



LENTEN DEVOTIONS FOR
REFLECTION AND RENEWAL

Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and Schools
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Lent 2022

FOREWORD

Turning Toward God's Abundance

Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love. Joel 2:13

We sing this verse from Joel as our Gospel Acclamation during the season of Lent. With it, we welcome the stories of Jesus that call us to reflect and focus on repentance and God's amazing grace. Turning to God and asking for God's goodness and mercy to forgive our sins and show us how to live anew in the abundant life of God is the gift of Lent.

We also turn toward Easter and the abundant life that is proclaimed through Holy Week and the Three Days – Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil of Easter. God in Christ Jesus passing over from death to life. This good news is the center of our faith and the hope in which we journey.

Through the 40 days of Lent, join us in turning toward God's abundance in devotion. With the community of faith at Cross of Hope Lutheran Church, encounter scripture, contemplate in reflection, and pray together as we turn toward God's abundance.

We are grateful for the members of this faith community who have offered prayerful reflection for our life in devotion together this season of Lent. We are grateful for the heartfelt coordination and production of Nancy Morrison without whom this resource would not be possible.

Peace,
R. Adam Berndt, Pastor

Dust we are

***Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit. (v. 12)***

David Kovarik has been introducing us to the band *The Brilliance* for years now in worship on Ash Wednesday. It has been a great gift to me, and I pray it may be for you too as we begin our journey through the season of Lent again this year. With the psalmist, we seek God's mercy, confess our 'dustiness' and cry out to be restored with the spirit of God that is salvation and life for this journey as we turn toward God's abundance.

For your meditation, the lyrics to Dust We Are by *the Brilliance*:

From dust we've come and
Dust we are and shall return
Be still my soul and let it go
Just let it go

Glory to God, Glory to God in the highest
Glory to God, Glory to God in the highest

Naked we came and shall
Return into the grave
Be still my soul and let it go
Just let it go

Be still my soul
Lord make me whole
Lord make me whole

In our stillness this day O God, help us see and know our wholeness in you. Renew us with this journey through Lent to let go of our fear and self-righteousness and give glory always to you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer concern: Those crying out for a clean heart and a new start.

Great things

Why, Lord, why have you brought trouble... (v. 22, NIV)

Trouble can bring despair or increase one's faith. If Moses had simply asked Pharaoh to let his people go and Pharaoh had said, "Okay", then no other intervention by God would have been necessary. There would have been no great signs and wonders, no Passover feast, no fear of a pursuing Egyptian army, and no parting of the Red Sea. There would have been very little evidence of God's intervention and therefore very little faith in God generated.

Gideon had little confidence that God would help him defeat the Midianite army. Gideon had 30,000 men against 33,000, so the odds weren't too bad. Still, Gideon tried the "fleece" test on God.

When God reduced the size of his army from 30,000 to just 300, Gideon learned what real faith was. And sure enough, God, with an enormous challenge, performed an enormous work.

But, these stories are not about Moses or Gideon doing great things. They are about God doing great things.

I once thought that my faith was about doing great things for God. I had it all backwards. It's all about having enough faith to get out of the way and let God do great things for me and through me, as He wills.

Almighty God, maker of Heaven and Earth, help me to listen to your Spirit. Help me to get out of the way when you want me to, and to boldly step up by faith when you call me to.

Prayer concern: Oh, God, help us so that we might better listen to your Holy Spirit.

Jerry Burton

Trust

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust." (v. 1-2)

As I read through the verses in this Psalm, I found it to be so thematic to what our world has experienced in the past two years. We have all been trusting God to provide constant wisdom, protection, and comfort from a raging virus. I have held tightly to my trust in God that his angels would see us all through this.

I started teaching in 1981, when ditto machines with the purple dye were the bomb. Using that form of "technology" and then moving to using an overhead projector, were my biggest worries. Modern technology has proven to be more my enemy than friend in the last two years! I am a digital immigrant.

I'm still reeling from the trauma of being a teacher in March of 2020, when our world sent me into a technological learning curve that was almost unbearable. I had to quickly learn how to teach using video, how to manipulate my video from going from myself on the screen to showing actual text on the screen at the same time. The most common statements from my students were, "Mrs. Bagby, you're muted!"

I remember my positive promises to students that things would get better and we would get back to "normal" by the end of the year, and then by the end of the first month of school in the fall, etc. God assures me that he will protect those who know His name.

Lord, please continue to give shelter and refuge from this virus that is still with us. Amen.

Prayer concern: Students and teachers continue to persevere during this time.

Lynne Bagby

How does it all fit together?

For, Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (v. 13)

I find it very helpful, especially in anxious or uncertain times to somehow get a glimpse of the “big picture.” That is probably one of the reasons that I like Google Maps and GPS. Satellite view is my favorite setting where I can see the rooftops, trees, and identifying features that can help me find my way. My big picture feelings may go way back to a canoe trip I took as a teenager in the Boundary Waters of northern Minnesota. I got desperately lost in the tall trees for several hours. If I had checked the map at the beginning of the day, I might have noticed that the trail took an important turn in a new direction.

In the letter to the Romans, Paul was informing his readers of God’s new direction of bringing salvation to all people. It was actually a reaffirmation of God’s original intention and purpose through the words of the Prophet Joel (2:32) “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.” But “Everyone?” God’s intention? Just “call on the name of the Lord?” It seems too simplistic! What about motivating people to be good!

What I do get from this big picture of God’s intention is that God is in the incredible salvation business and we are in the business of proclaiming God’s astounding and amazing grace to all people, not just to those we might feel are worthy. Why? Because we are also recipients of God’s undeserved and amazing grace!

**Lord work through me to proclaim your great good news
of saving hope in all that I do and say. Amen.**

Prayer concern: For all who are hungering for words and actions of restoration and salvation.

Pastor Russ Sorensen

Temptation

***Then Jesus ... was led by the Spirit into the wilderness,
being tempted for forty days by the devil. (v. 1-2a)***

There are definitely two competing stories in this verse; one shows the devil's intent and the other shows Jesus' self-awareness. The devil tells of self-indulgence (make yourself bread from stones), self-aggrandizement (all the nations of the world are yours, if you worship me), and self-serving religious identity (if you are the son of God cast yourself from the top of the temple). He even quotes Psalms in his delivery.

Jesus responds with his own quotations from the Old Testament showing the true source of life and identity (life is more than food), his reliance on God (the one worthy of worship), and his understanding of God's character (not one to be tested). Jesus demonstrates his dependence on God rather than self for life, glory, and for his identity.

When I feel I am being tempted by the devil it is usually about food – for me, food that I should not eat - or it is about being judgmental. There are bible verses to remind me what God expects of me for these temptations: Proverbs 25:16, "If you have found honey, eat only enough for you, lest you have your fill of it" and Luke 6:37 warns "judge not and you will not be judged." It is really all there, the answers to all of our questions and temptations, we just need to find, read and understand it.

Dear Lord, I pray that you help us all understand the source of our identity is you and your love for us. You give your love abundantly and fully so we should do the same. Amen

Prayer concern: Growing spiritually without distractions and temptations.

Karen Schwartz

Standing tall

And David said to God, “Was it not I who ordered the fighting men counted? I am the one who sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? O Lord my God, let your hand fall upon me and my family” (v. 17, NIV)

It often makes the lead story in the news when business leaders fail to take or when they accept responsibility. In my time as a senior executive for a national nonprofit we often discussed the need to accept responsibility as a leader and often used the adage of what “what would you do if ‘60 Minutes’ came knocking on your door.”

