things worse.

That sure seems to describe Peter, doesn't it? Every time he opens his mouth, he inserts his foot. He tries and tries and never "gets it." He makes a fool of himself.

And how often do I say the same thing to myself? I messed up that turn. I missed that jump. I didn't practice enough. I didn't get my exercises done this morning. I'm behind on a huge mass of paperwork. Oops! I almost forgot to pay that bill! My desk is a mess. The computers are in such bad shape I can't find anything. The yard. The house. The gig I didn't get because I didn't sell it quite right.

The problem is that God only talks if I shut up long enough to listen. I can't say the wrong thing when I'm not talking! My voice teacher used to say, "Let it go!" She was right. When I let it go and listen, God talks.

God, help me close my mouth and listen.

Prayer concern: May God's light and love shine on all people and guide our words and actions.

Keri Sutter

**“Rejoice, For Our Lord Has Borne Our Guilt,
And We Have Been Set Free!**

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. (v. 53:5, NIV)

It's easy for us to focus on the first part of this verse; Jesus “was pierced for our transgressions”. However, Jesus was also crushed for our iniquities. He bore the punishment which should have been ours to bear. And, He was wounded so that we might be healed and receive peace.

These are the aspects of Jesus' suffering that we find painful to think about. We often react with sorrow (appropriately), ask for forgiveness and move on to think of happier things.

I think we miss an important step in this “mourning” process.

When King David acknowledged his sin with Bathsheba, he not only acknowledged his failure, but he also asked to be remade. I couple Psalm 51:10-12 with Isaiah 52. We should not be defeated by our failures, but renewed in spite of them.

**Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me now away from Your presence; And take not Your Holy Spirit
from me. Restore unto me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me
with Your free spirit. Amen (Psalm 51:10-12)**

Prayer concern: May you be renewed!

Jerry Burton

Darkness without the Light

"I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God"
(v. 17, NIV)

Sometimes in our darkest valley "we mutter Lord where did you go?"

We look and he is not there, you feel as Mary did at the sight of the empty tomb. Here the disciples find the empty linen.

"Where is Jesus? Where has he gone?" They wonder, as they contemplate they come to understand the scriptures, that to be fulfilled, Jesus must rise from the dead. Afterward, they went home.

Mary looked into the tomb and saw two white robed angels one at the head the other at the foot where Jesus had been laying. "Dear woman why are you crying?" "Who are you looking for?" They asked. She said to them "they have taken away my Lord and I don't know where they have put him."

She turned and Jesus was standing there "Rabboni" she cried. Jesus said "'don't cling to me I have not yet ascended to the Father," but go and tell my brothers 'I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God'

Sharing that he will never leave us, but always be with us and we will be with him and the Father together we are never alone, he will always be there when we seek him.

Father we thank you 🙏 for the love of Jesus in heaven and that he is always there when we seek him. To give us grace and hope.

Prayer concern: People struggling to feel the Lord

Elisa McClellan

Overwhelming Light

[The angle of the Lord's] appearance was light lightning and his clothing white as snow. (v. 3)

If every Sunday is a 'little Easter' that always shines the light of the resurrection, then Easter Sunday must be the brightest of the year! Set amidst the lengthening days in the springtime of the Northern Hemisphere, all creation seems to be emerging from the depth of winter to bear the new life of another summer on the horizon. Today the Alleluia's return and ring out of our song and speech to proclaim the good news that 'Jesus is not here, for he has been raised.' This was overwhelming good news to the Marys that morning, to the disciples who received their testimony, and to the world throughout time.

As the first day of the week was dawning (there's that growing light image again!), the light of God's good news was suddenly overwhelming. This is the gospel account that tells of the earthquake and angel of God physically rolling away the stone that had sealed the tomb of Jesus' burial. This is Easter Sunday! No time for subtlety, and so too was the light overwhelming. I love the physicality of the detail that the angel of the Lord 'sat on it' after rolling away the very real stone from the very real tomb that had previously held the very real crucified body of Jesus.

The angel's appearance was like lightning. Sudden. Overwhelmingly bright. Powerful. And the angel's clothing white as snow. A little harder for our New Mexican minds to recall perhaps, but if you've ever stood under a bright moon in a field of fresh snow, you may recall thinking you need your sunglasses! Overwhelming light to illumine the now empty tomb and send the women clearly on their way with the best news ever: Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

We bless you risen Christ for this most holy day. Fill us anew with your steadfast love and send your light to guide our path to share your light and love with the world. Amen.

Invitation to prayer: for the church gathered in worship throughout this holy day.

Pastor Adam Berndt

Journey with Us in Worship

Lent – Holy Week – Easter
2026

Ash Wednesday, February 18, 2026

Worship – 12:00 noon and 7:00 p.m.

Sundays, February 22, March 1, 8, 15, 22

8:45 and 10:45 a.m.

Palm Sunday, March 29

One Worship at 10:00 a.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 2

Worship – 7:00 p.m.

Good Friday, April 3

Worship – 7:00 p.m.

Vigil of Easter, April 4

Easter Day, April 5

Worship – 8:45 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

