



*Lent  
Devotions*

## *2025 Lenten Daily Devotional*

### Devotional Writers

*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. Rebecca Hoover, One United Church of Christ - Kenhorst, PA*

*Rev. Nichole Jackson, Open Table United Church of Christ - Pottstown, PA  
Supply Pastor at St. John's UCC - 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. Alan Miles, Zwingli United Church of Christ - Souderton, PA*

*Rev. Joseph A. Motz, Bausman Memorial United Church - Wyomissing, PA*

*Rev. Nicholas L. Pence, Jr., Palm Schwenkfelder Church - Palm, 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 United Church of Christ - Mohnton, PA  
(Daily Devotional Writers)*

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*Joel 2:12-13a (NRSVUE)*

*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.*

**Reflection:** “It’s okay.” How much are we conditioned to utter those words when someone says, “I’m sorry,” to us? An apology is an acknowledgement of hurt, and being hurt is not okay. When someone apologizes to us, rather than saying, “it’s okay” (because it’s not), it’s better to say what you need from that person. My first graders and I practice this all the time. When someone hits another (accidentally or on purpose) and apologizes, we’re learning to say, “Please don’t do that again,” or “I need you to be more careful,” or “you hurt me, and I need you to stop.” Lent is the season when we say, “I’m sorry,” to God for all the ways we’ve broken right relationship with God, with each other, and with all creation. Notice that when we apologize to God, God doesn’t say, “it’s okay” but rather names what the Holy One needs. Instead of rending our clothing (an ancient way of showing sorrow for a misdeed), God needs us to rend our hearts. To change how we move through this world, to show that the brokenness of our lives is not okay. How can we do something differently, something more healthily this Lent, something that God needs us to do?

**Prayer:** Holy One, we know we hurt you and others by what we’ve done and by what we’ve left undone. Help us to listen more deeply to what you need from us to make our corners of the world just a bit healthier, flourishing, and just. Amen.

*Psalm 91:1-2 (CEB)*

*“Living in the Most High’s shelter, camping in the Almighty’s shade, I say to the Lord, “You are my refuge, my stronghold! You are my God—the one I trust!”*

**Reflection:** The image of camping in the Almighty’s shade feels warm and comforting. In my younger days I spent some summer weekends canoeing and camping with good friends. We would journey to Port Jervis, New York and spend the weekend on the Delaware River. Remembering the water, the beauty of God’s creation, the fellowship of good friends around a campfire evokes memories of beautiful, simple days spent camping in the Almighty’s shade. What do the Psalmist’s words evoke for you in this season of Lent? How are you feeling God’s Shelter and the Almighty’s shade? How are you experiencing God’s refuge and stronghold? Life isn’t always easy. Life isn’t always simple. In this season of wilderness wandering, may we breathe deeply and place our trust in God who remains with us today, tomorrow and every day to come. The image of camping in the Almighty’s shade also reminds me of words from internet poet, John Roedel, who offers life is not a competition. Rather, it’s a gathering place. He goes on to imagine the afterlife being “a campfire circle where we make s’mores and share our stories from earth.”

Friends, may we love each other deeply. May we be there for one another with kindness and compassion. May we follow Jesus, so we have wonderful stories to share around campfires.

**Prayer:** Holy One, thank you for all of the blessings you offer us day after day. As we journey together through this season of Lent, may we remember to always place our trust in you. May we breathe deeply as we feel your shelter and shade surrounding us, holding us, filling us. Amen.

*Exodus 6:6-11 (NRSVUE)*

*“Say therefore to the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians and deliver you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you as my people, and I will be your God. You shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.” Moses told this to the Israelites, but they would not listen to Moses, because of their broken spirit and their cruel slavery. Then the Lord spoke to Moses, “Go and tell Pharaoh king of Egypt to let the Israelites go out of his land.”*

**Reflection:** How long are you willing to hold on to hope? After how much crushing defeat, after how much cruel injustice, after how much disappointment are you willing to hold on to hope? The reality is we all lose hope. At one point or another we all potentially stand in that place of being utterly broken. We are human. We are finite. But thanks be to God that God does not respond to us out of a sense of our hope. God acts regardless of our hope, while inviting us to cling to God’s hope. At times we are carried along by the hope that resides within us. At times, we are carried by the hope of God that embraces us.