The former Navy sub commander Scott Waddle, whose ship collided with a Japanese fishing boat, killing nine civilians provides a classic example of taking responsibility. Although an investigation determined that some of his men had made errors, Captain Waddle took responsibility for the incident. While he was reprimanded for the accident, he has been largely regarded as a hero for taking full responsibility for his actions and the actions of his crew, never once diverting any criticism to them.

Taking responsibility for failure is a hallmark of a great leader. In this verse from 1st Chronicles, we see David accept full responsibility for his actions, his refusal to place blame elsewhere and acceptance of the Lord’s punishment. He did not try to hide his failures, blame others or shy away from God. He admitted his failure, sought the Lord’s mercy and moved back to the Lord. It is the same for each of us for sin is inevitable, temptations constant, and Satan always working to pull us away. What is as important as taking responsibility for our actions is learning from the mistake for in the Lords’ hands those mistakes become an opportunity for a new beginning.

Lord help us stand tall and acknowledge our sins and repent that we might grow closer to you. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who have suffered because they were wrongly blamed for another’s failure to accept responsibility.

Greg Morrison

Never-ending love

I call on you, my God, for you will answer me; turn your ear to me and hear my prayer. Show me the wonders of your great love, you who save by your right hand those who take refuge in you from their foes. (v. 6-7)

Song to listen to: *Reckless Love* by Cory Asbury

As a kid, I remember the warm feelings of my parents, grandparents and families' hugs. They were a warm embrace when I was sad, or happy, when we were excited about a performance or achievement, or when I was hurt. Their hugs were always there, and for me, were one of the biggest signs of love I could remember. I have often thought about God's never ending love as a giant hug which would catch me when I would fall, comfort me as I grieved, and was here to pat me on the back when I was excited.

This past summer, I was given the opportunity to work at Rainbow Trail Lutheran Camp. While spending my summer in the mountains of Colorado, we would often sing the song *Reckless Love* by Cory Asbury. As I read the above verse it reminds me of the song. As the song states, we cannot earn God's love, make it change, or make it any less. We can't lose or shake God's love off. To me, this love is God's hug to us.

As you move through your day today, take a second to say the breath prayer down below. Let it remind you of the hug of a loved one, and most importantly, God's never ending love for us.

**Breathe Prayer: Breathe In- No matter, no matter, no matter...
Breathe out- God's love is wonderful and great.**

Prayer concern: Anyone who feels that they are too far from love for any reason.

Anxieties of life

Be careful, or your hearts will be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness and the anxieties of life. (v. 34a)

Being weighed down with the anxiety of life is sometimes a good description of me. At 19 years old, Jane and I had been married just two months when my 49-year-old father drowned while snorkeling in Hawaii. My parents had adopted two young children with significant needs, and my mother had a very hard time raising both of them alone. Jane and I never could understand how this tragedy was for the good, yet we trust that we will ultimately understand when we are in heaven ourselves.

When Judas, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, betrayed Jesus to a horrible crucifixion, the rest of the disciples must have been very bewildered and anxious. Later when Jesus explained how his death and resurrection were necessary for our salvation, the pieces all fit together.

Sometimes in life we understand why things happen but not always. Problems such as death of loved ones, divorce, financial problems, our country so badly divided by political sides, COVID pandemic, etc., can cause us to worry and even be angry. These anxieties weigh us down. Part of Isaiah 30:15 says, "in quietness and trust is your strength."

Dear God, when we are fearful, and lack sleep and peace, calm our minds and let our hearts rest in you, knowing that nothing is any threat to your everlasting love. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those weighed down by anxiety

Charlie Anderson

“Are we there yet?”

So Abram moved his tent, and came and settled by the oaks of Mamre, which are at Hebron; and there he built an altar to the Lord. (v. 18)

We moved quite a bit while I was growing up. Five moves to five states in 19 years. The longest we ever lived in one place was just under five years. But along with all the moves came the benefit of so much travel! By the time I turned 18 I had traveled with my family to all 48 contiguous states, by car! As you might imagine, after about our third move I was quite hesitant to make new friends. Who knew how long we'd be living there? Being the “new girl” in school would always quickly wear off and I just couldn't compete with friends who had known each other since preschool. I never did feel like I belonged anywhere.

So, Abram's travels really caught my attention. God called him to “go!” and he did, without hesitation. But we read in Genesis 12 and 13 that the route he traveled wasn't so direct. There were several stops and detours over many years before he finally reached his final destination. Once he finally arrived back to Canaan and God asked him to raise his eyes and look around, that all the land that he could see would be his, I imagine as soon as he saw the biggest, shadiest tree he breathed a sigh of relief and finally “settled” down! He was home!

Our family has now called Albuquerque “home” for the past 11 ½ years. As an adult I recognize that all those moves as a child helped me to see so many different parts of our country, experience how others live and they have allowed me to connect with SO many people over the years, because, more than likely I can make a connection with where just about anyone is from in the USA!

Dear God, help us to remember that you are always with us. Our life journey is often confusing. It is filled with twists, turns and detours that often take a lifetime of experiences for us to make any sense of. Help us not to despair or worry, but trust you will continue to guide us in the direction you want us to go. Amen.

Prayer concern: Families who are moving.

An abundance of fear

I would have despaired unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord. Wait for the Lord: Be strong and let your heart take courage: Yes wait for the Lord. (v. 13-14)

People have asked me in the last 1 ½ years if I was afraid, fearful. I am battling cancer and definitely fear has overwhelmed me from time to time. I think David the author of this Psalm had fear also. Fear is a dark shadow that envelopes us and can ultimately imprison us. We all have had an abundance of fear at times. However, David knew because he believed his Lord that he would see the goodness of the Lord while he lived on earth, but had to WAIT and take courage. Zack Williams, a Christian musician writes: "Fear he is a liar. He robs our breath, steals our steps, robs us of rest, steals our happiness." We see what fear does! I have however, with God's abundance of patience, strength, prayer warriors and courage decided I would NOT let fear overcome me. It's hard at times not to feel negatively but GOD'S abundance overflows and covers our fears. I choose not to be fearful but choose to live in God's abundance and wait for Him. Maybe the title of this devotion should be "God's Overwhelming Abundance." I choose to live there.

Lord, thank you for your perfect abundance that overflows us in so many ways. How we love you. Amen.

Prayer concern: Cancer patients

Susan McWilliam

We are COH (Citizens of Heaven)

But our citizenship is in Heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. (v. 20)

Deep down inside, we always want more out of life. We want the newest, the latest, the freshest, the coolest. We want more. I think God has basically wired us that way. Yet as much as we live life, as much as we experience, as much as we see, it always seems it isn't quite enough. Why is that? Solomon tells us in Ecclesiastes that God has placed eternity in our hearts.

There is a recognition, deep down inside, that this world won't be able to deliver on its promises. As a song I learned at church camp goes, "This world is not my home; I'm just a passing through." Today's verse says our citizenship is in Heaven. When we put our faith in Jesus Christ, we become citizens of Heaven. That is our real home, not earth. This is why we will always be a bit out of tune with this world and all it celebrates. That is why certain things the world parades before us will leave us cold. As followers of Jesus, we want something more. We want much more. That is why we have this longing deep inside, a longing for something this earth can never deliver; but Heaven can. As Christians we will live happily ever after – in Heaven, in the presence of God!

