

## *2026 Lent Daily Devotional*



Devotional Writers:

Rev. Caroline Bashore, First UCC, Royersford, PA and Linfield UCC, Linfield, PA  
Rev. Kimberly Berenotto, Longswamp United Church of Christ - Mertztown, PA  
Rev. Frances Chester, Falkner Swamp UCC, Gilbertsville, PA  
Rev. Selina Hamilton, Rosedale United Church of Christ - Laureldale, PA  
Rev. Matthew Hoover, Salem United Church of Christ, Campbelltown, PA  
Rev. Becky Hoover, God's Free Agent, Reading, PA  
Rev. Nichole Jackson, Open Table United Church of Christ - Pottstown, PA  
Rev. Zack Jackson, Open Table United Church of Christ - Pottstown, PA  
Rev. Linda Kozlowski, Good Shepherd United Church of Christ - Tuckerton, PA  
Rev. Leslie Mamas, Olivet-Schwenkfelder UCC, East Norriton, PA  
Rev. Alan T. Miles, Zwingli United Church of Christ - Souderton, PA  
Rev. Joseph A. Motz, Bausman Memorial United Church - Wyomissing, PA  
Rev. Becky Sausser, St. John's United Church of Christ - Allentown, PA  
Rev. Dr. Kimberly Stryjak, St. Peter's United Church of Christ - West Lawn, PA  
Rev. Mark Stryjak, Alleghenyville UCC, Mohnton, PA  
Rev. Tammie Wisniewski, One UCC – Kenhorst, PA

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**February 18, 2026**

**Rev Joseph A. Motz**

**Joel 2:1-3, 8-9, 12-14 (NSRVUE)**

Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near— a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness! Like blackness spread upon the mountains, a great and powerful army comes; their like has never been from of old, nor will be again after them in ages to come.

Fire devours in front of them, and behind them a flame burns. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, but after them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. ...They do not jostle one another; each keeps to its own track; they burst through the weapons and are not halted. They leap upon the city; they run upon the walls; they climb up into the houses; they enter through the windows like a thief....

Yet even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; rend your hearts and not your clothing. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment. Who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him, a grain offering and a drink offering for the Lord your God?

**Reflection:**

One of the most ancient pieces of Christian liturgy we know is the Kyrie. “Lord have mercy upon us. Christ have mercy upon us. Lord have mercy upon us.” As we stand on the threshold of Lent, there is no question that everyone of us has fallen short of the calling and purposes of God. There is no question that our actions fail to line up with the way of God. And there is no question that God continues to call to us with hope and love, mercy and grace. Without this final truth, we as humanity would be utterly lost. Despite all the wisdom we claim to possess, we have shown throughout the millennia that we cannot save ourselves. “Yet, even now, says the Lord, return to me with all your heart...”

This is the invitation of Lent, to unwaveringly see both our sin and the truth of its destructive cost and to equally see the unrelenting, unwavering love of God that even now has the power to save us all.

**Prayer:**

O Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. O Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, have mercy upon us. O Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, grant us your peace. Amen.

**Jonah 3:1-10 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>3:1</sup> The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, <sup>2</sup> “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and proclaim to it the message that I tell you.” <sup>3</sup> So Jonah set out and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly large city, a three days’ walk across. <sup>4</sup> Jonah began to go into the city, going a day’s walk. And he cried out, “Forty days more, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!” <sup>5</sup> And the people of Nineveh believed God; they proclaimed a fast, and everyone, great and small, put on sackcloth.

<sup>6</sup> When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, removed his robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. <sup>7</sup> Then he had a proclamation made in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: No human or animal, no herd or flock, shall taste anything. They shall not feed, nor shall they drink water. <sup>8</sup> Humans and animals shall be covered with sackcloth, and they shall cry mightily to God. All shall turn from their evil ways and from the violence that is in their hands. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may relent and change his mind; he may turn from his fierce anger, so that we do not perish.”

<sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil ways, God changed his mind about the calamity that he had said he would bring upon them, and he did not do it.

**Reflection:**

A successful mission! Praise be to God!

The very next sentence reads, “But this was very displeasing to Jonah, and he became angry.” Huh? The thing he was sent to do *actually* worked – why would he be angry? He was angry because of *who* these folks were. Nineveh was the capital of Assyria, the nation responsible for the imminent destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel. Jonah, a prophet *from* Israel, saw the Assyrians as enemies. He was angry that God had shown mercy and steadfast love, and especially that God was ready to relent from punishing his enemies. God’s response was simple: “Go and attend to your enemy, because *I love them.*”

It is really hard to want God to bless those we see as enemies. And yet, we see in this story, and even in Jesus’ teachings generations later, that God doesn’t hate who we hate, as much as we’d like that to be true. God’s desire is for *all of us* to be whole, even if that is something that makes us uncomfortable. With God’s help, let us examine our hearts for the ways we, like Jonah, would like God to withhold God’s grace, steadfast love, and mercy from others, and ask God to speak tenderly to our hurting hearts to heal the places where we have allowed hate to consume us.

**Prayer:**

Holy one, you who know the nitty-gritty details of our lives and all those things that cause our hearts to break. May your love touch our tender parts – those that hurt to the touch – and heal them in your grace. Help us to see those we hate with your eyes, desiring their wholeness as much as we desire wholeness for ourselves. Amen.

**Jonah 4:1-3 (CEB)**

But Jonah thought this was utterly wrong, and he became angry. <sup>2</sup> He prayed to the Lord, “Come on, Lord! Wasn’t this precisely my point when I was back in my own land? This is why I fled to Tarshish earlier! I know that you are a merciful and compassionate God, very patient, full of faithful love, and willing not to destroy. <sup>3</sup> At this point, Lord, you may as well take my life from me, because it would be better for me to die than to live.”

**Reflection:**

What if you were commissioned with a calling, were wildly and unexpectedly successful in fulfilling it, and your very success made you angry enough to want to die? That’s what happens at the end of the book of Jonah. God gave Jonah the mission of proclaiming the message of “repent—or else” to the Ninevites, the hated enemies of Jonah’s people. Initially Jonah ran away from this commission but then got swallowed by a large sea creature, was vomited on to dry land, and schlepped himself to Nineveh where he half-heartedly mumbled a call to repentance. Shockingly every creature in Nineveh took Jonah’s message to heart—people and animals alike—and repented. Rather than be pleased at his success, at his enemies’ change of heart, Jonah is mad. Mad at God’s grace. Mad at God. Mad enough he wants to die. We might laugh at Jonah, but like him we struggle to accept the grace others receive. We think people should learn their lessons through punitive, painful measures. When people learn their lessons by other routes, we struggle to see them not suffer. Lent is a good time to examine our relationship with grace. Can we be in relationship with a God who doesn’t demand violence, who doesn’t enjoy suffering, who isn’t into doling out punishment, who knows an eye for an eye doesn’t lead anywhere worth seeing?

**Prayer:**

Holy One, merciful and compassionate, very patient and full of faithful love, soften our hearts just a bit more to wildness of your grace. May we who have been forgiven much be quicker to offer that understanding to others. Amen.

**Matthew 18:1-7 (NRSVUE)**

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?” He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.

“If any of you cause one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things are bound to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!

**Reflection**

Are we welcoming children in Christ’s name? You might be tempted to start listing the ways your church or local community are welcoming to families. But I wonder, are we as a country, as a society, as the global community, welcoming children in Christ’s name. My answer would be a resounding “No.” Not only do we fail to open our arms in Christ’s love to children, but we treat kids as disposable. From Sandy Hook to Uvalde, we continue to allow school children to be murdered in their classrooms. In Palestine and in wars across the globe, the death of babies is considered a normal price to pay in the conflict between authoritative and selfish men. From the Epstein Files to ICE Facilities, the abuse and exploitation of children is seen as forgivable if those in power deem it so. Christ calls us to do better.

**Prayer**

God who loves and welcomes all children, keep us from growing cold, keep us from turning away. Help us to stare into the face of evil and name it for what it is. Encourage us to take action that ends the abuse and harm of children. Hold us, Lord, as we grieve every child’s life ruined or lost due to a culture that chooses to turn away. Amen.

**Matthew 4:1-11**

8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 “All this I will give you,” he said, “if you will bow down and worship me.”

10 Jesus said to him, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.’[e]”

11 Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

“Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.”