**Prayer:** Ever providing God, pour out your hope upon this earth and her people. Pour your hope upon my spirit and those whom I know are struggling. Pour out your hope, O God, that we may always be found in your truth and your providing. Amen.

*Psalm 91:1-2*

*“Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’”*

**Reflection:** Charles Blondin, the famous 19th-century tightrope walker, once crossed Niagara Falls while pushing a wheelbarrow.

After his daring feat, he asked the crowd, “Do you believe I can do it again?” They cheered. Then he asked, “Who will get in the wheelbarrow?” Silence fell.

Psalm 91 invites us to true trust in God, not just with words, but with our whole lives. In this season of Lent, we ask ourselves if we are just cheering from the sidelines, or if we are sitting in the wheelbarrow in whole-hearted trust. So, you want to climb in?

**Prayer:** Lord, help me trust You fully, not just in words but in action. May I rest in Your shadow, knowing You are my refuge. Amen.

*Luke 4:1-13 (NRSVUE)*

*Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, where for forty days he was tested by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over he was famished. The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And the devil said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.'" Then the devil led him to Jerusalem and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'" When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.*

**Reflection:** Is anybody out there? Jesus heads alone into the wilderness, led by the Holy Spirit, as he begins his public ministry. In our minds we might picture Jesus, tempted by the Devil, on a cliff's edge, surrounded by dense trees. But the wilderness isn't just a physical location, it's a spiritual place. Perhaps you're feeling like you're in the wilderness lately. Lost, alone, unsure of where to turn to next. Fortunately, the wilderness isn't just an experience of being lonely, lost, and confused. It's also an opportunity for transformation and self-discovery. As early as the 2nd Century CE, Christian monks took to the desert, seeking this wilderness time. These Desert Fathers often emerged with deep insight and understanding that could only come from solitude with God.

**Prayer:** God of the lost and least, encourage us in our wilderness times. Walk us through the impenetrable forests, keep us from the edge of the cliff, and lead us toward a period of discovery. In our moments in the wilderness, may we make room for the transformation of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*I John 2:3-6 (NRSVUE)*

*Now by this we know that we have come to know him, if we obey his commandments. Whoever says, "I have come to know him," but does not obey his commandments is a liar, and in such a person the truth does not exist; but whoever obeys his word, truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection. By this we know that we are in him: whoever says, "I abide in him," ought to walk in the same way as he walked.*

**Reflection:** I don't know about you, but I don't *love* being called a liar... Am I perfect? No. But I don't *intentionally* tell untruths! And I certainly do not try to mislead people, certainly not *intentionally*.

However, if I am honest, I do, indeed, act contrary to what I believe sometimes - especially when I'm stressed, tired, even hungry. I believe in the love of God and desire to love in a similar way, but sometimes, I just can't seem to hack it. Sometimes, I want what I want when I want it. And my patience runs out and, well, I respond much less lovingly to my neighbor than I know I should.

This cognitive dissonance is a pretty common one in the life of faith - I think that's why John says that the person who believes and lives consistently has reached perfection. Try as we may, none of us can do this perfectly.

This is precisely why Lent is a season ripe with opportunity for *growth*. Because in this time, we *intentionally* lean a little further in, we dig a little deeper and dare ask God to reveal our incongruencies. When we are cognizant of these inconsistencies, we can offer them to God and seek God's guidance to work on them. We can ask God to help us to be more loving, to teach us how to live into our convictions and commitments in a better way that isn't dependent on our circumstances.

I invite you this day to ask God where growth might be needed in your life and ask God to help you do the hard, but necessary, work to move forward.

**Prayer:** God, help me to be honest before you about myself. Move in my life to help me to grow. Grant me clear vision and a willing heart to lean into the new life you offer. Amen.