**Dear God, remind us that we are your beloved children and that nothing can change that, and allow that promise to strengthen our resolve to live like children of the light and citizens of Heaven.
In Jesus' name, Amen.**

Prayer concern: That we are not driven by the temporary things on earth, but instead that our focus is on Jesus Christ and His return and that we do what pleases God.

Sheri Phillips

Gather your children together

***How often have I wanted to gather your children together
as a hen protects her chicks beneath her wings,
but you wouldn't let me. (v. 34, New Living Translation)***

March 13th is my mom's birthday. She was born in 1919, lived through the Great Depression and WWII. She was a caring mom to 5 daughters, who, I imagine, weren't always wanting to be gathered under her protective wings.

We all grew up independently. In today's language, I guess you could have called us free range children. We roamed the streets on our bikes and roller skates, came in after dark, had no seatbelts in cars, drank from garden hoses, and generally ran amok in the neighborhood. My mom would spend a lot of time trying to gather us all together for meals and baths and homework and protection. But we weren't having it. I guess we were a lot like the people in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. We turned away. We thought we knew best.

Our theme for Lent this year is "Turning Toward God's Abundance". God wants us to be protected, gathered in a safe and loving community (the church) like chicks under protective wings of the mother hen. But we won't have it. We want to be free range Christians. We want our Sundays for sports and follow God's laws when it suits us. We turn away, thinking we know best.

This Lenten season, let's turn back or repent and "turn toward God's abundance." Perhaps we can make it a habit to seek God's abundance in our daily lives even after Lent is over.

Lord, thank you for being patient with us when we want to do it our way. Help us to turn toward Your presence every day and experience Your abundance in Your glorious creation, in those around us, and in all You have done for us. In Jesus name, Amen.

Prayer concern: For mothers

Nancy Lacher

Ornaments to die for***So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb. (v. 6)***

We were given our freedom! We were offered this amazing place filled with “milk and honey”! All we could ever imagine and yet that wasn’t the here and now. Now was tough slogging through an unrelenting desert. Now was always remembering how “good” we had it back when we were slaves. The good old days that never were, but we held on to them anyway. We did have something to look forward to, but the newness had worn off long ago. Things weren’t right, God wasn’t among us anymore. He said we were stiff-necked, rebellious, stubborn; holding onto things that only ground down to grief, sorrow, and regret. We were alive, but not really living. If survival is all there is, then the cost was pretty steep. We’ve got anxiety, loss of peace, and depression, all so that we could hold onto those instant gratifications from the “good old days” that only rewarded us with a sense of emptiness and guilt. Not a very good rewards program if you ask me. So, we might be surviving, but what does truly living look like? It’s not holding onto the past and it’s not trying to grasp the future, though we look to it with hope. Living is in the present and it’s God amongst us. As Paul simply put it, living is Christ. Living is in the here and now with Christ leading the way. Living is having God’s peace even as we slog through whatever desert we are going through. Living is both a gift, grace to you through Christ Jesus, and a choice to live in the present with God. Let us choose this moment to strip ourselves of those ornaments of idolatry as the Israelites did. It is here that we come to our first step toward truly living. God loves us with an all encompassing and never ending love, even when we decide to be stiff-necked. His desire is to be among us leading the way. His desire is that we accept His love as the free gift that it is. Let us not put those ornaments back on. It’s time to turn back to the present and let us welcome God into our midst.

**Oh Lord, thank you for your love and acceptance that welcomes us.
We welcome you into our midst! Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those struggling to see God’s love and mercy for them.

He remembers promises

*He remembers his covenant forever,
the promise he made ... with Abraham (v. 8a, 9a)*

Many times in my life the Holy Spirit has reminded me to pray, praise, and count on the Lord to “show-up.” I’m so very grateful the Lord sent me to Albuquerque rather than Denver years ago. Then on to the body of Christ at Cross of Hope after Pr. Barth came to the door one day and invited us to attend! I had already decided I was going back to church because the girls were 4 yrs, Tara, and 18 months old, Kristen. I wanted them to know the Lord, so we came to worship!

Now I seek the presence of the Lord through daily devotions and He has shown me that He keeps His promises. The Lord has held me through many trials personally over the years, and COH also has suffered; yet our body of Christ remains together. Just as he said. Together we accomplish wonderful community impact acts of service.

I personally witness such support from so many of you toward Family promise of Albuquerque. Together we make the world a better place one child at a time, and sometimes several families at a time. You provide the gifts of prayers, your time, monetary blessings, food items, and even hot meals!! **PRAISE GOD from whom all blessings flow...**

Lord, help us continue our promise to support homeless families in Albuquerque because the children benefit the most. Amen.

Prayer concern: Homelessness

Jan Anderson

Be in line

***And behold, some are last who will be first,
and some are first who will be last. (v. 30 ESV)***

I have to confess that as a child, this verse only confused me. It just made no sense. As I have read and studied it through the years, the meaning has slowly come through.

How many of us have known someone who is just the perfect example of what someone should look like or act like in order to get into heaven. On the other hand, we have known those people who we say, “no way are they getting to heaven.” At least that’s what we think.

Okay, let’s make a list of those people who we think are on the fast track to heaven. Maybe it’s their looks, education or even how famous they are. Your grandmother will definitely be at the head of the line, she goes to church every Sunday, she makes blankets for the homeless, and she makes the best chocolate cookies ever. How about your favorite teacher who encouraged you to become a teacher, lawyer, or Pastor. Let’s not forget your best friend or how about that group of scientists who found a cure for Covid. They should be at the front of the line in my book.

We could make a similar list for those we think should be at the back of the line. Maybe, that kid who teased you in 6th grade or the girl who broke your heart or maybe you know someone who hasn’t always been honest on their income tax.

Again, we could go on and on. But, let’s be honest. Deep down we know that only the Lord decides who’s at the front of the line and who’s bringing up the rear. Front or back doesn’t really matter, we just want to be in that line.

Lord, help me to be the person you want me to be.

Prayer concern: That we may be an example to everyone in our lives.

In the midst

He answered and said, “but I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt, and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods.” (v.25, ESV)

What is God’s abundance? Turning toward God in trust, turning toward God in love. Turning toward God’s abundance is living a life filled with joy and goodness. What happens to our trust when we are faced with tribulations and adversity?

My great-nephew, Maximus, was born with Septo Optic Dysplasia (SOD) AKA Optic Nerve Hypoplasia (ONH). His disabilities include, among others, cerebral palsy, developmental delays, and underdevelopment or absence of the optic nerve. He is classified as special needs. Many of you have met Maximus, and come away mentioning his sweet smile and sunny disposition. You could say Max’s life is filled with adversity and tribulation, but let me tell you about God’s abundance. Maximus is surrounded by a large, extended family who love him so much it hurts our hearts. From the moment he was born and placed in the NICU unit, God has provided doctors, nurses, physical therapists, teachers and many specialists to aid in his care. Taking care of Maximus presents its own set of challenges. As a baby, his first companion was a large, imposing, steel cylinder oxygen tank. By God’s grace, that relationship ended 3 years ago. There are days and nights filled with concerns, questions, and “I can’t do this”, yet God is always there in the midst of our fires, guiding, and giving us strength, confidence and HOPE.

