

JOURNEY TO HOPE

Lenten Devotions for Reflection and Renewal

Cross of Hope Lutheran Church and School
Albuquerque, New Mexico
Lent 2025

FOREWORD

The 40 days of Lent mirror the transformative journeys found in Scripture from Jesus in the wilderness, to the years of desert wandering from Egypt to the promised land. The journey of formation and transformation is a clear theme of our faith. Lent is often times seen through the image of a wilderness wandering evoking the image of Jesus tempted in the wilderness (the gospel story for the First Sunday in Lent!) This year, I'm inviting you to consider the image of *Journey to Hope*. Christ is our hope and the 40 days of Lent conclude at the Great Three Days of Jesus' death and resurrection which is our great hope for the newness of life into which we are sent off in baptism. We do not make the journey of life and faith alone and so here in the pages to follow, find devotions written by members of the faith community at Cross of Hope. May the Holy Spirit use them to deepen devotion, spur conversation and discovery, inspire and encourage as we persevere on the way of Christ. They are the reflections of unique individuals called and sent in the same 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 I remain grateful for all these writers who have shared a time of devotion.

R. Adam Berndt
Lent Devotion 2025
Journey to Hope

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

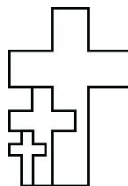
Sometimes our lives get a little confusing. Sometimes we find ourselves coming and going. So, It's just nice to take a few minutes a day and devote them to the Lord. That's one of the purposes of our Journey to Hope Lenten Devotions Take a few minutes a day, sit and relax, enjoy a glass of iced tea or a cup of coffee and take the time to connect with our Lord.

A big thank you for anyone who wrote a Lenten Devotion. It takes time out of your day but it's well worth it. Everyone stepped up to the plate and delivered a wonderful devotion. Thank you, thank you, Thank you.

A special acknowledgement and thank you to Nancy Morrison who puts everything together. A special thank you to those who wrote more than one devotion.

Many blessings to all of you this Lenten Season. May you find hope along the journey

Sherrie Simek
Diane Carrico



Humility

Take care! Don't do your good deeds publicly, to be admired, because then you will lose the reward from your Father in heaven. (v. 1, NLT)

When we feel compelled to tout our acts of generosity, whether in deed or donation, we are often being driven by poor self-worth and shame. The antidote? Acting in the knowledge of our sweet Jesus' love for us. I am reminded of John 13:23, where the disciple John, the author of this very Gospel, refers to himself as "the one Jesus loved". Isn't this beautiful? How differently would we lead our lives if we consistently regarded ourselves as the one Jesus loves (present tense intentional)? In the context of the commandment at hand we would be freed to give without need for acknowledgement, basking in the favor found with God rather than man.

**Dear Jesus, may your Holy Spirit enable me to see myself
as your beloved.**

Prayer concern: That we would take care to give of our time and talents in order to please God rather than to seek admiration by others.

Jessica Williams

The Long View

*May the Lord look on you and judge you! You have made us
obnoxious to Pharaoh...(NIV)*

I once worked for a company that seem solid with a promising future in New Mexico and then, without warning, they were bought up and sold off. It was a disaster! What was I going to do? Strangely enough, I was at peace, not because I was confident in my future but because I was confident in God's grace and provision. I was not unemployed...I was self employed, The fulfillment of a long held dream.

Moses was not confident in himself or God and neither were the Israelites. God knew that. So, of course God just magically made it all better! Nope, that is not what happened, he actually gave instructions to Moses that made it worse! Crazy! But God's ways are not our ways. God takes the long view. God knew that the Israelites would resist leaving Egypt as long as they were at least somewhat comfortable. God had to create an impossible situation for them. Bricks with no straw or not enough bricks with straw. What were they going to do?

God had a plan and it started by teaching Moses and the Israelites that they needed to trust and Fully Rely On God. (FROG). Do that yourself, It works.

Lord, It is so easy to say but so hard to do! Give me confidence in You.

Prayer concern: That we believe and trust God.

Peter Wormwood

Sheltered

I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge, and my fortress, my God in whom I trust." (v. 2, NIV)

Trusting in God first has been a difficult lesson for me in life. I want to be the first to take control of my life. Too many times, this tactic has failed miserably! I would think that after all of my years on earth, I should know that my fortress is not mine to control and it is not of this world.

My mother, who is 90, lives in a very small house and drives her very small car in a very small town of about 2,000 residents. There is one grocery store, a Dollar General, two traffic lights, and six rather small churches. The Dollar Store is her favorite place to shop. She finds the best deals there! Her advice to me is to never buy paper products at the grocery store. For months, my mom has fretted over the fact that she would have to take an eye exam to drive after her upcoming birthday. She let me know last week that she was able to get her driver's license renewed for another two years. Right after that piece of knowledge, she added that she only needed it to get to church, buy groceries and visit the best store in town.

Mom and I need to just turn to our Lord and put complete trust in his everlasting refuge. Because God loves us we must call on him first. "With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation." (v. 16, NIV)

God, give us the everlasting faith that you are the only perfect refuge.

Prayer concern: Those that stress over all the little things.

Lynne Bagby

Did they Believe?

If you openly declare that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead you will be saved. (v. 9 Life Application Study Bible)

Have you wondered at the death of someone you loved if you Will see them in heaven? When I was 18 and I was in my first year of nursing school, my mother died suddenly. Though I grew up from age 10 with our family going to a small Lutheran church in Michigan. We did not openly discuss our faith at home. Our family prayed at meal time only. So I worried at that time of her death if my mother was a true believer.

After learning the lessons in the ALPHA program started at Cross of Hope (COH) years ago by Laura and Jerry Burton, I felt truly confident my mom was indeed in heaven! Such comfort is truly from the word of God! At COH our community demonstrates truly caring for one another, studying the Word of God together, and seeking His truth in our lives. My mother demonstrated her love of God serving in 'Altar Guild' and I helped her. We were baptized together with my brother and sister (my father was raised Lutheran). She spoke aloud the Liturgy every week. We would go home together have lovely dinner she put into the oven before we left for church. She created very loving memories and demonstrated love.

I also feel encouraged by Romans 10: 13: *For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. (Life Application Study Bible)*

Lord, thank you for your continuous grace.

Prayer concern: That we demonstrate our faith, always sharing God's Grace and Love.

Jan Anderson

Those pesky resolutions

And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time. (v. 13, RSV)

It's started. My ministry. Why I was born. Why I will probably die. It was so simple to take that first step: go see cousin John and get baptized like everybody else. I could have said, "No. No way!" up until then, but a baptism is a promise. A promise to live a certain way no matter the cost. The dove and the voice were a little much, but they did emphasize that, for me, there's no turning back.

I did turn, though. Away from all the folks surrounding me asking me what happened and why. I had to get out of there! I needed some time alone to ponder and to listen. How, exactly, would I fulfill the promise I had made? How much strength of will? Sometimes it's easy to keep a promise. You're swept away in the events of the moment and follow the crowd. Or you just say, "Hey, that's who I am and what I do." Other times, though.... How much power do I have? How should I use it? Is it something I should use at all? Absolute power can corrupt, and it's tempting to show off or use it to my own advantage. Make bread out of rocks. Control the entire world (what if I make sure Hitler is never born? End all diseases?) Fly off the wall of the Temple. That would certainly attract attention and I'd get a bunch of followers. Jump start my ministry!

Can I resist temptation, or will I eventually give in? Father, help me.

Father/Mother God, keep me close to the promises I make to do Your will. Help me use them to guide my life.

Prayer concern: That we might all think about the promise before we make it.