*Zechariah 3:1-10 (NRSVUE)*

*Then he showed me the high priest Joshua standing before the angel of the LORD and the accuser standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to the accuser, "The LORD rebuke you, O accuser! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this man a brand plucked from the fire?"*

*Now Joshua was wearing filthy clothes as he stood before the angel.*

*The angel said to those who were standing before him, "Take off his filthy clothes." And to him he said, "See, I have taken your guilt away from you, and I will clothe you with festal apparel." And he said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with apparel, and the angel of the LORD was standing by. Then the angel of the LORD warned Joshua, saying "Thus says the LORD of hosts: If you will walk in my ways and keep my requirements, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts, and I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Now listen, Joshua, high priest, you and your colleagues who sit before you! For they are an omen of things to come: I am going to bring my servant the Branch. For on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven facets, I will engrave its inscription, says the LORD of hosts, and I will remove the guilt of this land in a single day. On that day, says the LORD of hosts, you shall invite each other to come under your vine and fig tree."*

**Reflection:** Zachariah is one of those minor prophets in the back of our Old Testament, that doesn't get a lot of attention because the majority of his message comes in the form of visions. (And we are looking at Old Testament Zachariah, not Zachariah the father of John the Baptist.) Zachariah and Haggai were writing during the period of time when folks were returning from the Babylonian exile to Jerusalem. Together, these two prophets tried to encourage and educate the people as they rebuilt the city. We remember that Jeremiah wrote that the people would be returned to the land so that they could rebuild the temple for God's spirit to dwell amongst them. Zechariah's book is part challenge, part vision, as he challenges the people to follow God devotedly, and to not be like their ancestors who were led astray. The visions and dreams tell a story of God's determination to fulfil the promises of the past and raise up the Messiah, the one who would save them. Here we see Zechariah's fourth vision, where their leader, Joshua, is wearing dirty and dingy clothes, representing the past sins of the people, but we see that he is given new clean garments, representing the removal of that sin. An angel of the Lord tells him that if he is faithful, he will be like a symbol of that coming messiah, because through Jesus our sins would also be forgiven and we would be made clean. I love the way that scripture connects, telling us one unified story of God's love for us through Christ's sacrifice. It is so important to remember that the scriptures we read aren't disjointed, but connected and woven together to teach us about Jesus' love for us!

**Prayer:** Holy Lord Jesus, thank you for your love for us. Help me to remember during this Lenten season that we are all connected through your love for us. Amen.

*Luke 21:34-36 (NRSVUE)*

*Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth.*

*Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place and to stand before the Son of Man.*

**Reflection:** Jesus concludes his teaching at the temple in Luke’s gospel with a warning to his followers to “Be alert,” regardless of the timetable of the end times. Throughout history, peoples have imaginatively wondered – to the financial benefit of a few – “is this the ‘end times’?” But Luke removes any specific time frame and instead draws attention to our own readiness.

When I receive the call to “be alert,” something in my soul pushes back. Being alert signals vigilance, which to me signals never letting my guard down. It’s a short walk from there to “build your defenses high.” Somehow, I don’t think closing myself off is what Luke intends here.

Lent points us to confession, opening our hearts fully to God. Somewhere between hardening up and protectively ignoring the times around us could be a helpful place to start.

**Prayer:** Holy God, as the Psalmist prays so do I: “Create in me a clean heart, O God,” (Ps 51). Help me begin with opening my heart to join with others so together, we may “be alert” to the Jesus way. Amen.

*Psalm 27:1, 13-14 (CEB)*

*The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?*

*I remain confident of this: I will see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord; be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord.*

**Reflection:** During the time of Lent, we prepare our hearts and our minds for Easter through a variety of practices and means. Are those means you are practicing actually preparing your heart and mind? Are you finding yourself more fully in love with God. Is God becoming more and more “stronghold of my life?” Am I becoming more in love with God, trusting in God instead of the fear of someone in power over you in some way? Are you putting into place practices that encourage you to wait upon the Lord and know that God is indeed good and the center of your soul? Do you meditate on God throughout the day and night? Probably not. And that’s okay. But as we practice being mindful, mindful of God and God’s work in, and around, and through us, may we indeed become closer to God in all that we say and all that we do. That way, we are ready for God come Easter morning.