Today, Maximus is a thriving 4 and 1/2 year old, attending school at the New Mexico School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Yes, his disabilities are still with him, as is evident by his wheelchair and developmental delays. But, when Maximus smiles and softly says, “What are you doing?”, you understand God is walking in the midst of trials and tribulations beside us all.

**Lord, thank you for being in the midst of our fires
and holding our hands throughout. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Special needs people and their circle of family, friends
and caregivers.

Sherrie Simek

Renewal

I give you thanks, O Lord, with all my heart. (v. 1, NLT)

Time flies, doesn't it? And during its ongoing flight, we often don't even notice. Only when it's gone, do we usually take note. And so it was for me. For many years before my husband's death, I had not attended church. I would always tell myself that I would go next week, or the next, but it didn't happen. Still, if you had asked me, I would have told you that I was a Christian and even a spiritual person. During my husband's illnesses and increased needs, I always found my faith and was lifted up by it. I believed and I knew that God was good and that He was with me. Yet something was missing and I knew it.

The first day I ventured back to church my legs almost failed me and I may have appeared pale and uncertain. Yet I was lovingly welcomed and it wasn't long before I felt at home. Here were many others who had gathered to worship. Here were others with burdens, pain and needs. I experienced a togetherness and a peace I had not for a long time. Somehow I knew immediately that I belonged here. I recognized that God dwells in this church and in all the people herein. And, I gave thanks.

When I first read my chosen passage, my heart leaped with joy and thanksgiving. Who would not be lifted by reading: "You reach out your hand and the power of your right hand saves me" (v. 7). I am immensely grateful to the Lord and to this Church for bringing me home.

**Lord, it is I who moved away from you. Your steadfastness
and love endure forever. Amen!**

Prayer concern: All those who have moved away from God.

Claudia Russo

Say what???

Joseph obeyed. (v. 21 The Message)

“Uh, Joseph....” “Mary?” “I’m pregnant.”

“Say, what???”

How many times has something happened that took us completely off guard? Especially in the last 2 years, with Covid -19, have we thought, “Say, what???” The pipes freeze. The car is wrecked. Masks are mandatory. The doctors say, “We can’t do anything.”

Say, what???

That’s not the way life is supposed to be. Life’s supposed to be fair – and stable. “You want me to take my family to Egypt? We don’t speak Egyptian!” “We’re supposed to go back home, but You want us to go to Nazareth? Moving *again*?? Say, what???”

But Joseph obeyed (though I wonder if he had some choice words to say every time he had that dratted dream about that dratted angel). He shifted gears, changed his priorities, left everything he and his family had known and led them to a new place.

It would be nice to think that Joseph looked at all this through the lens of, “God has a special plan!” But I’ll bet he just packed up their stuff, loaded the donkey, and started walking. Which may be the best way to cope with all the, “Say what’s” in our lives.

Hey, God, I’m in a mess.

Help me keep putting one foot in front of the other. Amen.

Prayer concern: People (well, let’s add our furry friends) who feel shaken by all the sudden changes in their lives.

Growing into it

For three years now I've been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven't found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil? Sir, the man replied, leave it alone for one more year, and I'll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down. (v. 7-9, NIV)

The Olympic broadcasts are filled with those stories of the "Olympic Moments" where we hear the back story of the athletes. Stories of how they grew to achieve their place on the Olympic team. Stories filled with difficult times for them, times of determination and times of setback that allowed them to grow as a star athlete.

So too is it in the parable of the fig tree. Our faith is like that fig tree, it's not like one wakes up one morning and suddenly their faith is complete and unwavering. Like so many things our faith is a growth process where we grow closer to bearing fruit but it is not without setbacks and challenges and the "fruit" of faith takes time to not only appear but to grow. Each day as our faith grows it is "fertilized" by our attention to and the tools the Father provides for it to grow. But like everything there is only so much time and we must be prepared to show the "fruit" of faith. As the Jesus indicated earlier in this reading "But unless you repent, you too will perish" or in the metaphor of the parable of the fig tree "If not, then cut it down."

Lord let us be open to your word that allows us to grow our faith, help us to commit to bearing fruit of faithfulness. Amen.

Prayer concern: That all might know the power and love of the Father that acts as a pathway to growing faith.

Greg Morrison

God's never-ending love

Listen to my voice, and do all that I command you.

So shall you be my people and I will be your God. (vs 4, 5a RSV)

Jeremiah was called to be a prophet at a difficult time in Judah. The people had abandoned their faith and lived as they pleased, worshipping the local gods, among other things. Through Jeremiah God reminded his people again and again of the covenant God had made with their forefathers. But they remained in their evil ways, even trying to kill Jeremiah to silence the harbinger of doom. Finally King Nebuchadnezzar took the people of Judah into Babylonian exile. Yet God's love reached out to them. In a letter of Jeremiah to the exiles we find this comforting message:

Thus says the Lord... I will visit you and I will fulfill to you my promise and will bring you back to this place... (Jer. 29:10-14).

What was true in Jeremiah's time is still true for us today. A life without God in it becomes empty, despite our best efforts to live right, providing for our families and loved ones. To fill that void we seek diversion, food, drink, drugs, or we bury ourselves in work until we "burn out". We have created our own exile and cannot find the way home. Perhaps most of us have experienced that hopelessness at one time in our lives, while trying to put on an every-day face. I have experienced it a couple of decades ago. I hadn't lost my faith in God (or so I thought), or else I would not have prayed so fervently. I had just taken God for granted, lost contact. I fell into a depression and couldn't get out.

It took a little invitation on a flyer to a Christmas service, and I found God welcoming me in a loving congregation. It happened to be COH (Cross of Hope).

Spirit, spirit of restlessness, stir me from placidness, wind, wind on the sea.

Living God, make us willing to hear your call through Jesus. Amen

Prayer concern: Persons struggling with addiction and depression.

I don't want to know

David says Show me Lord, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. (v. 4)

If I had two weeks to live, what is one thing I must do?

I would go back to Maui. It epitomizes the beauty of God's creation. I don't want to know the number of my days. I just want to live them in peace.

To be in God's family is peace. This I pray for us all. Amen.

Prayer concern: For those who want a peace-filled life.

Ruth Franz

Haiku for the kingdom

What is the kingdom of God like? (v. 18a)

Seed slips from fingers
Spirit tends branches and roots
Flocks nest ...safe and high

Hands work flour and yeast
Spirit lifts a nourishing loaf
Bread...for Feast to Come

**Heavenly Father, draw us near to you each day. Clear away the clutter
and noise that block our view of Your Kingdom.**

Prayer concern: Guide my actions to point others toward Your Kingdom.

Glenna Meneely

Stones to remember

***When your children ask you, “what do these stones mean?”
tell them...(v. 6-7, NIV)***

The mass of people crossing the Jordan River were the next generation. Being slaves in Egypt, crossing the red sea while pursued by Pharaoh's soldiers, being fed by manna from heaven, and all the other miracles that we think about from the desert - these are all history to them. They were born in the desert. All they know is wandering in the desert. Being led by a pillar of fire and cloud were just how things are, nothing amazing about it. It has always been this way. It is like the current young people, 9-11 is history. Nothing unusual about taking off your shoes at the airport.