**Reflection:**

Wait—what? The Spirit leads Jesus there? That feels backwards. But Lent often does.

Jesus enters the wilderness not because God delights in suffering, but to show us what faithfulness looks like when temptation comes. And it will come. Hebrews reminds us that Jesus was tempted in every way we are, yet was without sin. He knows this terrain.

On the mountain, Jesus is offered the shortcut: power without sacrifice, crowns without a cross. Wealth, security, control—everything shiny and immediate. All he has to do is bow. Jesus refuses. He will not trade worship for influence or obedience for safety.

This is our question, too. Are we content with God’s call on our lives, or are we clinging to easier kingdoms? Lent invites us to release what promises everything, and to serve the One who gives us everlasting life.

**1 Kings 19:3-8 (NIV)**

<sup>3</sup> Elijah was afraid<sup>[a]</sup> and ran for his life. When he came to Beersheba in Judah, he left his servant there, <sup>4</sup> while he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness. He came to a broom bush, sat down under it, and prayed that he might die. "I have had enough, Lord," he said. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors." <sup>5</sup> Then he lay down under the bush and fell asleep.

All at once an angel touched him and said, "Get up and eat." <sup>6</sup> He looked around, and there by his head was some bread baked over hot coals, and a jar of water. He ate and drank and then lay down again.

<sup>7</sup> The angel of the Lord came back a second time and touched him and said, "Get up and eat, for the journey is too much for you." <sup>8</sup> So he got up and ate and drank. Strengthened by that food, he traveled forty days and forty nights until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God.

**Reflection:**

Elijah is exhausted, afraid, and ready to give up. After confronting power and violence, he flees into the wilderness, convinced he is alone and that nothing will ever change. Many of us recognize that feeling. In a world marked by war, political division, economic anxiety, climate crisis, and the erosion of trust, despair can feel like a faithful response. Lent meets us in that place.

God does not scold Elijah for his fear or demand stronger faith. Instead, God offers rest, nourishment, and presence. An angel invites him to eat, to sleep, and then to rise again—not to escape the world, but to keep going within it. This is holy resistance.

Lent reminds us that burnout is not a moral failure. God meets us under our metaphorical broom trees, tending to our bodies and spirits before calling us forward. Even when hope feels thin, God provides just enough bread for the journey ahead.

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, when the weight of the world leaves us weary and afraid, meet us as you met Elijah—with rest, nourishment, and gentle presence. Feed our spirits when hope feels scarce, steady our hearts for the road ahead, and remind us that we do not walk alone. Give us strength for this Lenten journey, enough courage for today, and trust that you will provide again tomorrow. Amen.



**Psalm 32 (NRSVUE)**

"While I kept silent, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' and you forgave the guilt of my sin. Therefore let all who are faithful offer prayer to you; at a time of distress, the rush of mighty waters shall not reach them. You are a hiding place for me; you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with glad cries of deliverance."

**Reflection:**

The season of Lent is all about turning away from sinful habits and self-centeredness, acknowledging our shortcomings, seeking forgiveness, and committing to change. Repentance lies at the center of Lenten practice. We recognize and affirm that we are all completely dependent on God. We have earned nothing. None of us is "great" or "worthy" based on the lives we have lived, our education, work ethic, frugality, lawfulness, or even church attendance. The relief the psalmist speaks of comes from being offered grace after grace - forgiveness followed by forgiveness - not because of who we are, but because of who God is. No matter who we are or what we have done, God hears our distress, forgives us, and provides us a safe space - a refuge or "hiding place" - from the debilitating weight of regret. We all have words and actions, mistakes and bad choices, that we are sorry for. We all have bad habits that mar our relationships with others and God. Lent offers a structured and communal opportunity to repent, experience God's grace, and strengthen our relationship with God.

**Prayer:**

God of Mercy, this Lent we have much to repent for not only as individual believers, but as a people. I ask your forgiveness for things I have thought, said, and done, which have separated me from your loving will. I pray your pardon for the things I should have said or done, but neglected out of fear, selfishness, or apathy. Be my safe space now and always. Amen.

**Matthew 18:10-14 (CEB)**

<sup>10</sup> “Be careful that you don’t look down on one of these little ones. I say to you that their angels in heaven are always looking into the face of my Father who is in heaven. <sup>12</sup> What do you think? If someone had one hundred sheep and one of them wandered off, wouldn’t he leave the ninety-nine on the hillsides and go in search for the one that wandered off? <sup>13</sup> If he finds it, I assure you that he is happier about having that one sheep than about the ninety-nine who didn’t wander off. <sup>14</sup> In the same way, my Father who is in heaven doesn’t want to lose one of these little ones.

**Reflection**

If you have ever been around a child that has lost something that they deem important then you know the search that pursues. Bins are emptied, beds are ripped apart, things are taken out of every possible space in order to find that one thing they “just have to have.” I imagine that is how the Shepherd looked for the sheep from our reading today. Turning over rocks, separating bushes, searching caves until they were found. And I am comforted to know that this is how God searches for the lost, for me, for you. In the times that we feel we have wandered too far from God or are lost in our own failures, this Lenten season reminds us that God actively searches for us, loves us and celebrates us.

**Prayer:**

Seeking God, thank you for your unwavering love that searches for me when I wander. During this Lenten season, help me find my way closer to you. Amen

**2 Timothy 1:3-7** (New Revised Standard Version, UE)

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. <sup>4</sup> Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup> I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. <sup>6</sup> For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands, <sup>7</sup> for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.

**Reflection:**

Like many of you, I was raised in the church. I remember being very young and going to Sunday school to learn about Jesus. Some people have a lightning bolt moment where God calls them and makes everything clear... but for some, our faith is formed as a rock-solid foundation with a gentle and steady drip, like the way a stalagmite is formed. When I read Paul's letter to his mentee, Timothy, I am reminded of the gentle and steady formation of my faith. Timothy learned from his mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois. I have been given this precious gift, this heirloom, so that I might cherish it and care for it, and pass it on to the next generation. Today, as you continue your Lenten journey, I invite you to join with me in a moment of gratitude for the incredible examples of faith that have come before us.

**Prayer:**

Creator, Son, and Spirit One, thank you for the people in my life that planted and tended the seeds of your love. Help me to carry your love and light into the world. Amen.

**Romans 3:21-24 (NRSVUE)**

“<sup>21</sup> But now, apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed and is attested by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup> the righteousness of God through the faith of Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction, <sup>23</sup> since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; <sup>24</sup> they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus”

**Reflection:**

Lent is a season that gives us a reality check. We like to think we are good people and that we don't do much wrong, but Paul bluntly reminds us “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” The reality is that we've all made mistakes and missed the mark; we've all sinned and fallen short of what God intends for us and our world. At times, we've ignored those in need; we've been angrier than we need to be at other people; we've lied and told half-truths. In short, we've all messed up and made a mess of things.

In his letter to the Romans, yes, Paul reminds us of the reality of our sinfulness, but he also reminds us of another reality as well. The reality that it is not through our actions that we've earned justification and salvation, but through God's love made known to us in Jesus' actions and ministry. We are given God's grace anew this Lent and every day. As we continue this Lenten season let us examine ourselves every day and be honest about the ways we've fallen short and also be open and honest about the ways God saves us through God's love and grace.

**Prayer:**

Holy God, we have sinned, we have fallen short. We acknowledge this and so we pray, forgive us. Forgive us and restore us through the power of Christ's grace and the work of the cross. Amen.

**Scripture: Psalm 121(NRSVUE)**

I lift up my eyes to the hills—from where will my help come?

My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber.

He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade at your right hand.

The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil; he will keep your life.

The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.

**Reflection:**

Whenever I read or hear the words of Psalm 121, I think of a gentleman who was a member of the faith community where I used to serve. Repeatedly he would tell me that this was his favorite verse in Scripture. Repeatedly he would tell me that God was his helper, his answer, his rock, his shade, his guide through life. Repeatedly he would share that his life was good because he trusted in God.

Friends, life can be challenging. Life can be really messy. Life can be complicated. And, life is a beautiful gift from God. When we despair, when we feel hopeless, when we feel like everything is spinning out of control, we're invited to turn or to return to God. We're invited to remember that God is in control, that God is our protector, that God is always by our side, that the Spirit of God is always going ahead to prepare a way. As you move through this season of Lent, this season of turning around and repenting, take some time to lift up your eyes to the hills, as the Psalmist does. Take some time to breathe deeply and trust that God will not abandon or forsake you. Take some time to reflect on God's promises, on God's protection, on God's presence. Take some time to remember that you do not journey alone for God is with you through the day and through the night. God is loving you, carrying you, holding you, filling you with blessings.