Keri Sutter

Strengthening Hope through Faith

“Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.” (v. 1)

Hope begins with faith. Faith is the “assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen” (Heb. 11). Faith is being completely convinced that God is faithful to do what He has promised. This confidence in God is the soil for hope to spring into life. When we are confident in God then we can have hope in the ‘things not seen.’ Here in 1 Chronicles, David has lost sight of his faith and therefore his hope. He commands his men to perform a census of his armies. David was aging, feeling vulnerable and insecure. He was seeking a sense of security, status, and power. He lost sight of the conviction that filled his being in the field standing before Goliath, “I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty...This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands”. Goliath’s giant size and army did not matter. David had confidence that God could do the unimaginable in the face of overwhelming and impossible odds. In losing sight of his faith, his hope withered. His vision became as the world – size of armies, wealth, and power. There was a great cost to this wandering off from faith. However, later (vs. 24) David repents and makes offerings to God and God, in mercy, answered. There are times, like David, that we wander off the path of faith and our hope wilts. We can strengthen our hope by building up our faith. We can recount the times that God has been faithful in our lives and others’ lives. We need to feed and nurture our deep conviction that God will fulfill His word. As we focus on our deep assurance and conviction, our hope will flourish and be a light to others.

Gracious and merciful God, ruler of the universe, you have mercy on your people. Grant us a strengthening of our faith in growing our confidence in your faithfulness. May our faith and hope expand this Lenten season and become a light for others.

Prayer concern: Those whose faith is faltering due to suffering, fear, or discouragement.

Seeking Refuge in God's Presence

I call upon you, for you will answer me, Oh God; incline your ear to me and hear my words. (v.6, NRSV)

As I read this Psalm verse 6 stood out to me most. God hears us whether we verbalize our concerns or just think them. He is there to carry us through any difficulty.

Many years ago, when I was a young Mom with two small children, my husband lost his job. Then my son, who was 4 years old, became very ill and was hospitalized for a month. While in the hospital our pediatrician diagnosed him with a blood disease. I prayed every day to God to heal my son and to help my husband find a job. My son was finally released from the hospital with a very large bill, which we were unable to pay. I prayed to God again to help me resolve this. Four weeks later, the hospital called me to tell me they had found grant money to cover my son's hospital bill. I could not believe it and I thanked God. My son continued to have health issues, but God let me have him for three more beautiful years. I know God carried me through those years and especially the death of my son and the grief afterwards. God held me in the shadow of his wings.

Our trust in God is vital and he hears our words and concerns.

Lord help me to trust you and accept your answers to my concerns.

Prayer concern: For those faced with challenges or fears, that they turn to God for refuge. That they trust his unfailing love and find solace in the shadow of his wings.

Cecelia Pepper

BEWARE!

Beware! Don't be distracted to the point you become unaware about the truth to be revealed. Jesus was actively being sought to end his life. Both by the leading priests and teachers of religious law. When Satan entered into Judas Iscariot he began looking for a way to betray Jesus. The final plan was set in motion. God was fulfilling the sacrifice to bring us freedom from the bondage of sin. Every day Jesus went to the temple to teach and each evening he returned to the Mount of Olives, each morning the crowds gathered at the Temple to hear him. We do not want to be obscured by dullness to hearing God's redemption message. We want to keep our ears and hearts open for the message of salvation and redemption through Christ Jesus.

Prayer concern: those living without the true light of Christ to light the way.

Elisa Mclellan

Journey of Moving

“Now Lot, who was moving around with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. But the land could not support them while they stayed together...So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron.” (Genesis 13: 5a, 6a, &18, NIV)

When Abram and Lot saw that their livestock was so great that the land could not support them both, they separated and moved to different areas. The move was not good for Lot or his wife or his children. For Abram the move turned out better.

I was born in Indiana, raised in Las Cruces, married Jane, and moved to Phoenix. After having two children, Jane and I moved to Albuquerque where we had two more. We have lived here ever since, on both the east and west sides.

I am sure many of you reading this can tell a similar story. Moving from place to place is part of most of our life journeys. In all places, God has people for us to meet. Some will be a blessing to us, and for others, we may be the blessing to them. Our decisions affect more than ourselves; they also affect those around us and our family members. We should examine our motives when deciding to move. Hebrews 13:5 & 6 says, “. . . be content with what you have,” but if we move, or are perhaps forced to move, it also says, “God has said ‘never will I leave you, never will I forsake you.’”

Dear God, when we are considering moving to a different place, remind us of Abram and Lot. Keep us always sensitive to your guidance and to seek to live in your will.

Prayer concern: Those who are considering a move.

Charlie Anderson

Be Brave and Courageous

*“The Lord is my light and my salvation—so why
should I be afraid?” (v. 1, NLT)*

In 1972, I was confirmed by my dad. I remember the day like it was yesterday. For those of you that don't me that well, my father was a Lutheran pastor. I had extra pressure on me to learn it all and learn it all well. In those days, we were questioned and tested by the Elders of the church (nowadays, the Church Council). Elders sounded soooo much scarier. Well, long story short, I made it to confirmation. And I got confirmed. And this was my verse.

In our current time, we have many more things to fear than whether we will actually make it to confirmation. Health concerns, family issues, finances, crime, and the list goes on. And yet, this verse still rings true in my heart.

The Lord IS my light in the dark times of my life. He helps me see clearly ahead and I know that He is in charge and all I need to do is trust in my Lord. The Lord is my salvation protecting me and saving me from things that could happen and things I don't even know could have happened.

As I process this verse, I am reminded of another passage in Psalms, “Yea, though I walk through the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff, they protect me.” Psalm 23:4

And for me, that's the bottom line—God is with me. God is with me. Emmanuel. God is with me everywhere, every time, all the time, past, present, and future. God's got me and so I have nothing to fear.

**Lord, thank you for loving me and being with me everywhere
and all the time.**

Prayer concern: Those that are facing some fearful times in their lives.

Nancy Lacher

Our Heavenly Home and Hope

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

When Paul wrote to the Philippians “our citizenship is in heaven,” he was using a concept they were very familiar with in their everyday lives. Philippi was under the control of Rome, so the Philippians were Roman citizens even though they were not living there. The Philippian believers understood what Roman citizenship was and Paul’s letter was a good way for him to explain the difference between enemies of the cross and believers. Paul wanted the Philippian believers to know their true citizenship was in heaven.

Have you ever been away for a long time and looked forward to getting home? “There’s no place like home” is true. We had a wonderful month-long vacation in Italy last fall, and when we returned it was truly a good feeling to be back home. There’s just something special about going home.

Maybe there have been times in your life when you’ve been away from home. Perhaps you left for college, the military or maybe just a long vacation, and after a while, the strangeness of being away from home wore off and you started feeling “at home” where you were. We are comfortable here on earth. We don’t think enough about heaven and how wonderful it will be, so we don’t long for it that much. I’ve heard it said that God didn’t give us too much information about heaven because if He had, we’d want to go there right away!

We know heaven is amazing and wonderful and certainly something we can look forward to as believers. Our citizenship is in heaven. We’re not just living in the here and now – a heavenly future awaits us!

Lord, help me to live my life filled with the hope of heaven.

Prayer concern: That we may live lives that reflect the hope of heaven, and we may share Your hope with others.

The Best and the Worst of Times

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. (v. 35)

It was the best of times. It was the worst of times. It was the age of reason. It was the age of foolishness. You probably recognize these words from the opening paragraph of Charles Dickens' classic Tale of Two Cities. But these words come to me when I think of Jesus in today's reading and in our lead-up to Holy Week. The best of times...casting out demons, performing cures, and, later, His triumphant entrance into Jerusalem before cheering crowds, and His ultimate victory over death. And it was the worst of times; a warning that His life is in danger in today's Gospel and the worst of the worst...the hideous agony of the cross. And so it is on our journey through life. Good times mixed with difficult experiences; Times of reason mixed with some amazing folly (what was I thinking?). But through it all we are blessed with one amazing constant...our Creator's unending love and grace. Each of us lead lives that zig and zag through good and difficult times, but we can always lean on, our living and forgiving God.