Now these people stand before the Jordan with a new leader, Joshua. No longer past history, this is *their* experience with God. Why gather stones from the middle of the Jordan, the place of greatest risk? – To remember and share. Do we do this? I spent most of my life hiding some of the amazing works of God in my life because to share them would expose my sins, failures, and weaknesses. To share about what God has done in my life often requires vulnerability. What will people think of me? I might get judged.

God said to gather rocks big enough that you have to carry them on your shoulder and use them as a reminder and a conversation starter of what God has done. This was not a rock in a pocket. It was one that can't be hidden. If we don't share in vulnerability and openness about what God has done, how will others know and trust God? I must be willing to share my failures and weaknesses so that God's amazing work can be displayed. After all, this is about God, not me. Set up big rocks to remember and to share.

**God, give me courage to share in vulnerability that others
may come to trust You.**

Prayer concern: That we may create safe spaces for people to share
and others hear about God

I willing Spirit

Then Mary said, "Here I am, the servant of the Lord: let it be with me according to your word." (v. 38)

I have a Life Application Study Bible that gives some good insight. The commentary on this verse really jumped out at me: "A young unmarried girl who became pregnant risked disaster." Joseph could decide not to marry her, her father could reject her and then she would be homeless and may have to resort to some unsavory ways to support herself and her child.

Still, knowing the consequences, she makes the statement " Let it be with me according to your word." Was she crazy!! If I had just been told that I was going to become pregnant by God and give birth to his son, I may have said "What? Wait a minute! What do I tell all my friends, and especially Joseph and my parents? I'm not sure about this." Thank goodness Mary was the one chosen to be given the privilege and awesome responsibility to carry, deliver and raise the son of God.

There have been times in my life when I didn't understand what God was asking me to do, but I did it anyway (sometimes reluctantly). By doing what I thought God was asking me to do, I experienced many blessings along the way. Sometimes it seemed like there were more challenges than blessings, but after I went through those challenges, I realized they revealed blessings.

Mary, I'm sure, experienced blessings and challenges but at that moment when the angel Gabriel came to bring her the good news she chose to focus on God's abundance of love and protection. What a wonderful example of a person willing to follow and trust God and His word. May it be with me, also.

Lord, I pray that I willingly respond when you call me to serve you.

Prayer concern: Grant a willing heart to those who are listening for your call to service.

In with the new, out with the old!

***Everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new! (v. 17b)***

Anyone who knows me knows full well what a hopeless car nut I am. So, it stands to reason that I will always remember the thrill of driving my first brand new car home from the dealer. It was a 1970 Camero (red, of course!) I remember the thrill of getting a whiff of that "new car" smell, and the excitement of cruising it around to show my friends. For me, it was a day I'll never forget.

This is exactly the kind of excitement communicated by Paul in this passage from 2 Corinthians. Christ represents a brand-new relationship with our Creator! The "old" has passed into history...it's a new day! We are loved...we are forgiven...we are free! It's a brand-spanking-new day made possible by our Savior on the cross. Now, THAT'S something to get excited about.

Father God, we thank you for bringing us your Son to die on the cross so that we may have everlasting life. During this time of reflection, help me to recognize and appreciate this special gift, given to us because You love us so much. Amen.

Duane Meneely

Intuition

After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me" Jesus said to him and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. (v. 27-28, NIV)

As I prepared to graduate high school a guidance councilor told my mother that I was not college material and if I was to make it in the world trade school would be best for me. Three college degrees and four national certifications later... Years ago, I applied for a job at a national medical association where along with the CEO the entire management team was part of the interview. I was not the first choice of many of the management team but to the CEO I was the one. Thirty years and three CEO's later I retired as the Deputy CEO of the world's largest nonprofit radiology association. My mother knew, the then CEO knew, they did not judge the surface imperfections but trusted their intuition.

So to in the text, we see Jesus's call to Levi (Matthew) the tax collector, distained by others and seen as unfit, but Jesus does not judge by only what is seen. In this text we see Jesus's call to us to see past what might be the superficial imperfections and as the saying goes "not judge a book by its cover" for Matthew goes on to be one of the most generous individuals noted in the Gospels. There are many such examples in the Bible of people that others would not see as deserving or not the right choice that heeded the Lord's call and followed. The Lord looks past the imperfections and calls us all to look past our own imperfections and to "Follow me"!

Lord we ask that you help us to be more like you and look past our imperfections and follow in your everlasting love for you see us for what we are to be. Amen.

Prayer concern: That we may not judge others by only what is seen.

Greg Morrison

Budding awareness

On the first day you shall take the fruit of majestic trees, branches of palm trees, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God...(v. 40)

I look out my window at the tree in my yard, its branches stark and bare against the sky. And I look closely at the tips of each branch, each day searching for signs of budding, of life breaking forth after the long winter. Some branches are old and gnarled, some broken after a storm or fierce wind, some just waiting. Waiting for spring as I am.

That old tree has been there longer than I have. A “majestic tree.” It has a lot to teach me. Firstly, about patience, about endurance, about persevering through all kinds of weather, all kinds of circumstances. Secondly, about growth. We can’t always see the growth, but it’s happening by God’s grace and design. Thirdly, about awareness. I can learn to be aware – about the tree and about my own life, to look for signs of buds, seasons of change, and how God is with me, and the tree, through the seasons and through the changes that come.

I pray that God will open my eyes to see the majestic trees, to learn from God’s good creation about God’s goodness and mercy, about God’s abundance. For as we move through the season, the buds will come, blossoms and leaves on the “boughs of leafy trees”. God provides.

God provides new awareness for me – in the beauties of creation, in the budding grace of God’s word, in the fruitful silence of contemplation, in the strength of prayer, and in the love of community.

Thank you, God, for the wonder before me and around me. May I always rejoice before You, my Lord and God. Amen.

Prayer concern: For arborists and foresters

Pastor Gail Heidtke, retired, friend of COH

Smite the infidel!

Don't they know anything, all these imposters? Don't they know they can't get away with this, treating people like a fast-food meal over which they're too busy to pray? (v. 4, The Message)

My husband and I rarely have a good experience in a medical office. The staff are condescending. Our questions are never answered – at least not with actual data. The bottom line always seems to be, “We can’t do anything for you.” By the time we leave, we feel we’ve wasted our time and our money. And our hopes for healing are, once again, shattered.

Wouldn't it be nice if God did come down and deal with them? Give them all what-for? Show them how much their We Can't Be Bothered With You attitude hurts?

Hasn't happened yet, and I'm not holding my breath. God doesn't seem to work that way. Seems like the only thing I can do is work to be more compassionate towards the other folks I meet, especially people who are commonly ignored by society. No, I haven't figured out what I should do for the folks living in cardboard boxes across the street from my office. But I am continually hounded by Jesus' lesson in Matthew 25:40: I'm telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me – you did it to me.” (The Message)

God, help me stay focused on compassion and love for all Your creation. Hold all of us gently in Your love.

Prayer concern: Those who feel abandoned.

Keri Sutter

Abundance always comes through

All ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. (v. 17)



The Cross of Hope Kindergarten class discussed “what is abundance?” What do we have more than enough of? Their first response was “LOVE!”

Thank you God, for loving us abundantly. Amen.

Prayer concern: That all come to know of God’s abundant love.

Cross of Hope Kindergarten Class

No doubt

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. (v. 1b, NIV)

There have been few times in my life when I have encountered fear. One such time involved a medical problem. As a child, I had acute asthma. A serious asthma attack creates terror. You are unable to breathe air into your lungs because you are unable to exhale.