**Prayer:** Dear God, help me to draw closer to you. To know you more intimately in my inmost being. Show me ways you would have me draw closer to you, and to wait upon you in these Lenten times. In Jesus name, Amen.

*Psalm 27:13-14 (NRSV)*

*I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living.  
Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!*

**Reflection:** Have you ever found yourself, in the depths of winter, struggling to believe that spring would come again? Maybe it happens when your toes are numb from your fifth time shoveling snow this week. Maybe it happens when one of your three kids brought home the seventh illness this month. In the midst of difficult seasons, it can be hard to trust that something easier is coming.

You may begin to feel this way as we journey through Lent, a season when we focus on sin and repentance, a season which leads us to the devastation we experience year after year at the foot of the cross on Good Friday. We open ourselves to the pain of the story, and in doing so we might find ourselves struggling to believe in the promise of the resurrection that we celebrate every Easter Sunday.

Today, I encourage you to keep the faith. Face the pain of the story, knowing in your heart that we will see the goodness of the Lord, sooner and more fully than we can even imagine, here in the land of the living. We don't get to skip the cold of winter or the desolation of Lent, but we can trust that warmth and celebration will come, in God's time.

**Prayer:** Lord, as we wait for you, help us to be strong and courageous, trusting in your goodness and your promise. Help us to stay present in the season that we're walking through, even as we trust you to bring us into the joy of Easter. Amen.

*Matthew 23:37 (NRSVUE)*

*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!*

**Reflection:** I wonder if you can relate to Jesus here. He's looking out over his beloved fellow-citizens and the city that should be the shining example of God's love, and he weeps. He can see them clearly heading towards disaster, but no one will listen. Sure, as the Son of God, he could compel them to do what is right. He could force compliance and punish those who refuse to listen, but he knows that won't help. No one was ever truly saved by coercion or violence. People are only saved when they choose salvation. I had a friend with severe mental illness who refused to stay on his meds no matter how it affected his loved ones. He would have these awful breakdowns that strained his relationships, and I feared would one day take his life. It killed me to watch it happen, and I used to beg God for the power to fix him. I mean, the solution seemed so simple! The cure was right there! I just wanted to grab him and save him from himself, but unless he was willing to change, I knew it wouldn't stick.

There's another passage in which we read that Jesus went back to his hometown and couldn't do many miracles, because no one believed that he could. What a powerful thought. Relationships always must go both ways. You cannot force belief. You cannot force love. You cannot force someone to take care of themselves or to do the right thing. You can only encourage them, pray for them, and refuse to let them go when they are spiraling. Let us learn a lesson from Jesus who never coerced anyone to accept his love, but also never gave up trying.

**Prayer:** Lord, gather us under your wings. When we refuse your love, do not leave us behind, and when people refuse our love, give us the strength to keep loving anyway. Amen.

*Luke 13:31-35 (NRSVUE)*

*At that very hour some Pharisees came and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." He said to them, "Go and tell that fox for me 'Listen, I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work. Yet today, tomorrow, and the next day I must be on my way, because it is impossible for a prophet to be killed outside of Jerusalem.' Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! See, your house is left to you And I tell you, you will not see me until the time comes when you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"*

**Reflection:** This scripture reminds us of an important, yet sometimes forgotten, practice of Lent, lament. Lament is a powerful form of prayer. When we look inward to our souls, we can lament, the things we have done that have taken us farther away from God and detoured us on our path of discipleship. When we look outward to our world, we can lament the evil and sin in it; we can lament those who suffer needlessly; we can lament those who seek to silence prophetic voices and the people of God. Jesus understands that lament and join us in it; yet Jesus also challenges us to "be on our way" and be active in confronting those things that cause us to lament and cry out to God. Prayers of lament and active faith are both holy things to God.