Father God: You are always there for me...present in my life all day every day. I thank you for your loving grace and pray that you will bear me up in times of stress and difficulty. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who are experiencing difficulties.

Duane Meneely

Sacred Journey

The Lord said to Moses, Go, leave this place, you and the people you have brought up out of Egypt, and go to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' (v. 1)

God has called his people to a place of promise. He said to Moses, 'Go and take everyone with you!' It was a journey to an unknown, uncertain future and it required faith. They had to believe that God would get them there and accomplish all that He had promised. This was not just a move to another country, it was a sacred journey, a pilgrimage. And it was not just for Moses, it was for the entire community. Their journey reminds me of a local one that happens every year during Holy Week on Good Friday, a pilgrimage to the Santuario de Chimayo. A journey of faith to experience the goodness of God. People from all over New Mexico have been gathering together to make this sacred journey for hundreds of years.

Similarly as Moses was called to go, Jesus calls each one of us to go with Him. We ask, 'Where are we going, Lord?' Jesus' reply is a simple one, 'Come and see!' So we go. This our pilgrimage, our sacred journey, following the way of Jesus. We go remembering that we have been granted kinship with Jesus through baptism. As Jesus stood up, dripping from baptismal water, God the Father declared that He was His beloved Son. And just as the water of baptism flows over us, we too are called beloved! As beloved children of God we go, but not alone, we go with the community of believers, the body of Christ. Moses didn't go alone and neither do we. This is not a solitary pilgrimage, it is a walk alongside our brothers and sisters in Christ. By faith we go together. So, be there for one another along the way, support one another, encourage one another, and walk with faith, hope, and love.

Oh Lord, you have called us to walk the way of Jesus. Draw us near to you and one another as we go! Amen.

Prayer concern: For strength and faith to continue along the way of Jesus.

Chris Morgan

Communal Hope

“Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice...Remember the wonderful works He has done.” (v. 3-5)

The Psalmist charges us to not only remember but also to sing and to tell of God's great works. In our hyper-individualistic culture, it is easy to make our remembrances of God's faithfulness a private affair. Our culture encourages us to keep our faith and our hope rather quiet. When I was a youth, a pastor shared a metaphor of charcoal. Take a coal out of a pile of white-hot coals and place it by itself. Alone it will quickly cool while the others in the pile will still be hot. God created us to be communal creatures. Our journey to hope is a communal journey. Although our culture says that we can do it alone, it is almost impossible. The Psalmist tells us to “make known his deeds among the peoples...tell of his wonderful works” because God knows that we need to hear to grow. It is fuel for our faith and hope. Hearing from others of God's faithfulness in their lives, spurs us on to greater faith. We see this in the lives of the martyrs throughout time. I think of the Thundering Legion in 320 AD. The Christian soldiers who chose to die on a frozen lake rather than deny Christ. As they sang of the wonders of God, another soldier watching was so inspired, that he joined them on the lake to die with them. It makes me wonder, has my silence hindered the hope of another? As communal creatures, we need this to continue our journey to hope. Let us sing and tell of God's faithfulness in our lives. Let us rejoice and press on in hope together.

God of wondrous deeds and great faithfulness, encourage our hearts to sing and share of your great deeds and faithfulness to others.

Remind us that we are communal creatures that need to hear from each other. May we rejoice as we journey together to hope.

Prayer concern: That we may encourage others by sharing your faithfulness in our lives

Laura Burton

Striving to follow Jesus

Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. (v. 22)

‘Try your best,’ I encourage my kids. ‘Give it all you’ve got,’ motivates the players. ‘Leave it all on the field,’ implores your teammates. Life, sports, faith, all take energy and intention. I want my kids to try their best in the task at hand, whether homework, chores, navigating friendships. Both success and failure then become an opportunity for reflection and growth when you know you tried your best to engage the task honestly. Similarly in sport, either winning or losing is met with grace when you know you gave it all you had in the contest.

On the journey of faith, we strive to follow Jesus and give ourselves over to the will of God. This is not always easy as any faithful life will show us, and yet it is the life to which we are called in baptism. ‘Lord, will only a few be saved?’ someone asks Jesus on this teaching journey in today’s gospel story. “Strive to enter the narrow door,’ is the image with which Jesus offers in the face of perhaps complacent faith. The text seems to go on to paint a picture of preconceived security from a familiar and established relationship surprised then at the shut door. The Gospel of Luke loves reversals as is clear here in v. 30. We give thanks for the inclusive nature of God’s love in this passage while always striving to follow Jesus in offering this inclusive love in a world that would too quickly shut the door to the flow of God’s great love. Each day we do our best to love as God loves and give ourselves to the grace of God for redemption and salvation.

God of love, we bless you for the gift of faith. Strengthen us to strive always for your way of love in the world and bring us at the last to your great feast of love. Amen.

Prayer concern: to be opened to God’s love in the unexpected.

Pastor Adam Berndt

"...didn't we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?"

In Babylon, 500 years before Christ was born, Daniel's three friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego while working for king Nebuchadnezzar, were thrown into a fiery furnace - not for something they did, but for something they refused to do. They would not worship a false golden god as ordered by the king. They didn't fight the guards who forced them into the fire because they had faith beyond all measure that God would protect them.

I am reminded that God sometimes uses a trial to strengthen our faith and trust in him. The verse demonstrates God's power over all things, even fire, and his ability to protect us. To Nebuchadnezzar the fire represents a punishment, although that didn't work out very well. To Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, the fire represented a trial or test from God.

Like most of you, I have faced difficult times in my life. Some of these situations have taken a great deal of effort and fortitude to overcome, but did I stop and think, I trust that God has this? No, instead, my normal response is "I can do this", and I start making a plan. God has a hand in this decision, the planning and in the execution of the plan, but do I notice? Sometimes, but not always.

God will test me, he has unmeasurable power, he will deliver me from suffering and he will protect me from harm. God's grace is greater than we can imagine or than we generally expect.

**Dear Lord, I pray that you help us develop faith like Shadrach,
Meshach and Abednego. Amen**

Prayer concern: Those who need to grow greater faith and trust in God.

Karen Schwartz

Covered by God

*“Because you have been my help, therefore in the shadow of your wings
I will rejoice” (v7, NIV)*

After Rudy and I were married, we took a trip back to Rudy’s hometown, Rockwood, NY so I could meet his father, who had not attended our wedding. His father raised chickens. When we walked into the barnyard where the coop was, the babies ran for cover under their mother’s wings. “Who is this city girl coming into our yard?”

Just as the baby chicks trusted their mother to protect them from me, I trust my God to spread his wings over me throughout challenges and joyful celebrations. I find restoration in the shadow of His wings as He covers me in protection against sicknesses and injuries. I cry in the shadow of His wings as He covers me in comfort against sadness and grief at the passing of loved ones. I rejoice with thanksgiving as He covers me in joy with so many blessings.

My hope is strengthened by God’s goodness, faithfulness and love through this journey.

**Trustworthy One, we offer joyful thanksgiving as we find peace,
comfort, and joy in the shadow of your wings. AMEN**

Prayer concern: For those that have lost or never had trust in the Lord.

Sherrie Simek

The Way Out, The Way Forward

No testing has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but with the testing he will also provide the way out so that you may be able to endure it. (v. 13)

God knows our weakness. Remember the Sunday School song, *Jesus Loves Me?*

Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so. Little ones to him belong; they are weak, but he is strong. Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.