One night, face down in bed with my pillow under my chest so my body weight would help expel air from my lungs, I prayed to God for relief. I was only a fifth grader at the time, but my mother had encouraged me to trust God and to seek His will in my life. I had no doubt that God existed. I had no doubt that God saw me and heard my prayers. I also had no doubt that God loved me. But I was afraid that God was “letting nature take its course” and I might die.

I thought about it for a while. Then I prayed a simple prayer. “Dear God, I know that you can heal me. I don’t doubt that at all. I want to grow up and serve you and I pray that you have a work for me to do. But dear God, I would ask that you heal me or take my life. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

I don’t remember anything after the “Amen”. All was black; all was quiet; my brain didn’t sense anything. I opened my eyes - it was morning. The sun was out and I was alive! I never had another acute asthma attack.

LORD, thank you for your abundant love and in-dwelling Spirit!

Prayer concern: Give us ears to hear your call, the determination to obey, and the courage to share!

Jerry Burton

Dreamers

Come home with shouts of joy (v. 6)

A drawing from Addison Berndt, age 8 reflecting on the psalm.
Please join her in meditation today.

Addison's reflection
(from top to bottom):
Dollar represents our fortunes.
We're 'like those who dream.'
Laughter and Joy
God restores ALL of our fortunes
Tears – under the joy that will be.



Dear God, thank you for creating the earth so we can live. Amen

Prayer concern: People who are sad today

Addison Berndt

The goal

Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. (v. 13-14 NIV)

I've always admired people who race – running, skating, swimming, any physical competition. However, I'm not a racer! I don't even keep up with my husband walking. But that makes me love this passage all the more. Paul is warning the Philippians to stay away from anyone who tries to convince them to win the goal by doing physical things or being of the right heritage. He sets out quite a litany of those things, which he himself had boasted of before he turned to Christ, and then tells these Philippians that it's all garbage. He throws it all away so that he can have the righteousness that comes from God through faith in Jesus' death and resurrection. Not only that, he tells them he wants to participate in Christ's sufferings so that he can be raised like him. Now that is a goal!

He's quick to let us know that he has not attained this yet, but he's moving forward to take hold of "that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me." Christ had him first! Now he's reaching for the goal, knowing Christ already has him. That's where the above verse comes in – reaching for the goal God set for him.

I think about how Martin Luther's life also followed this formula – struggle to gain heaven by works, then realizing that Christ had already completed the work for him, then working toward doing God's will for his life. Beautiful examples for me to follow in my journey of life!

**Lord, help me forget the past and reach for You as You pull me close.
Amen.**

Prayer concern: All of us struggling to turn loose of the garbage and trust in Christ.

Janet Wormwood

Are you listening?

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.... Jesus replied, It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial. (v. 3, 7, NIV)

Many of us have worked on teams and as the teams project draws to a close someone will do something that others will ask why did you do that? Then realize it was the correct thing to do at that time. Or perhaps for me I can remember times growing up having to ask why are we doing something and the answer was I told you about it over some period of time.

In this chapter of John, we hear of not only Mary's great love for Jesus as demonstrated when she wiped his feet with her hair but perhaps more importantly the act of pouring the nard on Jesus' feet. That act demonstrated that she had truly been listening to Jesus and understood that His time on earth was growing short. As Jesus reminded those in the room so to should it be a reminder for us. We to must find the solitude to listen. To listen for the small still voice call in the night, calling to us prayer and faithfulness, calling us to follow. For in doing so the promise of forgiveness of our sins, paid for by Jesus' death is truly a gift worth listening for.

**Father let me be open to hear your calling
that I might answer "Here I am Lord." Amen.**

Prayer concern: All those that have not heard the good news of salvation.

Greg Morrison

God's invitation to meet

Then the Lord said to Moses, "set up the tabernacle, the tent of meeting." (v.1, NIV)

Turning toward God's abundance includes turning toward His offer of meeting - His offer of His Presence. The Tabernacle was a place of meeting, a place for God's Presence to dwell. When Israel came to Mount Sinai (Ex. 19) God's Presence came with thunder, lightning, and a thick cloud over the mountain which shook violently. Moses and the people trembled in fear. Despite their unfaithfulness and rebellion, God still pursued and desired to meet with His people.

Today, despite our unfaithfulness and rebellion, God is still pursuing us and extends to us the Tabernacle invitation to meet with Him. He meets us in the Sacraments and invites us to meet with him in His Word and in prayer. But do we do this daily? I find that if I'm "too busy" to meet one day, it becomes many days. Our Old Testament ancestors would find it impossible to understand how we would turn down the invitation to meet with the mountain-shaking God who is also compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness (Ex. 34).

When I meet with Him, I am reminded that I am like a living Tabernacle with the indwelling Presence. I am to be the living Tabernacle invitation to a hurting and desperate world. When I stop long enough to listen, I am reminded that He has given us the ministry of reconciliation (II Corin. 5:19-20). As living Tabernacle invitations, God makes his appeal through us. In a world that is reeling and shaking from the last two years, we have the only true message of Hope.

We turn toward God's abundance by accepting his invitation to meet and in turn, His Presence dwells within us. We then can be His Presence in this hurting and desperate world that needs to hear of the hope that is in God's loving invitation to meet.

Lord, help me to daily accept your meeting invitation

Prayer concern: That we may be God's Presence to this hurting world that needs hope

Laura Burton

True success

May God grant you your heart's desire, and fulfill all your plans. (v. 4)

Coach Ted Lasso from the award winning television series Ted Lasso, lives a life of being “curious, not judgmental.” This perspective allows him to see the goodness and worthiness of each person with whom he interacts. He works to bring out the best in each individual and for his team, and that assures a kind of success based not on accomplishments.

God works for us, affirms us, supports us – not to fulfill all our plans but to fulfill God’s plan. God’s abundant love and grace in Jesus Christ calls forth the best in us. God is not calling us to be successful by the world’s standards, but to be faithful. God will accomplish what God intends – for us and for community.

Our heart’s desire then is not for ourselves alone, but for what God wishes and intends. God’s gift of affirmation of me allows me to share affirmation, support and love for others. True success is acknowledging God’s goodness and turning toward God’s abundance, and sharing that goodness with others.

Holy God, grant my heart’s desire – to know you and love you, and to share that love with others, for Jesus’ sake. Amen

Prayer concern: For mentors and coaches.

Pastor Gail Heidtke, retired, friend of COH

Life's expectations

See, we are going to Jerusalem and everything that is written about the Son of Man by the prophets will be accomplished (v. 31, NRSV)

There is a song by the contemporary Christian group 4Him called "When It's Time to Go." Told from Jesus' perspective, the song tells the story of a young Jesus realizing he needs to begin his ministry but struggling to tell his human parents that he needs to leave. As the song's lyrics play out, Jesus finally says "When it's time to go, you've got to let me go away and save the world." I hadn't heard this song for several years, but it came to mind when I read this short passage in which Jesus plainly tells the disciples about the fate awaiting him in Jerusalem. We don't know much about Jesus' life between the age of 12 and the time he reappears at the river Jordan. We do know, however, that Jesus was fully God and fully man who understood every detail of his life, agonizing death, and triumphant resurrection.