**Prayer:** Holy One, we lament and grieve so much in our world right now. May our tears and our actions be sacred things. Help us to confront the things not of you in this world. Help us to name the truths of those who abuse their power to silence your prophets. Keep us faithful during our Lenten and strengthen us for all that is to come. Amen.

*Psalm 105:7-11 (NIV)*

*He is the Lord our God; his judgments are in all the earth. He remembers his covenant forever, the promise he made, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit."*

**Reflection:** Any healthy relationship we are a part of in our lifetimes will require adapting to the constant changes that life brings about. The Israelites were no different living than we are when it comes to being in a healthy and lasting relationship. A part of Psalm 105 reflects to its readers what the recipe we need is. That measurement is to "do our part."

The Psalmist tells of God's great deeds on behalf of his people. It is a known story of God's movement throughout the Israelites ages and it concludes with the understanding that God did his part and now Israel must be faithful to her part of the covenant by obeying God's laws. Everything is to be realigned in life to keep all pieces contributing to the purpose we do anything. In higher education we must give ourselves copious time to learn and understand in order to grow and move forward in a new way. In our faith life, we need to do the same and I know I cannot use the word copious to explain my faith journey. Determined, intentional, yes, but not copious in trying to balance this life out.

And so this season welcomes us again...to step back and to see where an aligning is necessary. The issue we are considering on this day is where do we have to re-align with God to stay true to our words and deeds? In our best vision of what our faith life would be, prayed and discerned over with God, what is it that we do not see?

What do we NOT see in our faith lives? I believe it is an easy slide to default our Lenten journey to look over where we have gone on our faith journeys and re-aligning some actions and words for the future but better than fine tuning might be recognizing a missing piece along our journey(s).

Taking a different perspective and looking at this Lenten season from a different point of view might just be what we need to grow closer to God this day.

**Prayer:** God, we want to see completely where we need to turn and repent these days. Some we know, but we are praying with you to see the rest and to be the best we can be going forward.  
Amen

*1 Corinthians 10:1-6 (Common English Bible)*

*Brothers and sisters, I want you to be sure of the fact that our ancestors were all under the cloud and they all went through the sea. All were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea. All ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. They drank from a spiritual rock that followed them, and the rock was Christ.*

*However, God was unhappy with most of them, and they were struck down in the wilderness. These things were examples for us, so we won't crave evil things like they did.*

**Reflection:** As we enter the season of Lent, a time of fasting, prayer, and reflection, we are reminded of the importance of examining our hearts and actions. In today's Scripture, Paul is reminding the people of Corinth about how the Israelites witnessed miracles yet also were tempted with things of this world and fell into disobedience and idolatry. Despite God's faithful provision, many of them wandered, grumbled, and sought after things of this world that took them further from God.

Lent is a time for us to reflect on, "what temptations keep my attention and love from God?" As we reflect on this, we can also be comforted that Paul also affirms God's commitment to Corinth and to us. We hear the promise that God will always provide a way of escape, a path to avoid falling into the temptations of this world. The implication is that we should actively seek to avoid temptation but also know that we do not need to rely solely on our own strength to resist it. During this holy season, we remember that God is with us.

**Prayer:** Loving God, thank you for always being with us, guiding us and loving us. As we walk through this season of Lent, help us to examine our hearts and turn away from anything that keeps us from fully following you. Help us find new ways to focus on you, to trust you, love you, and share your love with others. Amen.



*2 Chronicles 20:12 (NRSVUE)*

*O our God, will you not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.*

**Reflection:** What would you do if a large mob of your enemies (or people who decided they would become your enemies) was coming for you? That’s the situation facing King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah. They were about to be invaded by a murderous hoard. Jehoshaphat is terrified and does the one thing he knows to do: gather everyone in the kingdom and ask God for help. Verse 12 above is Jehoshaphat’s concluding line of prayer, “we do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” This is a remarkable prayer of trust. At times, we feel like a terrifying hoard is coming for us—family troubles, financial troubles, health troubles, political change, social upheaval—and we don’t know how to meet such challenges. We feel overwhelmed and powerless. In these times, we can take our cues from King Jehoshaphat. Turn toward God in honest prayer, even borrowing Jehoshaphat’s words, declaring, “God, we don’t know what to do but our eyes are on you.”