In the Father's eyes, we are his little ones, beloved and cherished. The warning in verse 12 of our reading, to watch out that we do not fall, is not an angry pointing of the finger. He loves us dearly and doesn't want us to succumb to temptation. As I said, he knows our weakness, and still, he knows that the consequences harm us, causing guilt, regret, and loss of peace. We have all been there, haven't we! Do not despair, God always provides a way out. Seek him and keep on seeking, pray and keep on praying. God rewards those who seek him, who continuously knock until that door of endurance opens up (Heb. 11:6). We can find the way out of the sin that so easily entangles us (Heb. 12:1). Remember that we have all fallen, but we are not condemned. We are redeemed by faith and nothing can take that away from us. We have been made whole by the water and the blood. By the water of baptism we are named children of God. By the blood of Christ on the cross, we have been washed clean. This is ours by faith, now and forever. So, keep on seeking, and keep on praying, until you find the way to endure. Peace be with you!

Merciful Lord, the path before is not always easy. Help us through the difficult times and lead us into your grace. Amen.

Prayer concern: For those struggling with addiction.

Bears Fruit

“If it bears fruit...” (v. 9)

Parables are often difficult for me and so is this one. I wondered why Jesus responded with this parable about the fig tree right after he talked to the people about repentance.

Then I thought that maybe the fig tree represents sinners who while they hear the Word and receive the Meal, continue to go on their way as if they did not need to repent from their sins in order to be closer to God. And while God was feeling frustrated with them, Jesus says let's give them more time and more nourishment and living water. And perhaps we as Christians are to tend to each other and those we meet on the journey so they truly come to know God, repent and bear fruit too as they serve others and reflect God's love for them. God is always ready to receive our prayers for forgiveness and he doesn't have a certain number of times we can ask forgiveness and his time for us to come to him has no certain number of years. If we tend to others—help others—we grow ourselves and our eyes may be opened to our needs as well as those we help. God has an endless supply of love for us and he desires us to know Him. God is love and love is good.

**Lord, help me to reflect your love as you send me to others
on this journey.**

Prayer concern: that we may reflect Christ's love to all so we and they may be fed.

Carolyn Bye

They Set Their Own Course

“You shall say to them, Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Cursed be anyone who does not heed the words of this covenant ...” (v. 11:3)

After leaving Egypt, God clearly instructed the Israelites to obey His commandments so that they might become His people and be given “a land flowing with milk and honey.” The migration from Egypt to Canaan was difficult and had its failures. However, the people eventually were allowed to enter the “Promised Land” with hearts full of hope.

At first, they believed God, but soon forgot Him. By the time of Jeremiah, the Northern Kingdom and most of the Southern Kingdom had been conquered by Assyria. However, Jerusalem and a few large, fortified settlements remained in Israeli hands.

God instructed Jeremiah to call the people back to His covenant or be conquered by the Babylonians. God was extending grace to Israel, but the people refused to accept Jeremiah’s words. They refused to believe that God would allow the Babylonians to conquer Jerusalem. They felt that as long as the Temple stood in Jerusalem, God would continue to be present in the Temple and would protect Jerusalem.

Rather than heeding the words of Jeremiah, the people rejected them and persecuted him. Eventually, Jeremiah had to make another journey, to Egypt, to avoid being killed. Jeremiah was later killed in Egypt. Both trips, from Egypt to the Promised Land and the confrontation by Jeremiah of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, were full of hope for the kingdom, yet they were “failures”.

Not every journey we make is a safe or happy one, but it should always end in victory through Christ. Through Him, our journeys become victories in spite of what might seem failures in an earthly sense.

Our hope should always end in “success”. However, it is likely to fail if our hope is in the kingdom, rather in the king!

Almighty God, as we journey through this life on earth, may we keep our hearts centered on our king, Jesus!

Prayer concern: That our nation might trust in God and that our human leaders may come to focus on our Heavenly Father.

Jerry Burton

Annunciation of Our Lord

*The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored!
The Lord is with you." (v. 28, NIV)*

Mary must have been confused by Gabriel's visit, and even more so by the additional news from him that she is to give birth to a "Son of the Most High". Upon further clarification, she learns that "the Holy Spirit will come upon her and the Most High will overshadow her". In addition to giving her the news of Elizabeth's pregnancy, he then reassures her that nothing is impossible with God.

Mary had a faith that went far beyond human understanding. Her faith in all of this was in God himself. She truly glorified the Lord. She had to in order to be the highly favored one to bear God's Son. Gabriel's news was unsettling, but she acquiesced.

Luke, a physician, knew that the faith of the blessed Mary went far beyond the intellectual understanding of conception. She knew God's promises must be realized.

**Blessed Father, we glorify you. You planted the seed in Mary that
would allow us to see you in human form.**

Prayer concern: For all expectant mothers awaiting the birth of a miracle from God.

Lynne Bagby

Faith Renewed

“It is like the leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour until it was all leavened.” (v. 21, ESV)

I am walking a journey I know some of you have walked as well. Rudy, who I love deeply, has been diagnosed with Alzheimers. Actually, I walked this journey 25 years ago alongside my mother and siblings as my father battled this dreadful disease for 13 years.

Some pieces feel the same, some pieces feel different. Most of the difference is in me. I am older, the relationship is different. It is not my father. It is my husband. However, the biggest difference is my faith. It is deeper, stronger, more assured than before. I’ve always believed in God. I was raised in organized religion, the daughter of the church choir director and church accompanist who established a strong foundation of God. Throughout the past 7 years, much like the leaven bread dough in verse 21, my faith has flourished and grown because of God who has blessed my life with this school community, this body of Christ, this community of faith and my pastor.

In her book, “ordinary mysticism” Mirabai Starr writes “Take a few deep breaths and consider allowing yourself to tumble from the cliff of certainty into the abundant air of not knowing”. That is FAITH! I have tumbled from the cliff.

My journey of hope is that someday they find a cure for this disease that robs so many of us of our loved ones. That makes us into caregivers long before we desire to be so. Not sure this will happen in my lifetime. Actually, my journey of hope is that Rudy and I can walk with patience, love, understanding, grace and mercy. When Rudy and I stumble and fall, as we often do, we know for sure God picks us up, slips His hand in between ours and carries us onward. We are never alone.

Gracious Father: Grant peace to all those that care for others. Thank you for picking us up when we stumble and fall. AMEN

Prayer concern: Those suffering from any memory loss illnesses.

Sherrie Simek

Enough

*They ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes
and parched grain. (v. 12)*

After having finally arrived in Gilgal, it is finally time to rest. God's people have finally arrived in the land that was promised to them. Better yet, it's time for a meal in their new home. No more manna. The sign of the covenant is restored.

Arriving home after a long journey is always a reason for a huge sigh of relief; especially when one can have a home cooked meal rather than the fast food and junk eaten on the road. Parents are often convinced about this time that there will be no more asking, "Are we there yet?"

At this point, it is just nice to say enough. I am content to be home. I know I have finally arrived when I can thank God for his goodness seeing me through a long journey.

God of promises kept, settle me in your presence.

Prayer concern: Those who are unsettled, without enough or without a home.

Lynne Bagby

It is better to confess Sin

*Happy is the person who sins are forgiven,
who wrongs are pardoned. (v. 1, NCV)*

Can we all admit we are always going through a journey when it comes to choices each day? Just by a mere thought, words, and/or actions? Yup! Each and every day, 365 days of the year, with the exception of Leap Year!. Morning, noon, and night! It's the consequences that follow which are the deal breakers.

I always reflect on the Disney's movie "Pinocchio." Pinocchio, a puppet who wants to be a real boy. Pinocchio's Papa who created him along with a beautiful Blue Fairy who hears his wish, and a well-dressed Jiminy Cricket, a cricket who is entrusted to be Pinocchio's council. Pinocchio finds himself in some rough spots, since he did not heed Jiminy Cricket's advice. In the end, after admitting his own wrongdoings, and following the correct path for his wish, he does become a real boy.