For Jesus the man, living his life in the shadow of the cross could not have been easy. In addition to this text from Luke, there are at least nine other instances where Jesus tells the disciples about his death. Often, they did not fully comprehend the meaning of his words. When we are struggling with an issue or problem, it sometimes helps to talk about it with those closest to us. This could be the reason Jesus the man confided in the disciples, the group of people who knew him best. While it might be hard to think of Jesus in this way, Scripture tells us that Jesus was in anguish the night of his betrayal, even asking his Father to take the cup from him. But Jesus as fully God knew the stakes and did not waver in completing his life's mission for the good of all of us.

Holy God, thank you for the gift of your son who still went to the cross willingly. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those leaving home for the first time

John Valdez

The wondrous mystery

He bore the sins of many (v. 12,NIV)

The truth that Jesus Christ bore our sins is an essential tenet of our faith. This step in our Lenten journey calls me to pause and dwell in the wondrous mystery of God's abundance - the mystery of God's ever-pursuing love of us, who chose exile over communion.

The wind and waves obey Him. Yet, we, the ones created in His image to love and represent Him (II Corin. 5:20), choose exile over communion. Like the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), we say, "you are dead to me" while demanding our inheritance. We stomp away to squander our lives in a far-off country. This rejection of God's goodness opened the way for evil – the vast depths and breadth of the worst of evil throughout history, today, and in the future. He bore all of this.

Internally, I resist that I am like the prodigal son. But every day I choose my way over God's. I choose to be angry when I don't get my way. I have made choices over my life that resulted in harm to others. I have excused and justified my sins. I have chosen exile. How angry do I get when someone insults me or disrespects me? We have done much more to God. And yet, He bore it all - our rejection and the depths of the worst evil.

What a wondrous mystery that God, who rightly deserves all glory, honor, and worship, looks on us in our pig sties and loves us. We chose exile and welcomed in evil, yet God pursues us. The Trinitarian God chose to become sin so that we might become the righteousness of God (II Corin. 5:21). He entered our exile "why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46) to bear sins. Jesus bore it all that we might be reconciled to Himself. The abundance of God's love, mercy, and grace is manifest as Jesus bore the sins of many.

God, open my eyes to the ways that I daily choose exile over communion with You. Amen.

Prayer concern: That we may speak of God's reconciling love to those in our paths

God's abundant and unfailing love!

***Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love. (v. 16, NIV)***

In verses 9 through 13, David expressed his distress, sorrow, and grief. He felt abandoned and alone. He was not sure he had the strength to go on. He was pursued by his enemies. He felt that even his friends had left him. He felt broken and dead to the world.

Most of us reach a point like this at least once in our lifetime. I certainly have. I've cried out for God to intervene. "Oh God, save me from this time of trial. Oh God, where are you now!" I've prayed for relief, hoping it will come in a day, a week, or as far off as a month or a year. I become impatient; I begin to doubt.

But what was David's reaction? God's promise of kingship to David was not fulfilled in a day, a week, or a year. It was at least 16 or more years after David was anointed that he became king over all of Israel. Despite that, David trusted God, leaving the timing to Him. He believed in God's faithfulness and God's abundant and unfailing love.

Almighty God, may our trust in you be as abundant as your love is for us. And may our trust be unfailing, even as your love is unfailing. Amen.

Prayer concern: Patience, faithfulness, and love are three of the fruits of the Spirit. May we be led and strengthened by your indwelling Spirit so that we reflect your patience, faithfulness, and abundant love.

Jerry Burton

Ah, c'mon, Paul!

He lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death. (v. 6-7)

I am absolutely not going to get into the conflict over the nature of the Trinity. It's been going on for too long and has, too, too often, been too, too bloody. Is Jesus less than God the Father? An equal? Something else entirely? Ugh. I'd rather scrub the bathroom.

Jesus said, "You, therefore, must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." (Matthew 5:48, Revised Standard Version)

I'm not sure how selfless obedience fits into that concept of perfection. After all, God is a creator, and if we are to be like God, doesn't that mean we're supposed to be creative, too? People who create often bend – or even break – the rules. You kind of have to in order to create something brand new. Like the Big Bang. Or Picasso's Guernica. Or the concept of a front-end loader. Or the wheels on that front-end loader.

I wonder if obedience is the right word. It denotes blind acceptance, and passivity. I wonder if the right idea is that we are to be so aligned with God that we can be part of God's creative process. Which could include creating wheels. Or art. Or dying so someone else can live.

God, You love to befuddle me! But I excited to be part of Your next creative whatever.

Prayer concern: Folks who think they can't be creative.

Keri Sutter

The different King

***Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven! (v38)***

Today begins Holy Week and our journey with Jesus through death and resurrection. Holy Week is the center of our year as Christians. This is the week upon which we draw hope and meaning for the remainder of the journey. As we continue turning toward God's abundance in devotion, look deeply with me this week at all the ways Jesus is turning toward God's abundance in the midst of this most dramatic and dynamic week. Today and the Great Three Days of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and the Vigil of Easter/The Resurrection of our Lord I'll offer an image to contemplate with some guiding words as you sit before the abundance of God's love.



**"Blessed is the king who comes
in the name of the Lord!"**
Luke 19:38, NIV

Jesus is turning toward God's abundance in the Passion story first on the donkey like a king. Going up to Jerusalem on a colt and being greeted as a king is where we begin. How is Jesus a different king?

***silence* Blessed is your name O, Lord. As I draw my breath to give you praise today, give me the courage to follow your Spirit deeply into this Holy Week and continue to turn to your abundance and meet you there. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who will encounter this week and the Passion story for the very first time.

Acting out of love

Six days before the Passover ceremonies began, Jesus arrived in Bethany, the home of Lazarus—the man he had raised from the dead. (v. 1)

In any given situation there are many different ways we can respond, depending on our motivation. As Jesus arrives at the home of Lazarus, we can see how he was received, based on each person's relationship with God, at that particular moment.

Martha prepared a meal out of **Gratitude** for Jesus raising her brother from the dead.

Mary acted out of **Love**. Washing Jesus' feet with expensive perfume was such a pure act of love that she didn't even realize the full implications at the time. Jesus pointed it out for everyone to see.

Judas responded out of **Greed** and **Pride**. He only wanted to look superior by putting Mary down, and thereby making himself look better. Jesus knew his true motivation and called him on it.

The Priests were driven by **Fear** and **Envy**. Afraid of losing their livelihood and positions of power, they would do anything to stop this, including plotting the murder of Lazarus, and later, carrying out the murder of Jesus.

The bystanders were there for the reasons they are always there, out of **Curiosity** and to see if there was some **Gossip** they could pass along later.

We too, have the opportunity to respond in our own way to the life and teaching of Jesus each day, in every situation we find ourselves in. As long as our primary motivation is Love, the Spirit can keep working in us, and through us and for us. And just like Mary, when we act out of love, our actions have eternal ramifications.

Dear Lord, I ask that you will help me examine my motivation for every action I carry out today. And if it's not Love, please help me to change it. Amen

Prayer concern: For those in need of God's love.