**Prayer:**

Holy One, thank you. Thank you for caring about us. Thank you for guiding our footsteps, for offering protection, for showering us with grace (even though we don't deserve it). Our hearts overflow with gratitude and our response to all of your blessings is to do our best to live graciously and generously, to be love in the world. Amen.

**Sunday, March 1, 2026**

Rev. Frances Chester

**John 3:14-15**

And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.

**Reflection:**

Numbers 21 typically isn't in the rotation of favorite childhood biblical stories, but it features here in John. The reference to Moses lifting up the serpent in the wilderness speaks to the wandering Israelites prior to settling in Canaan who are bit by poisonous snakes. The Genesis author implies that the people intuited the snakes' presence as punishment for their crying out in agony over lack of food and water ("we have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you," v. 7).

The Lord instructs Moses to make a serpent of bronze and lift it high on a pole. The hurting people may then look upon it and be healed.

In this manner, Jesus, lifted high on a different kind of pole, offers healing to all who gaze upon him. The instrument of torture – the cross – with Jesus upon it, will be transformed into an instrument of salvation.

**Questions for reflection:**

Gaze upon Jesus lifted on the cross; what do you see? How is Jesus present with you? What might Jesus wish to heal in you ... to heal through you?

**Numbers 21:4-9 (NRSVUE)**

From Mount Hor they set out by the way to the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom, but the people became discouraged on the way. The people spoke against God and against Moses, “Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no food and no water, and we detest this miserable food.” Then the Lord sent poisonous serpents among the people, and they bit the people, so that many Israelites died. The people came to Moses and said, “We have sinned by speaking against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord to take away the serpents from us.” So Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a poisonous serpent, and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten shall look at it and live.” So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole, and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live.

**Reflection:**

Although the journey from Egypt to Canaan should have taken a little less than two weeks by foot, the Israelites found themselves on that journey for forty years. By the time we find them in the 21<sup>st</sup> chapter of the book of Numbers, they have already been walking for nearly 40 years.. They are tired and hungry and discouraged, and they grumble against God and against Moses. They are so worn down by their journey that they have forgotten the miracles that have brought them to this point. Now come the venomous snakes, biting and killing people who have already suffered so much.

They beg Moses to pray to God for forgiveness and for relief from the danger that the snakes pose to them and their families.

And God tells Moses to make a venomous serpent and put it on a pole, so that everyone can look at it and live.

If we want to survive the things that are harming us, we need to be brave enough to look directly at them. If we want our neighbors to survive the things that are harming them, we have to be brave enough to look directly at them.

Throughout this season, keep your eyes open. Don't look away from those systems and institutions that are harming people. Be brave enough to bear witness. And then, do what you can to help. The journey may be longer than we hoped, but we can't lose sight of the good news that we are in it together. We can't lose sight of the miracles that we've experienced along the way.

**Prayer:**

Lord, grant us the patience, the perseverance, and the courage to trust that the future that you've promised is coming and to keep our eyes open to the pain that exists in the world around us while we wait. Keep us soft enough to be with people in their suffering and strong enough to help wherever we can. Amen.

**Tuesday, March 3, 2026**

Rev. Caroline Bashore

**Isaiah 65:19-23b (The Message)**

I'll take joy in Jerusalem,  
take delight in my people:  
No more sounds of weeping in the city,  
no cries of anguish;  
No more babies dying in the cradle,  
or old people who don't enjoy a full lifetime;  
One-hundredth birthdays will be considered normal—  
anything less will seem like a cheat.  
They'll build houses  
and move in.  
They'll plant fields  
and eat what they grow.  
No more building a house  
that some outsider takes over,  
No more planting fields  
that some enemy confiscates,  
For my people will be as long-lived as trees,  
my chosen ones will have satisfaction in their work.  
They won't work and have nothing come of it,  
they won't have children snatched out from under them.

**Reflection:**

God promises Israel, and us, a world better than the one we have. And still, we wait.  
If we can read this vision and it doesn't bother us, we aren't paying attention.  
If it doesn't bother us, we aren't loving our neighbors.  
If it doesn't bother us, we aren't longing for God's Kingdom.  
Isaiah's vision exposes the gap between God's dream and our reality.  
We read "no more babies dying," but experience lives lost to gun violence, addiction, lifespans shaped by zip code and access to care.  
We read "build houses and move in," but experience unaffordable housing and displacement.  
We read "satisfaction in their work," but experience working multiple jobs, undervalued labor, retirement as fantasy.  
We read "children not snatched away," but experience family separation, deportation, incarceration.  
Lent doesn't let us look away.  
So... what are we going to do about it?

**Prayer**

God, we are tired of waiting while people suffer. Come closer. Shake us awake. Use us. Amen.



**John 8:5-11 (NRSVUE)**

In the Law, Moses commanded us to stone women like this. What do you say?” They said this to test him, because they wanted a reason to bring an accusation against him. Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground with his finger. They continued to question him, so he stood up and replied, “Whoever hasn’t sinned should throw the first stone.” Bending down again, he wrote on the ground. Those who heard him went away, one by one, beginning with the elders. Finally, only Jesus and the woman were left in the middle of the crowd. Jesus stood up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Is there no one to condemn you?” She said, “No one, sir.” Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on, don’t sin anymore.”

**Reflection:**

This story in John’s gospel has always disturbed me. It is a story of a woman being publicly exposed for her sin, according to the law, and the response of the religious leaders to jump to the worst possible consequence at their disposal. And, to make matters worst, they were using a woman’s literal life as a way to “test” another religious person’s morality. The level of inhumanity in this story is heartbreaking! I think it was heartbreaking to Jesus, too. And, not only did he not fall into the trap, but he changed the conversation entirely. The pregnant pauses he took granted him a couple moments to refrain from just reacting to this attack –directed at both him and this woman. In bending down to write in the dirt, he quieted the violent noise threatening to snuff out a life, and perhaps his own rising anger at the sinister plan made in the name of “holiness.” He didn’t see a problem to solve, but a life to protect. And he didn’t see this woman as a wretched lost cause, but someone that God loved and treasured. When he finally did speak, he looked at the woman’s accusers and asked them directly, “Is this really what you want to do? Are you willing to bet that you would ‘pass the test’ you are placing before this woman? By all means, throw your stones if you truly believe you’re in the clear.” And then they all leave, one by one, until it is just the two of them. After this horrific, embarrassing, terrifying experience, Jesus tells her that even HE, the Son of God, did not condemn her. I can only imagine her relief...Jesus stood by this woman when her lover abandoned her. He truly saw the woman the religious leaders were willing to erase. He empowered this woman who was incredibly disempowered by those around her. He refused to use the “rules” as a tool to condemn and instead, chose to love. As we continue to move through this season – daring to look inward, recognizing our neediness, and longing to draw closer to Jesus – may we know that Jesus is already drawing us close to him. That in his coming to us as us, he recognizes the neediness in us because that was part of his very own existence as well. Jesus knows us to our core and sees the good, and he longs for us to be whole. Let us pray that we can allow ourselves to be received by a God like that.

**Prayer:**

Loving One, thank you for seeing us. For loving us. For hearing the cries of our hearts. As we continue to walk through these 40 days, may you accompany us with each step. Soften our hearts to allow your warmth and tenderness in. Amen.

**Exodus (Col 1:15-23)**

<sup>22</sup> But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— <sup>23</sup> if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

**Reflection:**

We hear in this scripture that we are reconciled by Christ's physical body through death...without blemish and free from accusation.

When I reflect on these words I am drawn to "without blemish and free from accusation"

What is a life lived like when we heed Christ's words to be like Him and therefore, without blemish and free from accusation? To live unencumbered by this world's weight and formidable paths where the world, the powers around us, seek to mold us into a piece of this world is a heaviness many live under. The threats are real, the accusations run wild but if we choose, that is to follow and become a servant of Christ, as the Apostle Paul has shared, than we are truly redeemed.