For whatever reason when we choose, like Pinocchio, a bad decision, it does have an effect on us. We can pretend all is well outwardly, but deep down we know. The Jiminy Cricket in our lives is the Holy Spirit, our guiding conscience, helping us, but ultimately, it's our own choice. I see the beautiful Blue Fairy representing Jesus. He sees and knows us immensely and understands our daily struggles. And just like Pinocchio's Papa, our Heavenly Father, he is there for us always, loving us no matter what! When we freely admit our own wrongdoing, we feel that calm and peace. It's a connection we understand and at the same time, a struggle we face on a daily basis.

Dear Heavenly Father, I acknowledge my struggles within my heart and actions, please forgive me as I confess to you. Please guide me to feel the peace and love you provide unconditionally. Amen.

Prayer concern: For those who are riddled by heavy guilt and believe there is no hope for forgiveness.

JOY – Jesus, Others, Yourself

All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation. (v. 8)

Paul tells us if it were not for Christ paying the ultimate price for our sins, we would all face eternal punishment. We have been set free to go out and share the Good News that there is forgiveness and hope for new life. As members of His Body, we have been commissioned to carry out and continue the ministry of reconciliation that Jesus started during His earthly life.

I was raised in the Lutheran church and can't remember a time when I didn't know that God loved me. That's what my family told me, what I learned in Sunday School, and that sentiment was ever-present in our community. After our first child was born, I became a stay-at-home mom and made the time to attend bible studies. This is when I realized, for the first time, just how deep God's love is for me and the Holy Spirit started moving in me and my relationship with the Lord blossomed. One of the strongest changes in perspective that the Holy Spirit revealed to me is JOY. We are reconciled. We don't need to earn our salvation because Jesus took care of that. So I'm free to praise Him, be grateful to Him, to focus on others, and to be an example of God's love and reconciliation.

Every day when I wake up, I feel joy because I have been given a new day to repent, to be forgiven, and to go show and tell others about His good news. It is a joy to show others of His love for each and every one of us and continue the ministry to spread the great news of reconciliation through Him.

Lord, help me to be humble and share what You did on the cross for ALL through my actions and words today.

Prayer concern: that we may think of others before ourselves today.

Renae Johannsen

Experiencing Jesus' Healing Touch

Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, "I do choose. Be made clean." (v. 13)

In today's reading, Jesus accomplishes something amazing. He cleanses the leper and cures the paralytic. And, now, I can say I have personally seen Jesus healing me and making me whole. I had been dealing with a severe hearing problem for some time. Finally, my hearing deteriorated to the point where even the best hearing aids weren't much help. Without being able to hear, I was left out of most day-to-day activities. It was frustrating and stressful. I needed a miracle. I prayed, and Jesus answered my prayer by providing me with a cochlear implant. It's an electrode surgically implanted into my inner ear that lets me hear again. Now, Jesus didn't accomplish this miracle in the same way he cured people in today's Gospel. Instead, Jesus sent a skilled and compassionate surgeon into my life, followed by a dedicated and caring audiologist. Then he surrounded me with friends, family, and mentors to shower me with love, encouragement, and advice. I am truly the recipient of a miracle, just as the people healed by Jesus were. And this begs the question; what miracle has Jesus performed in your life? It may not be as dramatic as cleansing the leper or healing the paralytic, but, rest assured, he is performing miracles nonetheless.

Father God: Thank you for giving me my hearing back. Your love has truly given me my life back in such a meaningful way. Thank you for my caregivers, friends and family who were such a big part of my miracle. Amen.

Prayer concern: People suffering from hearing loss. May they find solutions to help them regain their hearing.

Duane Meneely

Festivals as Calibrating Forces

“These are the appointed festivals of the Lord, which you shall celebrate as times of holy convocation” (v. 37)

Atonement and tabernacles. In our Lent journey, we pause on two of the seven festivals prescribed by God. Atonement reminds us of our need for forgiveness. Tabernacles reminds us that God’s great desire is to dwell with us. God provided annual festivals as foreshadows of Christ and the coming Kingdom. The rehearsing of these festivals each year served as an orienting force to direct their hearts and hope toward God. Annual rituals such as these are heart-calibrating forces. The annual nature of these festivals created a rhythm and direction for their hearts. Our liturgical calendar can have the same orienting force. It directs our hearts and hope toward the promises of God. Our daily personal rituals also have a subtle calibrating force. I wrote a morning prayer that I try to use each morning to orient my heart to God and His promised hope. I try to have dedicated time each morning before work to read some scripture and journal a prayer reflection with God. The truth is that the pressures and busyness of life press in distracting me and stealing time. When I reflect on the calibrating power of these routines, I see their importance. The self-disciplines of Lent as an annual exercise serve a similar force as the festivals. In Lent, I tend to put extra focus and effort into the self-disciplines of fasting, prayer, meditation, and Bible reading. These carry a re-calibrating force. It is easy to believe the lies that the things of this world – relationships, status, money, esteem – provide a hope of security, acceptance, and welcome. These can only provide shadows of the true hope of God. The hope of welcome and eternal security in the Kingdom to come. May Lent reset and recalibrate our hearts to God.

Almighty and holy God, you created us as liturgical beings wherein the daily and annual rituals calibrate our hearts toward a hope. Open our eyes to see the daily routines that carry a calibrating force in our lives and empower us to create and sustain Kingdom-focused routines to orient our hearts to Your promised hope.

Prayer concern: to calibrate our hearts to hope in God’s promises

Laura Burton

Foolishness

“The fool says in his heart, “There is no God”. They are corrupt, and their ways are vile; There is no one who does good (v. 1, NIV)

This verse was particularly hard to read. How could the existence of God be denied? I am not so naive as to believe that there are not people who deny God. There are loved ones in my life that question the existence of God. Experts say there is no evidence of God. I beg to differ. God’s fingerprints are all over His creation. God is evident in the vastness of the universe and the intricacies of nature. (IE) How do bees collect pollen?

The definition of “fool” is a person who acts senselessly, irrationally, or lacking in wisdom. I wonder again, how could the existence of God be denied? Perhaps there are those that have never been exposed to the word of God, (lacking in knowledge) perhaps there are those that suffered a trauma or loss and blamed God, (irrationally) perhaps there are those that heard or read something and believed untruths instead, (lacking in wisdom). There are many “perhaps”. I choose to see God in the majesty of His creation.

We, as a community of faith, can, should, and need to do all we are able to turn the hearts of those exhibiting foolishness toward wisdom and love, shouting from the mountain tops as loud as we can the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The message of His unconditional love, grace and mercy shown by living in kindness, demonstrated through our actions and words. My hope is to create loving hearts from foolishness.

Lord, help me to show your love, mercy and grace to those that deny YOU! Amen

Prayer concern: For those saddled with disbelief and denial.

Sherrie Simek

Always Enough in the End

All ate and were filled. (v. 17a)

How well I remember trying to make ends meet during our early married years in Santa Fe. We were limping along on my (somewhat meager) salary while Glenna was a stay-at-home mom to our two young children. I would sit at the table on payday, checkbook in hand, and wonder how in the world I was going to have enough money to meet our obligations. First was the mortgage (and the SECOND mortgage!), a trip to the grocery store, gas, utilities...the pile of bills seemed infinite compared to my very finite paycheck. And right when we could least afford it, here comes an unexpected, unneeded, and unwanted expense like a car repair.

But looking back on those days, I am amazed to see that every bill got paid! Every obligation was met. OK, so maybe the PNM bill had to wait until the next payday, but it did get paid in full! And with money left over for a little fun, like camping in the summer and maybe an adventure like a road trip. In today's Gospel, we read how Jesus took a single meager basket of food, blessed it, and fed thousands, with lots left over. And so it is in our lives. God takes our meager contributions, blesses them, and we are fed and nurtured, with lots left over.