**Prayer:** Our eyes are indeed on you, Holy One. Show us when to take action and when to be still. In times of chaos, we pray for your protection and your wisdom. Amen.

*Psalm 63:1-8 (CEB)*

*God! My God! It's you—I search for you! My whole being thirsts for you! My body desires you in a dry and tired land, no water anywhere. Yes, I've seen you in the sanctuary; I've seen your power and glory. My lips praise you because your faithful love is better than life itself! So I will bless you as long as I'm alive; I will lift up my hands in your name.*

*I'm fully satisfied—as with a rich dinner. My mouth speaks praise with joy on my lips—whenever I ponder you on my bed, whenever I meditate on you in the middle of the night—because you've been a help to me and I shout for joy in the protection of your wings. My whole being clings to you; your strong hand upholds me*

**Reflection:** How often do we find ourselves thirsting, hungering, searching for God's presence. I can think of times in my life when I felt lost, when I felt alone, when I felt forgotten, when I felt forsaken. Still when I took time to pause, when I took time to breathe, when I took time to be still and listen, I began to realize I was not alone or lost, I was not forgotten or forsaken. Rather, God was with me through the shadowy valleys, during the challenging days, through the struggles and during the suffering. God remained by my side through all of my life. For this I am grateful, thankful. For this I rejoice and shout for joy.

Beloveds, God is always with us. God is always deeply within us. Life will place challenges and stumbling blocks in our paths. Life will sometimes seem to spin out of control. And, God remains. God remains gently whispering to us. God remains tenderly nudging us forward. God remains as our rock, our guide, our protection. God remains offering us a drink of cool, refreshing water. God remains feeding us so our bodies and our spirits are revived and restored. May we lift our hands, our voices, ourselves in praise of the One who guides us forward always.

**Prayer:** Sacred Presence, thank you for your guidance, for your strength, for your protection, for your love. When life seems uncertain, when life seems to spin out of control, you are there with comfort, with love, with grace. May we take time to ponder your presence. May we take time to meditate on your wisdom. May we rejoice for you are our God. Amen.

*Revelation 3:1a-3 (The Message)*

*“I see right through your work. You have a reputation for vigor and zest, but you’re dead, stone-dead. “Up on your feet! Take a deep breath! Maybe there’s life in you yet. But I wouldn’t know it by looking at your busywork; nothing of God’s work has been completed. Your condition is desperate. Think of the gift you once had in your hands, the Message you heard with your ears—grasp it again and turn back to God. “If you pull the covers back over your head and sleep on, oblivious to God, I’ll return when you least expect it, break into your life like a thief in the night.*

**Reflection:** Judgement is hard, even when it is spoken with love. Even when we know it’s true. It’s easier to live on the surface of things, to convince ourselves we aren’t that bad,

or to hold an illusion that is more agreeable to us. It is far harder to take an honest account of ourselves and to clearly name where and how we aren’t living out our faith, our ideals, or the person God has created us to be. But in the naming, in the truth telling of judgment, can we take serious the work needed for change. Or better yet, we can begin to embrace the humility needed to ask for mercy, grace, forgiveness, and help.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, give courage to my spirit to see the truth as you would have me see truth. In doing so, be my companion and my guide as you give the wisdom and courage to claim the fullness of life that is in me yet. Amen.

*Thirsting for God - Psalm 63:1-4 (The Message)*

*God—you're my God! I can't get enough of you! I've worked up such hunger and thirst for God,*

*traveling across dry and weary deserts. So here I am in the place of worship, eyes open, drinking in your strength and glory.*

*In your generous love I am really living at last! My lips brim praises like fountains. I bless you every time I take a breath; My arms wave like banners of praise to you.*

**Reflection:** Lent is a season of longing—a time to recognize our deep need for God. In Psalm 63, David cries out from the wilderness, “My soul thirsts for you, my flesh faints for you.” He does not thirst for comfort, power, or success, but for God. This psalm reminds us that our souls are restless until we find them resting in God.