But there is action on our part that is needed. Not just occasionally but relentlessly claiming both who and whose we are. Being faithful encompasses words of scripture, an undeniable decision to be unwavering in our allegiance to Christ, and who will be the first one that is raised from the dead.

Not surprisingly to us, that path of a committed and faithful walk everyday is to be recognized and aligned in everything we do. Beginning when we awake in the morning, moving through all thoughts and conversations and being the magnet that moves us closer to God, today, tomorrow and forever.

**Prayer:**

Eternal God, in a world that is more challenging everyday, from deciphering all what we hear and see around us, we prayerfully ask that you continue to guide us forward, to be a model of your unconditional love made know through your one and only Son, Jesus. May it be so now and forevermore! Amen, amen and Amen!

**Exodus 16:10-15 (NRSVUE)**

As Aaron spoke to the whole congregation of the Israelites, they looked toward the wilderness, and the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud. The Lord spoke to Moses, “I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, ‘At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the Lord your God.’”

In the evening quails came up and covered the camp, and in the morning there was a layer of dew around the camp. When the layer of dew lifted, there on the surface of the wilderness was a fine flaky substance, as fine as frost on the ground. When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, “What is it?” For they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, “It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat.

**Reflection:**

Have you ever been hungry to the point of starving? I have been hungry. Very hungry! But never to the point of starvation. There is no time in my life when I even approached the hunger of starvation. Which is so different from millions upon millions of people across this world. And my response to this life-long luxury? I grumble at times about a whole host of things I don't have! Which is terrible, right!! Generally, when we find ourselves in this place we sooth ourselves with a healthy portion of guilt and shame so that we can feel good about feeling bad about ourselves. But the next time you find yourself in this place, I invite you to do something radically different. Feel the gratitude for all you truly have. Gratitude is a highly underutilized spiritual superpower that moves us beyond the comforts of guilt to Christ's actions of generosity, because it frees us from the fear, selfishness, and anxiety that dominates our world. It does this by placing us within full awareness of the immensity of what we have and the awareness that what we desire in our soul is not more, but the ability to trust that God will provide for our true need as we seek to follow in the joy filled, life-giving, generous care of Jesus' way.

**Prayer:**

Fill me, O God, with the truth of my abundance. Let me sense with gratitude all I have to give thanks for this day and throughout the span of my life. As you do so, free me to rest in you and in your care. Free me from all that would keep me from being an ambassador of your life-giving love, so that I may know the joy of following in Jesus' way for the sake of this world. Amen.

**Exodus 16:27-30 (NRSVUE)**

[27] On the seventh day some of the people went out to gather, and they found none. [28] The LORD said to Moses, “How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and instructions? [29] See! The LORD has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you food for two days; each of you stay where you are; do not leave your place on the seventh day.” [30] So the people rested on the seventh day.

**Reflection:**

Why is it so hard for us humans to take Sabbath? Sabbath is specific time set aside for rest, family, and worship. It has always been intended as a gift - a built-in invitation to recognize that we are human beings, not human doings, and that God's desire for us is wholeness - not to function as limitless producers. The Israelites couldn't hack it, and if we are honest, many of us can't either. Why do we seem so allergic to stopping?

I think there are all kinds of good answers to that question, but at the core of it, I think it comes down to our collective conviction, well, maybe collective fear, that “enough” doesn't truly exist: we are not enough and there is not enough to permit us to rest: not enough time, not enough money, not enough hours in the day, not enough *fill in the blank*. So we push and push until we collapse, burn out, and then wonder why we are so exhausted. We are exhausted because we get caught up in this never-ending striving, and that isn't solved by “whenever I have the time” last-ditch efforts at self-care.

On this sixth day of the week, let's take some prayerful time to explore our own relationship to this concept of “Sabbath.” Sundays are the days many Christians designate as the Sabbath, but that looks different for folks who don't get the traditional Saturday-Sunday weekend. So, don't get wrapped up in the specifics. Just take some time to explore your beliefs about, and practices (or lack thereof) of Sabbath rest. And then take some time to listen for God's invitation to that Sabbath rest.

**Prayer:**

Holy God, help us to recognize, and maybe even challenge, the stories we tell ourselves about what our limits are, what kind of life we deserve, and what “enough” actually looks like. Remind us that we are “enough,” not because of what we do, but because we are beloved. Amen.

**Sunday, March 8, 2026**

Rev. Becky Hoover

**John 4:27-29 (NRSVUE)**

Just then [Jesus'] disciples came. They were astonished that he was speaking with a woman, but no one said, "What do you want?" or, "Why are you speaking with her?" 28 Then the woman left her water jar and went back to the city. She said to the people, 29 "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?"

**Reflection:**

Leaving Behind

Everything is different.  
The water jar is gone.

No more fear,  
No more being used,  
No more judgment.  
The water jar is gone.

No more snide comments,  
No more concealed snickers,  
No more shame.  
The water jar is gone.

The path before her is sweet freedom  
The breathlessness that comes from  
    holding your head up high.

What she carries with her now  
    is far weightier and pressing,  
    far more important than an empty vessel.  
The water jar is gone.

**Prayer:**

Savior of the World, inspire us to empty ourselves of old fears and tired concerns. May our thirst for newness drive us to drink deeply of your life-giving grace. Amen.

**Monday, March 9, 2026**

Rev. Kimberly Berenotto

**Psalm 51:10-17 (NRSVUE)**

Create in me a clean heart, O God,  
and put a new and right spirit within me.  
Do not cast me away from your presence,  
and do not take your holy spirit from me.  
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,  
and sustain in me a willing spirit.  
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,  
and sinners will return to you.  
Deliver me from bloodshed, O God,  
O God of my salvation,  
and my tongue will sing aloud of your deliverance.  
O Lord, open my lips,  
and my mouth will declare your praise.  
For you have no delight in sacrifice;  
if I were to give a burnt offering, you would not be pleased.  
The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit;  
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

**Reflection:**

Maybe it's just me, but I feel like I'm living with a broken heart most days. The Psalmist declares how they seek for God to forgive them, how they seek for their hearts to feel clear and light; so, they are able to share that experience with others who struggle to follow God's ways. But what God asks for in return when we mess up is not sacrifices or offerings, God doesn't say "So what are you going to do for me?" God wants to know that we have felt that hurt in the depths of our souls and spirits – that our heart knows what it's like to break. Our hearts may break when we act in ways that go against God's calling on our lives. Our hearts may break when we watch others experience a difficult walk along life's pathways. Our hearts may break with each scroll through the news cycle and each horrific headline. And our God says, "Let it be so, let your hearts break."

**Prayer:**

Righteous Creator, thank you for gifting us with open hearts that feel the depths of our own wrongs and hurts; hearts that refuse to ignore the pains of others and the world around us. Hold us when that brokenness feels overwhelming, pick us up when we know despair, and push us forward in ways that bring light and life to our own hearts and the broken hearts of the world. Amen.

**1 Corinthians 10:1-4**

1 Sing for joy to God our strength;  
shout aloud to the God of Jacob!

2 Begin the music, strike the timbrel,  
play the melodious harp and lyre.

**Reflection:**

Music has always been a refuge for my soul. When I was five, I loved to sing “The Song That Doesn’t End”—to the... enduring patience of my parents. It may have driven them a little crazy, but it filled me with joy. And that joy mattered.

When life feels heavy—when the news overwhelms, when grief or exhaustion creeps in—music reminds me whose I am: God’s. It recenters my heart when the world threatens to pull it apart. Yes, we need to stay aware of what’s happening around us. But we also need to choose, just as intentionally, to focus on what gives life.

So sing. Maybe it’s a hymn. Maybe it’s your favorite pop hit, sung loudly in the car with the windows rolled down. Watch something that makes you laugh. Revel in the wonder of creation or humanity’s achievements. Let joy be an act of faith—a reminder that God delights in our thriving, here on earth as it is in heaven.

**Psalm 81:6-10 (NRSV)**

6 “I relieved your[b] shoulder of the burden;  
your[c] hands were freed from the basket.  
7 In distress you called, and I rescued you;  
I answered you in the secret place of thunder;  
I tested you at the waters of Meribah.  
8 Hear, O my people, while I admonish you;  
O Israel, if you would but listen to me!  
9 There shall be no strange god among you;  
you shall not bow down to a foreign god.  
10 I am the Lord your God,  
who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.  
Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.