Precious Lord; Thank you for the many blessings you shower us with every day...all because you love us so much! Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who are food and/or housing insecure.

Duane Meneely

Standing on God's Faithfulness

*"Do not fear...when you pass through the rivers,
they will not sweep over you." (v. 2)*

This is one of my favorite passages. The promise of presence, love, and redemption is powerful. I am always deeply moved as I read, "I have redeemed you...and called you by name, you are mine." The holy and righteous God has chosen to redeem and rescue me. I pause and allow the concept to envelope me – God, who sees all, says, "You are mine." However, in discussing the passage, I suddenly saw a new layer. God is not only promising to be with us through the greatest trials, but also, He is recounting His faithfulness and His promise. In order to journey to hope, we must stand on a foundation and look forward. Here, God is providing the foundation of his past faithfulness. "When you pass through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire...the flames will not set you ablaze." Here we are harkened back to God's faithfulness in the crossing of the Red Sea and the preserving of the three in the great furnace. From this foundation of God's faithfulness, we can look forward in hope to His promise, "I will bring your offspring from the East, and from the West I will gather you...everyone who is called by my name." As we stand on the foundation of God's faithfulness, we can hope that God will gather us into His perfect Kingdom that has no end. Do I recount God's faithfulness in my life often enough? Lent provides an opportunity to reflect on all the times that God was with me in the water and the fire. The times that the river could have overwhelmed me, but He carried me through. This strong foundation holds us up to grasp a stronger hope. Let us take the time to reflect on God's faithfulness and continue on our journey of hope.

Great and Holy God, your faithfulness is beyond our comprehension.

Even when we have sinned and turned away from your ways, you have remained faithful. Help us to recall and see the times throughout our lives when your faithfulness has carried us. Provide the foundation that we may stand upon it and have hope.

Prayer concern: May the memory of God's faithfulness embolden our hope.

Sorrow Turns To Joy

May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. (v. 6, NRSV)

My brother would have been 69 years old this year. He died in 2008 at the age of 52. His sudden death filled us with terrible grief. At his memorial one of my Aunts told my family that she was just MAD! A good description for all of us in that moment. Why?, we asked God. We were definitely sowing in tears.

The first time I was exposed to the death of someone I knew was when I was 12 years old. I thought that death only happened to others, not to me or my family. When a close Uncle died, I assumed it was just an unfortunate accident. Upon hearing my conclusion, my parents found an excellent teaching opportunity. I knew what death was, I just thought it wouldn't touch us.

As time passed and my Christian education matured, I came to understand how those saved in Christ could confidently approach their own or the death of others, knowing that though death ended our earthly lives, we would joyfully graduate to God's perfect new life in Heaven. The heart of that 12 year old still beating in my chest had been eternally blessed! At last I could read the concluding verse of Psalm 126 with understanding and joy in my own heart.

Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing,
shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.

Lord, though I long for my new life with you, help me spread your joyful promise to others in this life.

Prayer concern: Those who grieve and do not hope.

Claudia Russo

Worth

...I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord (v. 8, ESV)

Before retirement, my husband would receive work related dinner invitations. I remember one in particular. It was in December just before Christmas and I was excited to go. The dinner would be held at the Rancher's Club in the Hilton (Crowne Plaza). I had never been there and knew it was a fancy place. I also welcomed the opportunity to dress up and wear my best shoes.

With all of the anticipation I also became nervous because I knew I would be sitting around a table with others I didn't really know and most were far more accomplished than myself. Yes, they were "rocket scientists"; my husband worked in the satellite division of Sandia Labs.

Like Paul, they held loads of credentials and could boast with confidence of their accomplishments. Over the course of dinner some would find opportunities to expound on them. After all of the hype and excitement of going to a fancy restaurant, I left feeling insecure and wondering about my worth and accomplishments.

Now however, I am grateful God's invitation to know Christ Jesus is a free gift. On this journey of hope and reconciliation, Paul reminds us that our right standing with God comes through faith in Christ (v.9, ESV). My worth is established with knowing Christ as my savior and I am not dependent on accomplishments in the flesh to know him and the power of his resurrection (v. 10, ESV).

Thank you dear God that because Christ Jesus has made us his own we have surpassing worth. May we find grace to share your immutable love.

Prayer concern: Those who are servers in eating establishments

Debra Gonzales

For the Love of Jesus

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

Dirty feet and expensive perfume = outrageous love? Jesus and His disciples stopped on their way to Jerusalem in Bethany to visit Lazarus, whom Jesus had raised from the dead, and his sisters, Martha and Mary. Lazarus was entertaining, Martha was preparing a meal, and Mary sat at Jesus' feet and poured nard which cost a year's wages on Jesus' feet, his dusty, dirty feet, not His head as was the custom. Then she let her hair down (which was not acceptable in public in those times) and wiped away the dirt and perfume from his feet with her hair. She was humbling herself before her Lord and doing servants' work! What outrageous love!

I want to be more like Mary. Mary loved Jesus so much and gave Him not only her wealth, but, as Jesus explained, she prepared His body for burial, even before his death. We all have time, talents and wealth to give to our Lord. If we have no money, we can give our time and talents. Our love for Him will guide us to give what we can!

Jesus replied to Judas' outrage that selling this perfume would have provided for the poor, but Jesus defended Mary telling him and us that the poor will always be with us. In another account, Jesus said Mary would be remembered wherever this gospel is told.

Thank you Lord for Mary's outrageous love for You. Strengthen my love and trust in you. In Your name. Amen

Prayer concern: Those learning to trust the Lord in all things.

Janet Wormwood

God Desires to Dwell with Us

“On the first day of the first month you shall set up the tabernacle of the tent of meeting.” (v. 2)

Tabernacle means dwelling place. This thread runs through the entire Biblical narrative – God’s desire to dwell with us. Christmas and Easter tell the great rescue story wherein God came in human form to rescue us and to give us the hope to which we journey – the joining of Heaven and Earth when God will forever dwell with us again in all fullness. This great hope is the future tabernacle-ing of God with us without the curtain separating us. I have pondered hope a lot in the past 15+ years both academically and theologically. I have come to see that so much of our hope is actually an ambiguous hope. For what am I hoping? But here, shadowed in the Tabernacle, is the true hope. God will dwell with his people and He invites us into this hope. When I think of dwelling, I think of home, welcome, embrace, and acceptance – the full embodiment of all for which my soul longs. The Tabernacling God, who sees all and yet comes to rescue me, invites me into this dwelling - how amazing and unfathomable is this hope? Perhaps I do not spend enough time meditating on this amazing story. The God of the universe, who spoke all things into being, who controls the stars and all the galaxies, who tells the oceans where to stop, who is holy, righteous, and just, this God wants to fully dwell with us. This God became Emmanuel, God with us, as part of his plan to dwell with us. And our hope is that Christ will return to bring His Kingdom into all fullness through resurrection. God will forever dwell with us.

Great and loving God, creator of all that is seen and unseen, who created me and knit me together in my mother’s womb, help me to see more fully the hope of tabernacle. May I more fully grasp the amazing hope that You want to dwell with us and invites me to enter into this hope. May your love envelope me and grant me hope.

Prayer concern: May others join us in our journey to hope in the promise of God dwelling with us

Prayer for Victory

“The Lord answers you in the day of trouble! The name of God of Jacob protects you. May he grant you your heart’s desire and fulfill all your plans. May the Lord fulfill all your petitions.” (vv. 1,4,5)

As a child and young adult growing up, I was not exposed to reading and studying the bible. Since joining Cross of Hope and becoming interested in the Bible, I have become familiar with many books and passages, so I signed up for Psalm 20.

Upon returning home and reading the psalm I had selected; it became immediately clear that I had chosen the most suitable passage for my situation.