Patty Westerfield

Where you go, I'll go

If any of you wants to serve me, then follow me. Then you'll be where I am, ready to serve at a moment's notice. The Father will honor and reward anyone who serves me. (v. 26)

The lyrics to Chris Tomlin's song, *I will Follow*, came to me as read this verse. Here are a few of the song's lyrics:

Where You go, I'll go
Where You stay, I'll stay
When You move, I'll move
I will follow You
Who You love, I'll love
How You serve I'll serve
If this life I lose, I will follow You
I will follow You

There have been moments in my life when I have resisted, ignored, and even argued with God about the times and places I've been called to step up, serve and follow Jesus. Sometimes the task has seemed too monumental and other times just so menial. There have been times when God's call has been so obvious and other moments where I just couldn't believe God would ask me to do something so unexpected, crazy, difficult, (you can fill in the blanks here!). In 2010 I sensed God was calling our family to move from Ohio to New Mexico to be closer to my parents, as Mom was in the early stages of dementia. My husband, Antonio, agreed and from the moment we said, "Yes," every single step of the move went smoothly. Today, almost 12 years later my mom, Elaine, is in the most advanced stages of dementia. We have been so fortunate to share these years together with my parents.

Loving God, comfort and draw our loved ones close to you as they breathe their final breaths. Amen.

Prayer concern: Loved ones diagnosed with dementia.

Jesus is in control

Now the Son is glorified and God is glorified in Him. (v. 31, NIV)

Jesus was troubled in spirit. First in the garden of Gethsemane and now at the Passover dinner.

It is hard to imagine a more difficult decision to make but Jesus keeps moving forward always in control. Yikes! Can you put yourself in Judas' position? What you thought you were doing in secret is laid bare before all your friends and most astounding is that Jesus just gave you permission to proceed. Jesus is in complete control.

How could he do it? Why didn't Jesus back out?

Jesus was in control of what He did but more importantly He knew God the Father was in control of it all. Jesus believed the Father, Jesus trusted the Father and Jesus was focused on the plan and not Himself. He knew what was coming, all of it, and Glory for the Father and the Son was the final result. The most amazing aspect of all of this plan was that it was all done for us. We glorify God the Father and the Son and ultimately they will glorify us.

Jesus was who he said he was, did what he said He would do and will do what he promised! All he asks is that we not only know what is in scripture but also believe God. It is called faith.

Lord, I don't understand! And I don't need to. I believe you are in control, I believe you, and I trust you.

Prayer concern: People that trust in people rather than God.

Peter Wormwood

The loving servant

Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet. (vv. 4-5)

From the Latin, *mandatum*, today Jesus orders our journey from the place of the servant.



Here Jesus turns toward God's abundance in service to others gathered at the table. Jesus takes a basin of water and towel around his waist and washes his disciple's feet like a servant. Though he is their Lord, their Master, Jesus commands love for one another through a humble act of service. At the feet like a servant, Jesus is turning toward God's abundance

found in love through service to another. Won't you come and practice this love tonight?

***silence* Loving Servant, give me the courage to love as you love;
to love whom you love; and to give myself away in love
and find there your abundance. Amen.**

Prayer concern: Those who work in service especially at odd and inconvenient hours.

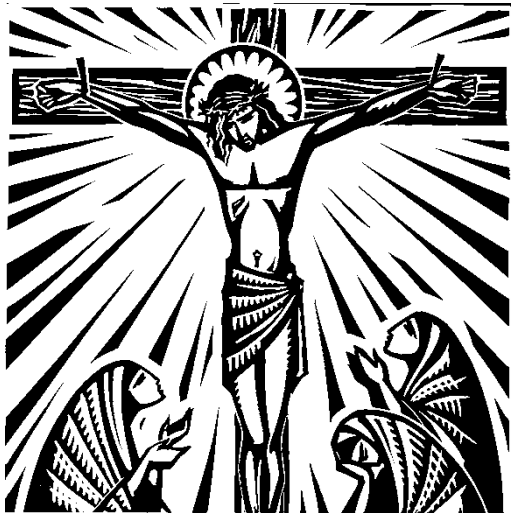
Pastor Adam Berndt

The innocent criminal

***Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering,
for he who has promised is faithful. (v. 23)***

How can the day commemorating Jesus death be called 'good?' And yet, it is on the cross that our hope is founded.

Here Jesus turns toward God's abundance not by choice but by sacrifice. Jesus is hung on a cross like a criminal though was the only one innocent of death. So, taking what the world was insistent on giving him, Jesus turned toward the abundance of God even from the sorrow of the cross and gave up his spirit. As you contemplate the depths of this great love today, may you be touched by the 'good' news of this day: that God, who has promised to redeem moments such as these, is faithful. Bring your contemplation to the adoration of the cross tonight and behold the abundant hope of God in the life-giving cross on which was hung the savior of the world.



***silence* God of our hope, today we mark the truth that Jesus died.**

Put to death inside of us the things that would make us want to intervene and waver in our confession of hope that, in you, all things are possible. Yes. Even redeeming from death. Amen.

Prayer concern: Whatever keeps for you from contemplating the 'good' of this night.

Forever just beyond

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

This is the night. We keep vigil as we mark the great mystery of Jesus passing over from death to live. Don't try to work out the details of how this happened. Not because God is trying to pull a fast one on you, but because God is always forever just beyond. Today we take a play from my friends at the podcast *The Vinyl Preacher* and contemplate a song by Clem Snide titled (not coincidentally) Forever Just Beyond from the album of the same name.

*Oh God is simply that which lies
Forever just beyond the limits
Of what we already seem to know*

*And I want to know you
Like an invitation
We have only questions
Bless these limitations*

*And I want to see you
In the tree tops swaying
But I'll always find you
In the wet grass saying
"God is simply that which lies
Forever just beyond the limits
Of what we already seem to know"*

*And oh what graceful patterns
That repeat then scatter
If my steps seem random
And my will abandoned
The machine elves whisper
"Let the matter settle
Worrying is praying
Praying to the devil"*

*God is simply that which lies
Forever just beyond the limits
Of what we already seem to know*

***silence* God beyond measure, fill us with what we need to curiously walk in newness of life to share your abundance with the world.**

Amen.

Prayer concern: Those feeling hopeless tonight.

Pastor Adam Berndt

The Abundant Christ

***Why do you look for the living among the dead?
He is not here, but has risen. (v. 5)***

Alleluia! Christ is risen!

There is no more turning towards abundance for Jesus for as the risen Christ, we now celebrate in the resurrection God's abundance in full!



Death and sin are no more,
God is not bound.
Rather, Christ now abounds
into eternity.
Lift high the cross.
The abundant love of God
proclaim!

***silence* Alleluia! It's great to hear this shout fill the silence of my prayer, risen God! Hold me steadfast in the joy and hope of this Easter to be and share your abundant love through which the world will turn!
Amen. Alleluia!**

Prayer concern: Those in places where the joy and hope of Easter is dampened by the sorrow of this yet groaning world. Break through.
Break through.

Journey with Us in Worship

Lent - Holy Week - Easter
2022

Ash Wednesday, March 2, 2022
Worship - 6:00 p.m.

Sundays, March 6-April 3
9:00 and 10:45 a.m.

Mid Week Lent Worship
Wednesdays, March 9 - April 6 - 6:00 p.m.

Palm Sunday, April 10
9:00 and 10:45 a.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 14
Worship - 6:00 p.m.

Good Friday, April 15
Worship - 6:00 p.m.

Easter Day, April 17
Worship - 9:00 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.



CROSS OF HOPE LUTHERAN CHURCH AND SCHOOL



Loving God - Transforming Relationships - Serving Others