**Reflection:**

Lent invites us to listen again to a God who says, “I relieved your shoulder of the burden... I answered you in the secret place.” Psalm 81 reminds us that liberation is not only something God does for us, but something God longs to continue within us. Yet, if we are honest: we often hunger for what does not satisfy—security, control, certainty—while ignoring the nourishment already offered.

“I am the Lord your God... open your mouth wide and I will fill it.” This is not a command of dominance but an invitation of trust. The Holy Spirit feeds us not with excess, but with what sustains—truth that unsettles injustice, courage that resists despair, and compassion that breaks open hardened hearts.

In this Lenten season, may we release what weighs us down and dare to open ourselves fully. The Spirit is ready to feed us with life that is freeing, faithful, and whole.

**Prayer:**

Holy and liberating God, in this season of Lent, help us release the burdens we carry and quiet the voices that distract us from your truth. Teach us to open ourselves wide to your Holy Spirit, trusting that you will feed us with what truly sustains. Nourish us with courage to seek justice, compassion to love boldly, and hope strong enough to endure. As you have freed us before, free us again—within our hearts, our communities, and our world. Amen.



**Ephesians 4:25-32 (NRSVUE)**

"So then, putting away falsehood, let each of you speak the truth with your neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not make room for the devil... Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice."

**Reflection:**

Psychologists recognize that anger is often a "secondary emotion." This means that since anger is a powerful emotion and easy to express, it frequently acts as a protective shield to mask deeper, more vulnerable feelings. Often, if we take a moment to ask "what feelings lie beneath this anger," we recognize other emotions like grief, embarrassment, shame, rejection, fear, regret, guilt, insecurity, or helplessness... All emotions that we would rather not talk about or have to feel. Instead we default to anger. Paul cautions the believers of Ephesus that we are not always on our best behavior when we are angry. While the emotion itself is neither good nor bad, it can lead us to sin; to damage relationships and speak falsely. How often have you said something in anger that you later regretted, or allowed a grudge to keep you from a loved one? Paul instructs us to put away wrath and never let the sun set on our anger, but these are easier said than done. When we are struggling with anger, we can pray to God for a spirit of discernment. Ask God to help illumine whatever emotions lie beneath the anger, and give courage to engage those feelings underneath. When we give to God all the complexities of our emotional lives, we are less likely to sin out of anger. We are blessed to worship a God who deeply understands, since Christ himself experienced rejection, grief, and the entire breadth of human experience.

**Prayer:**

Holy One, you know me better than I even know myself. Be gentle with me. Help me to understand my anger and all the emotions that lie beneath it. Forgive me when I am not honest with myself, or allow my rage to lead me astray. Cleanse me a peace that passes all understanding. Amen.

**Ephesians 5:1-9 (NIV)**

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup> and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

<sup>3</sup> But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. <sup>4</sup> Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a person is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.<sup>[a]</sup> <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. <sup>7</sup> Therefore do not be partners with them.

<sup>8</sup> For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)

**Reflection:**

Paul is challenging the church in Ephesians and us to love as children of God or children of the light. We do not live as children of God to earn God's love or mercy, rather we live as children of light because we have already been redeemed from the darkness. Lent is the perfect season to examine what darkness still hovers over our lives. Those things that are hidden, selfish, or unkind habits that hinder our relationship to God and each other. We are called to reflect God's love and holiness because we are not just in the light, but we are the light, which changes how we live, act and speak. This Lenten season, may we reflect God's light in the world.

**Prayer:**

Merciful God, thank you for loving me and calling me your child. During this Lenten journey, help me to walk in love, imitating your love and light in the world. Amen.

**John 1:1-9 (New Revised Standard Version, UE)**

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup> He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup> All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being <sup>4</sup> in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. <sup>5</sup> The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it. <sup>6</sup> There was a man sent from God whose name was John. <sup>7</sup> He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup> He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. <sup>9</sup> The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.”

**Reflection:**

As we were taking ornaments off of the branches of our Christmas tree to safely pack away for next year, my seven-year-old reflected, “Christmas was fun, when do we get to look for eggs?” This must be why Jesus tells us to have faith like a child, because in her mind there is a deep connection between Christmas and Easter. This is foundational to our faith, and some of us older children of God can get so distracted by the ever-growing to do list that we forget how important this connection is. If Jesus had not come in the first place as a vulnerable baby, there would not be a resurrection on Easter morning. It is because of Christ love for us that all of this joy is possible! As we continue in our Lenten journey, let us keep our eyes fixed toward the glory of our Lord. Amen.

**Prayer:**

Holy God, help me to have the faith of a little child. Thank you for your love and your presence in my life. Amen

**John 9:35-37 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>35</sup> Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?” <sup>36</sup> He answered, “And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him.” <sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, “You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he.” <sup>38</sup> He said, “Lord, I believe.” And he worshiped him.

**Reflection:** What do we believe in?

No doubt, we believe in many good things like justice, fairness, decency, and love, but do we believe in the God that is behind those things? Of course, we believe in God, right? Most, if not all of us, are good Christians who regularly attend worship and do the things that we are supposed to do. Yet, believing in God means not just saying we believe in God but living like we believe in God which is harder. Believing in God means centering our entire beings in God. In the story of the man born blind, the Pharisees would have said they believed in God and yet they missed God’s action right in front of them because it didn’t happen within their narrow definitions of the way God works. To believe in God is to open ourselves to the ways that God is in our midst, even when it doesn’t fit neatly into the boxes we have for God. To believe in God is to allow God to expand our perspectives and open ourselves to transformation; to believe in God is allowing ourselves to have our minds changed.

How has God been stretching our faith and belief this Lent? What new things is God revealing to us?

**Prayer:** Revealing God, open our souls to your presence around us. Expand our understanding of your realm and transform us into your people. Help us to believe in you more fully and live in you. Amen.

**Psalm 146 (NRSVUE)**

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

I will praise the Lord as long as I live;

I will sing praises to my God all my life long.

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help.

When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.

Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God,  
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith forever;  
who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.

The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind.

The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous.

The Lord watches over the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow,  
but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin. The Lord will reign forever,  
your God, O Zion, for all generations.

Praise the Lord!

**Reflection:**

Praise the Lord! Friends, we are imperfect humans. We make mistakes. We veer off the pathway Jesus points us toward. We believe the empty spaces within us can be filled with possessions—that newer, bigger (or smaller), and more will make us happy. It never works that way. Rather, we keep trying to fill our broken space again and again.

The Psalmist offers: “Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God...” As we move through this season of Lent, may we release the need to have more: more stuff, more control, more power, more possessions. Instead, may we breathe deeply, turn around, and praise the Lord. All we have comes from God’s generous and gracious hands. All we see and feel and know and experience, are gifts from God’s abundance. And God calls us to live as Jesus lived. And God calls us to love as Jesus loves. May we respond by showing up, by offering spaces where our neighbors feel seen and heard and welcomed. May we be LOVE in the world. May we breathe deeply and trust that God will never steer us wrong, that God will always be our guide and our protection. Praise the Lord, O my soul!

**Prayer:**

Holy One, remind us that your Way and your Word show us how to live together in beloved community. May we continually praise you. May we continually do our best to live as Jesus lived. May we care for our neighbors by feeding them, by listening to their stories, by loving them, by offering them the gift of grace. Lord, we give you thanks and we praise you.

**Colossians 1:9-14**

For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God. May you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, so that you may have all endurance and patience, joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

**Reflection:**

The report from Epaphras (vs. 1-8) leads Paul to exude with thanks and praise for the way God is revealed through the Colossians ("you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God" v 10).

After encouragement, Paul reminds them of God's act, not just for them, but for him and his team as well. They are all in this together: "He has rescued us ...."

The present perfect tense "he has rescued" affirms that the rescue happened in the past, but the result (you are safe) is true right now. It highlights the completion of the action rather than exactly when it happened. Being held in this manner by God, Paul, the church in Colossae, and future generations of the body of Christ are strengthened to be the good news of love, compassion, and restoration that mark the Christ-spirited church.

**Questions for reflection:**

Do you believe that Paul's words apply to you? To your church? Why or why not?

**Matthew 9:30-31 (NRSVUE)**

And their eyes were opened. Then Jesus sternly ordered them, “See that no one knows of this.” But they went away and spread the news about him through all of that district.