The prior week was just awful. Everything I said, I did, I wrote, how I acted - no matter what - was just an unpleasant experience. I was ready to give up but instead I cried a bit, felt sorry for myself, took a deep breath, and sat down. My bible was laying on the table next to my chair and I picked it up, held it for a few minutes and reread Psalm 20. I knew God would help me get through all these negative things I’ve been experiencing and guide me to the path I needed to take.

The following poem is from a book that belonged to my mother. I thought it summed up my emotions. It’s entitled “Don’t Quit.” The author is unknown.

*When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you’re trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low and the debts are high,
And, you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest, if you must-but don’t you quit.*

Everyone experiences moments of difficulty, but seeking guidance on how to manage these challenges can lead to positive outcomes. “They will collapse and fall, but we shall rise and stand upright. Give victory to the king, O Lord, answer us when we call.” (vv. 8-9)

Margie Reed

Too Much!

But they understood nothing ... (v. 34a)

Years ago these twelve men had hitched their wagon to that irresistible Star. They took care of business. They tried to shield Him from demanding crowds and pesky kids. They endured storms at sea, which he calmed with a simple command. Always, they were on the move. Desperate lepers, widows and parents approached Him for mercy and were never denied. He fearlessly spoke truth to the powerful and even settled their own petty disputes. Now, on their way to Jerusalem, He was again trying to explain that He was going to be put to a humiliating death. No way!

September 1967: I enrolled at UNM, brimming with idealism. But by spring, classes and exams were routinely being cancelled due to massive protests against the Viet Nam war. I'd been raised to trust the government, but how could you condone napalm and student deferments? One afternoon, National Guardsmen with fixed bayonets arrived at the Student Union Building to quell an angry scene. Blood was shed and people were hospitalized. April 4, 1968: Martin Luther King, Jr. was gunned down. Later it would be Robert Kennedy. Honestly, I resented the chaos and was afraid. My response was to hide out in Zimmerman Library between classes. Were the disciples too overloaded to take it all in? I can identify.

Lord, we trust in your mercy when it's all too much.

Prayer concern: Help us to lighten the load when others are in distress.

Glenna Meneely

Throwing in the Towel

The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous and he shall bear their iniquities. (v. 11)

In the old-time fight game, if a manager thought his boxer was getting beat up too badly, he could stop the fight and concede defeat simply by throwing a towel into the ring. The loser limps out of the ring, defeated while his opponent celebrates his victory.

But happily, our own personal journey to hope is not the same “zero sum” experience. Quite the contrary! When we get beat up by life, and we figuratively throw in the towel by giving up our troubles and problems to God, we don’t lose. Our living God surrounds us with His love and supports us through His infinite grace. The most constructive thing we can do is tell God, “OK...I give up! I’m putting you in charge.” When we do that, we come out on top as big winners!

**Loving and gracious God, thank you for your grace. Help me to experience your love and grant me peace as I give up myself to you.
Amen.**

Prayer concern: Our brothers and sisters who are experiencing difficult times.

Duane Meneely

When Things Go a Little Crazy

“But I trust in thee, O Lord, I say Thou art my God.” (v. 14)

Sometimes, it seems your life is a mess. You may have one of those days or weeks or even months. Maybe it's a fight with your spouse or with a friend. Maybe problems at work or maybe you even lose your job. It can be something as simple as burning dinner or something as serious as being diagnosed with a serious disease. Maybe you're facing surgery or maybe you lose a loved one.

You're hurting so bad you don't know where to turn. Your family and friends try to understand but a lot of times that just isn't enough. I've faced a couple of those things in the recent months and yes, my family and friends have stepped up to the plate. They've taken me to the doctor and to church. They've helped clean house and anything else that I've asked them to do. I've had a big support group but then I realized I was ignoring the best support ever. It was there all the time. Sometimes we're so low we forget what is right there.

I turned to the Lord. Things may be bad, but the Lord is always there. Sometimes we forget and look elsewhere, but He's always waiting. Look at that line, “Trust in the Lord.” Just do it. It helps.

Lord, help me not forget that you are always there.

Diane Carrico

The Cost of Following Jesus

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus (v. 5)

What does it mean to have the mind of Christ? In his book, *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer gave us a thorough look into the mind of Christ and of the cost of following the way of Jesus. It is, in fact, an all or nothing humbling commitment. While a seminarian, he travelled to New York and studied at the Union Theological Seminary. He befriended a fellow student who was black. He began attending church with him at Abyssinian Baptist Church. There he experienced, in a way he hadn't seen before, the Gospel lived out in both spirit and action. Jesus said that this Good News was simply to love God with all ones heart, mind, and strength; and to love ones neighbor as oneself. This congregation was living this out every day and it was an epiphany for Dietrich. The mind of Christ was exemplified through the lives of African American Christians who chose to care for their poor neighbors. They chose love in the midst of personal hardship and racism. They did not let hate win! When Dietrich returned to Germany he took with him this revival of faith, hope and love. He found that following the way of Jesus was costly, but life giving. For speaking against antisemitism, racism and idolatry, he was arrested, imprisoned, and hanged. His last words were, "This is for me, the beginning of life."

Oh Lord of grace and mercy, empower us to take up our cross and follow Jesus. Amen.

Prayer concern: For those struggling to count the cost.

Chris Morgan

Triumphant

“Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” (v. 38)

Jesus lived an ordinary life up to this point. Yes, he had the approval of God who declared how pleased He is. Yes, he had a large following. Yet day after day, he walked this planet and faced all kinds of trials. How to find food for His followers? What words of wisdom to impart to bring hope to those around him? He ministered to the sick, he comforted the hurting, and day after day, he woke up, and did it again. Wash, rinse, repeat. Sounds a lot like my struggles, especially when I was knee deep, parenting my teenage boys, or relocating my life to chase after my grandkids! Jesus spent most of his time on this earth living an ordinary life. Can you relate?

Yet, on this one day, and only this one day, he was acknowledged as KING! He was honored, and praised. In fact, “the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen” (v. 37b). He was seen as who he truly was. My fellow believers, take heart, God sees you exactly as you are, struggling as you may do at times, and he finds you so exceptional! In Jesus, because of what He did, and who He is, we are called worthy. Now that's something to really shout about!

King Jesus, help me to praise you each and every day, no matter what comes my way.

Prayer concern: That the sinners and the saints may know they are seen and treasured.

Susan Rivera
Director of Cross of Hope School Ministry

Mary's Extravagant Hope

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

It was just before Jesus' triumphal entry. Carrying a large alabaster jar, Mary, the sister of Lazarus, approached Jesus. Scholars estimate that this jar held 12 ounces of pure Spikenard, imported from India. Breaking open her alabaster jar, she pours it out on Jesus' feet. Filling the room, it had to be suffocating. It was an extravagant sacrifice. Spikenard was exceedingly expensive. Judas declares that it was worth a year's wages. Did this sacrifice reflect Mary's heart? Was her offering a primal expression from her heart? In this action, she had to face the rejection and condemnation of her close circle. Jesus said this was to prepare his body for burial. Did Mary grasp this from listening at his feet as he referenced his looming death? Was she less distracted from anticipating a worldly king? As Mary poured the oil, it seemed like it was the journey's end. Jesus' death was near. Where was the hope? But our journeys to hope do not end at death - for Jesus had declared just before he rose Lazarus from the dead, "I am the resurrection and the life." While Mary was extravagantly pouring out her love, devotion, and worship on Jesus she also served as a key marker along God's great narrative of redemption, rescue, and hope. As we declare and live out our devotion to God, we too can be a signpost for others, pointing them to the hope of God through Christ. As Mary, we should not be deterred from living out our devotion and love of God because of how others may misinterpret, judge, or even reject us. We never know how God might use our devotion to help them on their journey to hope.