**Reflection:**

There are moments in the Gospel when Jesus does something amazing and then says, “don’t tell anyone about this.” He never explains why, so we can only speculate on his reasons for asking for quiet. Maybe he wanted to keep control over the story told about him in the world. Maybe he was worried about the crowds that would gather quickly if word got out. Maybe he was concerned that if people heard about his miraculous healings, they would come to him for the miracles and missed the real point of what it meant to follow him.

Whatever his reasons might have been, time and again when Jesus says, “don’t tell,” what happens next is that everyone who seed and experienced the miracle of Jesus goes out and tells. The blind men whose eyes were opened by Jesus in this story left and made sure everyone in their town knew what had happened.

We are followers of Jesus who learned about him, about his work and miracles and ministries, long after his death and resurrection, long after he went from telling people to stay quiet about what they had seen to telling his disciples to “go and make disciples of all the nations...teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19-20).

Tell someone today. See that somebody knows of who Jesus is to you, what God has done for you, how much you love God and your neighbor. It’s time. Share the Good News.

**Prayer:**

Jesus, you have offered us deep and miraculous healing. You have taught us how to live and love. You have shown us the grace and forgiveness of God. Help us to go out and tell the world about our love for you. Help us to go out and show the world our love for our neighbors. Amen.

**Revelation 10:8-11 (NIV)**

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.”

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but ‘in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.’” I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”

**Reflection:**

Sweet going down. Bitter once it settles. That’s how truth works sometimes.

The scroll tastes like honey at first; good news that makes crowds gather. The poor are seen. The sick are healed. Sins are forgiven. Outsiders are welcomed. Hope spreads fast. Everyone wants a bite.

But then it reaches the gut and it turns sour.

Because good news that actually changes the world doesn’t stay sweet for long. It threatens power. It exposes fear. It refuses to play nice. What begins with open hands ends with clenched fists. Cheers become angry shouts. Welcome becomes rejection. Healing leads to a cross.

The bitterness doesn’t mean the message was wrong. It means it was real.

Some truths comfort us, others cost us, and the hardest ones do both.

**Prayer:**

Lord, even when your word turns bitter within us, we trust it is still life-giving. Shape us by what is hard as well as what is sweet. Amen.



**Psalm 130 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>1</sup> Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord. <sup>2</sup> Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications! <sup>3</sup> If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? <sup>4</sup> But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered. <sup>5</sup> I wait for the Lord; my soul waits, and in his word I hope; <sup>6</sup> my soul waits for the Lord more than those who watch for the morning, more than those who watch for the morning.

<sup>7</sup> O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem. <sup>8</sup> It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

**Reflection:**

Introspection is not an easy task. When we dare to look inward – beyond the surface where people can see what we want them to see – there is no hiding. Our most vulnerable parts are there, and our natural instinct is to self-protect, especially the parts we hold with regret and shame.

The psalmist reminds us that God's forgiveness is always waiting for us. That steadfast love greets us when we dare to bare those things before God. And it's not even just forgiveness, but even redemption– the opportunity to bring forth future good from the depths. That is the reason we take the chance of facing our pain and even mistakes – because God goes with us, and when we are honest, a path forward is possible.

Let us pray that we would trust that God is big enough to hold all of who we are, and allow the regrets and the shame to quiet in God's presence. For, if he doesn't condemn us, why should we condemn ourselves?

**Prayer:**

Forgiving and redeeming God, help us to receive your invitation to come to you with all of who we are, especially those things we would dare not name. Help us to trust that you long, not to destroy us, but to bring us into healing and wholeness. Amen.

**Luke 24:44-53**

<sup>45</sup> Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. <sup>46</sup> He told them, “This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, <sup>47</sup> and repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. <sup>48</sup> You are witnesses of these things. <sup>49</sup> I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”

**The Ascension of Jesus**

<sup>50</sup> When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted up his hands and blessed them. <sup>51</sup> While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven. <sup>52</sup> Then they worshiped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy. <sup>53</sup> And they stayed continually at the temple, praising God.

**Reflection:**

In Luke’s words to us on this day, our minds are opened so they could understand the Scriptures...how do we know if our minds are open to the Words that we intend to understand and follow? Scriptures are complex, words describing events and providing direction for a people so long ago and in a time that is hard fathom, just like today would be for them to understand. And yet our hope is found in our ability to embrace God’s will for our lives and in those times, our minds are opened to hear, to see, and to love as Jesus had shown.

In a divisive world where the center is nearly barren, the fringes are piled high and overcrowded with human desire and a human will that is held above all else, how do we become and stay faithful? How do we walk as children of God when the playgrounds for all are so limited by hate and indifference?

How do we choose this day both how and where to follow God and embrace our faith like our lives depend on it, because they do?

If our thoughts are just our own, we must recenter our lives through Christ.

If our actions are seemingly aligned with God’s will than we must hold fast on that arc of faithful action.

**Prayer:**

Holy God of these days, creator of all that is good, we call out to you with voices trembling with fear and outrage at the injustices and seemingly complex plight of daily life. We pray with every thought in our minds that we can follow your will. That we can always be open to see this world through your eyes and to model those actions accordingly. In your Son’s Holy name, we open ourselves in this moment to listen to the still speaking voice among the chaos, the noise and words of all things not faithful, to become and sustain our faithfulness no matter where we are on life’s journey.

We thank you God, from the very beginning to the very end of our lives, for the unconditional love and support you have given us, that you will give us and for all that is promised through your name, Amen, amen and Amen!

**Ezekiel 37:1-10 NRSVUE**

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry. He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?" I answered, "O Lord God, you know." Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you and will cause flesh to come upon you and cover you with skin and put breath in you, and you shall live, and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded, and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live." I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

**Reflection:**

How much of this last week was your hope centered in God? How many times did you pause in the dry, barren places of life to simply breathe in the Spirit of God, trusting that God's Spirit would be poured out like living water? What is the vision, the truth, the words God is inviting you to see, proclaim, and hear as you step into this new week? May you be bold in trusting not in the dryness of the bones, but in the living presence of God.

**Prayer:** (*Daniel Iverson, 1926 – "Spirit of the Living God"*)

Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Melt me, mold me, use me. Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me. Amen.

**Psalm 143:10 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>10</sup> Teach me to do your will, for you are my God. Let your good spirit lead me on a level path.

**Reflection:**

I was recently telling a friend about something I was worried about, and he asked me, not to insult, but with all sincerity, “have you prayed about it?” I looked at him, rolled my eyes and said with just a touch of sarcasm, “of course I haven’t. Why on earth would I do that?” Sigh. Thanks for that humble reminder, friend...

What a simple but profound prayer the psalmist offers – “show me the way, O God.” Life’s circumstances, our egos, worries, fears – they all have the tendency to consume our attention and energy. I don’t know about you, but when things get really overwhelming, I tend to spiral and solve absolutely nothing, and that’s often because *I do not stop*. I don’t pause. I just allow the same song to play on repeat. However, when I stop to pray – when I invite God *into* the spirals and the repetitive messages, they tend to slow a little bit, almost like the background noise quiets. When I pause to ask God to lead me into what’s next – the next right thing, the next right decision, the next breath – I am able to see with a little more clarity. I am able to panic a little less. I am able to discern what is actually in my control and what is mine to do, and that has a way of bringing peace.

Today, let us pray with the psalmist that simple prayer above, inviting God into our story and allowing God to guide us through.

**Prayer:**

Holy One, teach us to do your will, for you are our God. Let your good spirit lead us on a level path. Amen.

**Ephesians 2:1-6 (NRSVUE)**

You were dead through the trespasses and sins <sup>2</sup> in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. <sup>3</sup> All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, doing the will of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else, <sup>4</sup> but God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us <sup>5</sup> even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— <sup>6</sup> and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus

**Reflection:**

On this day 46 years ago, the Archbishop of San Salvador, Oscar Romero, was assassinated while saying mass. If you are not familiar with his story, take some time today to learn more about him. Archbishop Romero was considered a “safe” choice for the role of Archbishop when he was appointed in 1977 during a time of great political and social upheaval in El Salvador. He wasn’t expected to make waves; instead, Archbishop Romero became an outspoken critic of the government’s abuses and treatment of the poor and marginalized in El Salvador. On the day before he was killed, Archbishop Romero gave a sermon in which he directly addressed the members of the military, “I want to make a special appeal to soldiers, national guardsmen, and policemen: each of you is one of us. The peasants you kill are your own brothers and sisters. When you hear a man telling you to kill, remember God’s words, ‘thou shalt not kill.’ No soldier is obliged to obey a law contrary to the law of God. In the name of God, in the name of our tormented people, I beseech you, I implore you; in the name of God I command you to stop the repression.” Archbishop Romero knew the transformative power of God’s love embodied in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and he lived it. May his example and witness inspire us to live this same love courageously.