Gracious God and loving Father, grow our devotion and understanding of your grand narrative. Embolden us and grant us the courage to live out our devotion more fully and extravagantly before others not fearing their judgment but in faith believing that our journey toward hope can inspire others to join us on this journey.

Prayer concern: May others gain hope through our living out our devotion to God

Laura Burton

Light of the world

Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. (v. 35b)

On one of my regular trips to Home Depot awhile back, I made a nifty impulse purchase. It's a very compact flashlight, but with an extremely bright light that shoots a beam of light way into the distance. I am thinking about what a big improvement it is over the older flashlights. They took up a lot of space in my car's glove box and ran on D-cells that used to go flat right when I needed them the most. Or else the puny little light bulb would burn out. These high-tech LEDs are so much better.

Just as we need a good flashlight to tell where we're going in the dark, so we need Jesus to lead the way in life. His is the brightest light that never fails to show the way.

Blessed Father, we thank you every day for Jesus...the light of the world. Give us the continued strength to walk always in Jesus' bright light. Amen.

Prayer concern: Those who are searching for God.

Duane Meneely

Jesus Foretells His Betrayal

Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." (v. 27)

"One of you will betray me."...they look at each other...someone asks "Master, who?" 'Jesus says "The one to whom I give this crust of bread after I've dipped it." Then he dipped the crust and gave it to Judas, As soon as the bread was in his hand, Satan entered him.' Satan was waiting on the sidelines, Judas's disappointment that Jesus was not the Savior he had anticipated begins his betrayal.

I know when I don't love and care for my neighbor I betray Jesus. May we glorify your Name through our words and actions. Amen

Prayer concern: that all God's children will journey the path of Hope

Beth Cretsinger

The Hope of Love

Jesus knew that his hour had come... having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (v. 1)

There is hope in love. Jesus knew that his hour had come. The time for him to bear the cross and presumably he knew as well that in three days he would rise from the dead. The Jesus we find in the Gospel of John is very measured and calculated like that. Tomorrow we will recount how Jesus 'gave up his spirit' in this way. Similarly, then we can pay close attention to what Jesus does when he knows that his hour has come and how he loved his disciples – his friends – to the end. What does that love look like? *A meal and service.*

Unique to this gospel, Jesus gathers with his friends before the Passover and interrupts supper to wash the feet of his friends. Even Judas receives the service of foot washing and is included in this great act of love. The hope of this love is found not in the deserving of the one receiving it, but rather in the grace of the one giving. This is the example that Jesus sets for all who will look to him to learn the way of life in God. Love through serving the needs of others and there you will find the grace and life of God. This love is hope for the journey.

Tonight, the church gathers in worship around the meal and basin to share in the life of God both in communion through Christ and service to our neighbor. Together, we eat and drink the meal of Christ's body and blood to know the life of God through the forgiveness of sin, and we stoop humbly to wash the feet of our neighbor to experience the love of Christ that lasts to the end. This love is found in one another at the table, in the service and for the journey of hope.

Holy God, it is to your table that we come and to your service to which we are sent. Fill us with your love, enough to share, tonight and always on our journey. Amen.

Prayer concern: to see God in the act of service to your neighbor.

Pastor Adam Berndt

Sacrifice For Sin Is No Longer Necessary

“Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain ... ” (v. 19-20)

Our life is our personal journey. Our hope is to become a purified creature of God. However, sin stands in our way. In the Old Testament the Holy of Holies in the Temple was the dwelling place of God. Only the Priest, after a thorough cleansing ritual, could enter that chamber and only one time a year, Yom Kippur, the annual Day of Atonement. The priest entered as a representative of the “common” people.

When Christ was crucified and His blood was shed, the curtain separating the Holy of Holies was torn. The tearing of the curtain in the Temple symbolized the beginning of the Priesthood of the Believers as members of a “nation” of priests. Through Christ, we can draw near to God without fear at our journey’s end.

What a blessing; what a privilege!

Heavenly Father, help us to cast all our burdens on you as we pass through the journey of life. Help us always to seek a presence with you through the broken body and shed blood of our precious savior, Jesus the Christ!

Prayer concern: That we might persevere in our faith, never growing weary or faint as we journey through life with our Savior.

Jerry Burton

Hope of the Resurrection

For if we have been united with Christ in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. (v. 5)

This is the night. Christian churches gather in the darkness of the night late tonight (or very early in the morning darkness tomorrow) and proclaim the good news that 'this is the night.' This is the night we stop and remember and give thanks for the hope of the resurrection – that God brought Jesus from death to life. As a young seminarian in Chicago, I fell in love with the great Vigil of Easter. Gathering on the street corner just a few blocks from Wrigley Field on a cool spring night as the sun set and the darkness grew. Growing up camping, the fire that was built in the mobile fire pit felt warm and familiar. Once we had gathered we gave thanks for the new fire, light a new paschal candle and then the cantor chanted thanksgiving for everything from the light of Christ to the bees who made the wax for the candle. It looked beautiful, it felt ancient and ageless at the same time, it was over the top in the best and most appropriate way for a night as great as celebrating God's work of salvation. It was a long night too, ending well after midnight with a champagne reception. I believe some wore black tie. Oh the things I could do in my 20s!

I have not figured out how to offer this same experience as a pastor. Our years joining Saint Francis Episcopal has been a great blessing and now they've moved theirs to early morning. I've tried that here and there certainly is power and poetry in the rising sun on the morning we proclaim the risen son. Maybe this year I'll just go visit another church and see if I can find that wonder of that first Vigil of Easter in Chicago. No matter what we do together, or I do on my own tonight, the good news is that *this is the night*. Thanks be to God!

God of darkness and light, we bless you on this night we hold vigil for the good news of your saving work in the resurrection. Bring us through this night to the celebration of the resurrection and inspire us to walk in newness of life. Amen.

Prayer concern: for the church gathered in worship throughout this holy night.

Pastor Adam Berndt

Resurrection Power

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

When the disciples entered the scene, things were not as they should have been. They found the tomb wide open. The linen cloth was laying on the ground. The body was missing. Mary was telling “tales.” Disbelief and shock spread like a wildfire. There have been many times in my life when I felt the same. Returning to graduate school with two young boys in tow, while teaching full time! Feelings of shock at the “tales” people have said about what I can and cannot do. Yes, I have even felt as if part of me was dead.

It is in these hard times, that I turned my tear-soaked face to heaven and cried out, “Jesus, where are you?” Praise God for His faithfulness as he reminds me that he is NOT among the dead. He is alive. The truth is, He has given me His resurrection power! Peter stood amazed at the tomb, and I stand amazed at how my life has been blessed. I can see how His resurrection power has equipped me to accomplish unbelievable feats. I am shocked at how He worked it all together for my good and His glory. When I see the sun rise each morning, I give thanks to a good, good Father who delights in empowering me to do what I think is impossible.

Believe it, beloved! You, too, have been gifted with Jesus’ resurrection power. Rise up and tell everyone. He is alive!

Lord, help me to remember that it is your resurrection power that equips me today.

Prayer concern: For those that are feeling hopeless and weak that they may feel alive in Christ.

Susan Rivera
Director of Cross of Hope School Ministry

Journey with Us in Worship

Lent – Holy Week – Easter
2025

Ash Wednesday, March 5, 2025

Worship – 12:00 noon and 6:00 p.m.

Sundays, March 9, 16, 23

8:45 and 10:45 a.m.

Sunday, March 30

One Worship at 10:00 a.m.

Sunday, April 6

8:45 and 10:45 a.m.

Palm Sunday, April 13

8:45 and 10:45 a.m.

Maundy Thursday, April 17

Worship – 6:30 p.m.

Good Friday, April 18

Worship – 6:30 p.m.

Easter Day, April 20

Worship – 8:45 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.