**Prayer:**

Gracious God, may your grace give us the courage to stand up for those who are oppressed, abused, and mistreated. May your great love for us inspire our loving kindness toward each other, even when, and especially when, showing love is tough. Amen.

**Scripture Matthew 22:23-33**

The same day some Sadducees came to him saying there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question: “Teacher, Moses said, ‘If a man dies childless, his brother shall marry the widow and raise up children for his brother.’ Now there were seven brothers among us; the first married and died childless, leaving the widow to his brother. The second did the same, so also the third, down to the seventh. Last of all, the woman herself died. In the resurrection, then, whose wife of the seven will she be? For all of them had married her.”

Jesus answered them, “You are wrong because you know neither the scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection people neither marry nor are given in marriage but are like angels of God in heaven. And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God, ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is God not of the dead but of the living.” And when the crowds heard it, they were astounded at his teaching.

**Reflection:**

We are so human, and we like things to be in perfectly organized categories. The Sadducees were trying to make sense of the law that a widow is required to marry her late-husband’s brother(s); questioning who the woman’s husband would be in heaven. That ridiculous law in itself warrants its own moment of reflection, but I want to focus on Jesus’s answer. An answer that, of course, doesn’t actually answer the question. Jesus tells the Sadducees that they just don’t get it; God’s kingdom isn’t like our human world. A woman doesn’t belong to a man in marriage in heaven; everyone belongs to God. What a shocking revelation for those ancient leaders to hear; perhaps an important word that still needs to be said today. In God’s heavenly realm folks aren’t put into our human-created categories – everyone is equally God’s beloved.

**Prayer:**

God of Heaven & Earth, we pray so frequently “your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” when we use the words your son Jesus taught us. May we truly mean those words! Help us to create your kingdom on earth, a place where we don’t categorize humans, where humans aren’t identified by who they belong to, but instead all people are seen as equal members of God’s holy family. Amen.

**Philippians 1:21-30**

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

**Reflection:**

Paul writes, “I thank my God every time I remember you... always praying with joy.” Gratitude, it turns out, is a spiritual discipline. If we don’t practice it, it slowly slips away.

There was a season when I became so focused on what was breaking, so consumed by worry and loss, that gratitude quietly disappeared. My prayers turned anxious. My outlook narrowed. It wasn’t until I began ending each day by naming what I was thankful for—sometimes only one small thing—that something shifted. Gratitude didn’t erase the hard parts of life, but it changed how I carried them.

Paul reminds us that God is still at work, still bringing to completion what has begun. When we practice gratitude—for our lives, our friends, our families, our churches—we learn to dwell not only on what is crumbling, but on what is being held together by grace.

Gratitude strengthens faith. It makes us resilient. And it honors God with our trust.

**Philippians 1:27-28a (CEB)**

<sup>27</sup> Most important, live together in a manner worthy of Christ's gospel. Do this, whether I come and see you or I'm absent and hear about you. Do this so that you stand firm, united in one spirit and mind as you struggle together to remain faithful to the gospel. <sup>28</sup> That way, you won't be afraid of anything your enemies do.

**Reflection:**

Lent calls us to examine not only what we believe, but how we live. In Philippians, Paul urges the community to "live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." This is not a private spirituality tucked safely inside our hearts; it is a public way of being shaped by love, justice, and courage. To live for Christ is to let our actions reflect Christ offering welcome to the excluded, dignity to the marginalized, and mercy to the wounded. Loving our neighbor becomes the clearest measure of our faithfulness. In a world that thrives on fear, Paul's call not to be intimidated reminds us that solidarity is a holy act. When we stand together for compassion, when we resist systems that harm, when we choose kindness over convenience, we proclaim good news. This Lent, may our lives speak the gospel clearly—through brave love, shared hope, and faithful care for one another.

**Prayer:**

God of Grace, shape our lives to reflect the love of Christ. Give us courage to live the gospel openly, tenderness to love our neighbors faithfully, and strength to stand together without fear. In this season, may our lives speak Your good news. Amen.



**Lamentations 3:55-66 NRSVUE**

"You have seen the wrong done to me, O Lord; judge my cause. You have seen all their malice, all their plots against me. The whispers and murmurs of my assailants are against me all day long. Whether they sit or rise — see, I am the object of their taunt songs. Pay them back for their deeds, O Lord, according to the work of their hands! Give them anguish of heart; your curse be on them! Pursue them in anger and destroy them from under the Lord's heavens."

**Reflection:**

Forgiveness is rarely a single decision that occurs once and is then complete. This is why in many indigenous languages, forgiveness is an active, ongoing process rather than a final, one-time act. As people of faith we are called to forgive, but may feel incapable of doing so. We instead hold on to the feelings we cannot give voice to; the anger, hurt, and vindictiveness. Many years ago someone I cared about was the victim of a hate incident. The incident was traumatic, and its repercussions lingered long after the harm was committed. In the immediate aftermath, my prayers to God resembled those of today's lament: "Pay them back for what they have done! Cause them anguish! Curse them and destroy them!" My pain was raw and all I wanted was divine retribution. However, as weeks began to pass my prayers began to soften a bit: "Make them pay! Cause them pain! But maybe don't destroy them... After all, that would only leave their loved ones with the same grief I am experiencing." A while later: "Make them pay. Ensure they give an equal measure of goodness and beauty to this world for the harm that they caused." And finally, after many months: "Softening their hearts and heal them. Fix the systems that taught them to hate, and heal their wounds where that hate festered and grew." The transformation from pain and rage to forgiveness was nothing I could take credit for. By being honest with God, and sharing even the ugliest thoughts and feelings in prayer, God was the one who transforms us. The authors of Lamentations knew this truth. God does not need chaste platitudes and sanitized recitations. God does not require us to censor ourselves. (After all, God already perceives our thoughts and knows our words before we speak them). If we instead bring to God our most honest pain and anger, God sews the seeds of forgiveness within our souls.

**Prayer:**

Patient and loving God, like the ancient writers of Lamentations I bring my true self in prayer. I offer you my jagged edges, knowing that only you can soften my heart and smooth my rough places. Help me to forgive, just as you continuously forgive me. Amen.

**Matthew 21:6-11 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>6</sup>The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed them; <sup>7</sup>they brought the donkey and the colt and put their cloaks on them, and he sat on them. <sup>8</sup>A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. <sup>9</sup>The crowds that went ahead of him and that followed were shouting,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!  
Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

<sup>10</sup> When he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was in turmoil, asking, “Who is this?” <sup>11</sup> The crowds were saying, “This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee.”

**Reflection:**

Matthew’s story of Palm Sunday stresses that Jesus is a different kind of King. He is a King who serves rather than a conqueror who dominates. As Pilate clanged and crashed his imperial way into Jerusalem from the west, Jesus approached from the east, deliberately countering what was happening on the other side of the city. A political move on his part, he is making a statement that he brings a different kingdom, a different form of leadership.

These paradoxes are what give Jesus’s story its shape, calling us at every moment to hold together and recognize the discord of our culture of power vs God’s world of peace. This Palm Sunday Jesus calls for a change in our hearts—a shift from being ruled by the world’s power to being ruled by God’s kingdom power. May we trust the unknown future to the God who works good out of every circumstance and remember that God is with us.

**Prayer:**

Compassionate God, as we prepare to enter this Holy Week, may we remain hope-filled and courageous to continue on with the steadfast assurance of your Still-speaking voice. Amen

**Hebrews 9:11-15**

But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the holy place, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God! <sup>15</sup> For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant.

**Reflection:**

Man! I feel like I could talk about the letter to the Hebrews for hours! These four little verses pack such a big punch! This letter was written to an audience of people who understood the Jewish customs and traditions that Jesus would have been raised with. Sacrifices had to be offered for the forgiveness of sins, but now because of Jesus Christ everything is different! This is because Jesus Christ has offered his own blood and created a new covenant! This new covenant, this new promise from God not only frees us from sin and death, but also invite us to become part of the Royal and holy family of God! This new covenant makes us children of the light! And it is all possible because of Jesus!

**Prayer:**

Thank you, Jesus! Thank you for making away for me to be free and made holy. Thank you for creating this new covenant that welcomes me as a child of God. Amen.

**John 12:20-26 (NRSVUE)**

<sup>20</sup> Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. <sup>21</sup> They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” <sup>22</sup> Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. <sup>23</sup> Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. <sup>24</sup> Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

**Reflection:**

The time for us to honor Jesus’ death grows ever closer. As we approach this time the spirit of contemplative prayer and meditation, may we ask ourselves, “what has died within us this Lent?”

What have we needed to let go of this season? What have we lost? Lent teaches us that salvation and resurrection are only possible if we allow death to happen. It is not an easy task to lose something; it is not an easy thing to let go. If we’ve been resisting that death and that loss, there is still time. With the power of the Holy Spirit, let it go; let it go with tears and the necessary grief. Let it go and plant it in God. When we give it to God, we allow for the possibility that it can be reborn. It is only in God that we can be reborn. Sometimes to see Jesus and God, we need to enter the places of death and loss. If that’s where you are this Lenten season, go into that place knowing Jesus has gone before us.

**Prayer:**

Holy God, strengthen for this journey towards death and the cross. Give us peace for the necessary losses and deaths in our spiritual lives and help us to trust in the new things that are planted. Amen.

**Hebrews 12:1-3 (NRSVUE)**

Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls or lose heart.

**Reflection:**

Friends, for many life right now seems overwhelming. We turn on the news, we log onto social media, we turn on the radio, and we are bombarded with despair. The divides seem to keep widening. The incivility seems to keep growing. Perhaps in our exhaustion and weariness, we want to hide, to give up, to ignore the bombardment of doom which surrounds us.

Jesus faced betrayal from a friend. Jesus faced shame and rejection. Jesus faced the Cross. Through all of this, Jesus endured and stayed true to God's way. Jesus lived through everything we will ever live through. Jesus experienced all of the feeling and emotions we experience. Jesus' life and death remind us to keep moving forward, to breathe deeply, to persevere.

As we come close to the end of Lent, as we move forward toward Holy Week, may we release what is too heavy for us to carry. May we hand over to Jesus whatever stands between us and God; whatever stands between us and our neighbors. May we take to heart the words from the Book of Hebrews: "Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls or lose heart." Rest as you need to, friends. Breathe deeply. Keep moving forward following the One who is grace, who is love, who is peace, who is justice.

**Prayer:**

Oh, Holy One, remind us afresh to keep taking one more forward step. Remind us anew to release whatever we no longer need to carry. Help us continue this journey through life. And help us care for those we meet along the way. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

**Thursday, April 2, 2026**

Rev. Frances Chester

**Read: Exodus 12:1-4 (5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35 in your favorite translation.**

**Reflection:**

Exodus inaugurates the festival of Passover, with the blood of a lamb on doorposts signaling to God to pass over the Hebrew households on the night they are freed from slavery in Egypt. In 1 Corinthians Paul describes how the body of Christ joins together in memory of the body given for them, in symbols of bread and wine. John's gospel brings us to the table with that body who bends down to wash dirty, stinking feet, before breaking bread and passing around the cup, offering them like he will his very flesh and blood later that night.

On Maundy Thursday our senses are soaked in the ways God delivers us. On this night, allow your feet or hands to be washed and feel the hands that touch your skin, the coolness of the water or cloth. Notice the texture of the bread and the sting of cheap wine or sugary grape juice that hits the back of your throat. Notice and know: God is here, choosing vulnerable flesh as the place of our salvation.

**Questions for reflection:**

On a scale of one to ten, one being "at peace" and ten being "extremely uncomfortable," where are you as you sit with the images of Jesus washing your feet, and of Jesus passing to you bread and a cup? Does your scale shift from one image to another? Sit with each moment, allowing Jesus to serve you.

**John 19:25b-27 (NRSVUE)**

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother." And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home.

**Reflection:**

In one of his final acts on the cross, according to the Gospel of John, Jesus looked at his mother and at the beloved disciple, and not wanting them to be alone he told his mother that the beloved disciple is her son. He told the beloved disciple that his mother would claim him as her own.

Yes, in this moment Jesus is ensuring that his mother will be cared for and supported without the security of her own son, who would be expected to take over when Joseph died and she became a widow. I think that there's more to this moment, though. Looking at these two people who loved him deeply, his mother who loved him first and the disciple whom he loved best, he recognizes the grief that they are going to have to survive when he dies. He knows that they will need a loving and caring companion in the valley of death. He offers them that in each other. He tells them: you will love each other through this like a mother and a son.

This is one of the blessings of living in Christian community: knowing that we, like Jesus' mother and Jesus' beloved disciples, will always have a companion by our side in the valleys that life brings. We always have someone loving us through it. We will always be invited to be that person, loving a friend through their own grief.

**Prayer:**

Holy Jesus, our companion and our friend, help us to see and recognize the beloved friends who you have sent to walk with us through the hard days of this life. Help us to be beloved friends to those who are suffering. Help us to recognize one another as siblings, as parents, as children, and partners on the journey. Amen.

**Matthew 27:62-66 (NIV)**

The next day, the one after Preparation Day, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. “Sir,” they said, “we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, ‘After three days I will rise again.’ So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.” “Take a guard,” Pilate answered. “Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.” So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.

**Reflection:**

Holy Saturday is the day when doubt finally sounds reasonable. Jesus is dead, really dead, and his body has been wrapped, sealed, placed behind a stone, and for the first time in a long time, nothing is happening. After all the excitement of the past few years, after the crowds and the miracles and the hope, this ending makes the accusation feel plausible: maybe he was never the Son of God after all.

And yet, it is the chief priests and Pharisees who remember what the disciples cannot. They go to Pilate because Jesus’ words still haunt them. They begin to wonder: what if he was telling the truth, what if this isn’t the end, what if this man truly is who he claimed to be? They believe resurrection is possible enough to guard the tomb.

And we are left waiting, asking our own what if.

**Prayer:**

God, we know how this story ends, yet we linger with the what ifs. What if the guards were right, what if the tomb stayed full, what if Jesus was only another hopeful story that ended too soon. Stay close as we wait, unsure, unsettled, and still hoping.



**Sunday, April 5, 2026**

Rev. Zack Jackson

**John 20:17 (NRSVUE)**

Jesus said to her [Mary Magdalene], “Do not touch me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father. But go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”

**Reflection:**

What a puzzling moment! After the horror and drama of the cross, the uncertainty of Saturday, and the momentary panic of realizing that Jesus’ tomb was empty, you’d think that the least that Jesus could do would be to give his friend Mary a hug. It’s a strange moment that has puzzled people for ages. Why wouldn’t the Risen Christ allow one of his most beloved disciples to hold on to him? In 10 verses, he will tell Thomas to touch his wounds, so it’s not like he was radioactive or something. What is it about this moment that he refuses to allow Mary to hold on to him?

I’m not sure, but I think it has something to do with what happens next. She had reached out to him, presumably, to make sure that he never left her sight again, but he says, “No. Now it’s your turn. I want you to leave *me* and I want you to go preach the Good News”. What a job! Can you imagine being the very first person who was commissioned to bring Jesus’ message? He could have appeared to John and Peter, but he waited until they left, because this was a job for Mary and Mary alone. And she did it. She left that garden and she became the first preacher of the Risen Christ. That, by the way, is not a job that she could have done from the garden. She could not have done that while holding Jesus’ hand. She could not have stepped out that day into her fullness if she were still waiting for Jesus to do everything for her. She ran out of that garden a new woman, empowered and emboldened by Jesus to do what was hers to do.

I think we could use that example today. I don’t need to tell you that the world is a mess right now, and many of us are trying to hold on to Jesus, praying that he would fix everything because it feels too big, but Jesus is saying to us, “Do not hold on to me. Go. Do what is yours to do. Do what only you can do at this moment”. So let us go. Let us take on the power and audacity of the Risen Christ, let us believe in impossible dreams, and let us go with the conviction that Jesus will never leave us.

**Prayer:**

Risen Christ, conqueror of death and bringer of life, give us the boldness to believe that you have truly called us to this moment. Fill us with your power and love as we go out this Easter season to serve you and the world that you love. Amen.