May this season teach us to thirst for God above all else, and with arms waving like banners may we praise our God .

**Prayer:** O Lord, awaken in us a deep thirst for You. Let our longing lead us into deeper worship and trust. Satisfy our souls with Your presence. Amen.

*Luke 13:1-5 (NRSVUE)*

*At that very time there were some present who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. He asked them, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them—do you think that they were worse offenders than all the other people living in Jerusalem? No, I tell you, but unless you repent you will all perish just as they did.”*

**Reflection:** When Pilate kills a group of Galilean Jews while they are offering sacrifice at the altar, the Jews in Jerusalem come to Jesus to make meaning out of this terrible situation. However, the Jews in Jerusalem were pretty prejudice against the Galilean Jews. So, the Jerusalem Jews suggest, perhaps, it was the Galilean Jews’ fault they died in this horrible way; they were sinners. Jesus gives a resounding, “No way!” comparing this tragic death to a group who accidentally died in Jerusalem when the tower of Siloam fell. Jesus reminds us, God does not select one group of people on earth to punish over another; we can’t explain tragedy away by blaming it on individual sin. If we blame the death of the Galilean Jews on their own sins, we fail to see the oppression and injustice caused by Pilate and his regime.

**Prayer:** Holy God, keep us from feeling like we are able to bestow God’s judgement on others; that we can somehow decipher the sins of our neighbors. Help us to name the systems in our midst that oppress others and cause injustice. Forgive us for ignoring the structures of our culture that make us think we can identify the sins of those different from us; and then deem them worthy of punishment. Amen.

*Psalm 39 (CEB)*

*I promised I would watch my steps so as not to sin with my tongue; promised to keep my mouth shut as long as the wicked were in my presence. So I was completely quiet, silent. I kept my peace, but it did no good. My pain got worse. My heart got hot inside me; while stewing over it, the fire burned. Then I spoke out with my tongue: “Let me know my end, Lord. How many days do I have left? I want to know how brief my time is.” You’ve made my days so short; my lifetime is like nothing in your eyes. Yes, a human life is nothing but a puff of air! Selah*

*Yes, people wander around like shadows; yes, they hustle and bustle, but pointlessly; they don’t even know who will get the wealth they’ve amassed. So now, Lord, what should I be waiting for? My hope is set on you. Deliver me from all my sins; don’t make me some foolish person’s joke. I am completely silent; I won’t open my mouth because you have acted. Get this plague of yours off me! I’m being destroyed by the blows from your fist. You discipline people for their sin, punishing them; like a moth, you ruin what they treasure. Yes, a human life is just a puff of air! Selah! Hear my prayer, Lord! Listen closely to my cry for help! Please don’t ignore my tears! I’m just a foreigner—an immigrant staying with you, just like all my ancestors were.*

*Look away from me so I can be happy again before I pass away and am gone.*

**Reflection:** Have you ever felt, as our Psalmist did, like God’s gaze was too much - like, just a glance in your direction and everything bad about you surfaces? Like, it’s just never enough, that no matter what you do, you fall short? That kind of guilt and shame is a heavy load, but those feelings might be a bit more about how we see ourselves rather than about how God sees us. What if life is just really hard sometimes? What if we believed that God is actually *with* us, both when we are doing really well and when we are not, and that the gaze with which God looks at us is one of love?

There is a song we sing at Open Table called “Mother God,” a song that envisions God’s love as the love of a mother. The chorus goes like this:

*Even in our bleakest hour. The mother’s love remains. Even when we turn our eyes . The mother’s gaze stays*

As a chronic perfectionist, this chorus stirs something in me everytime we sing it, inviting me to believe that God doesn’t turn away from me when I struggle, when I sin, when I feel like I just can’t keep going and all is lost. But rather, that is when God’s love rushes in, when God reminds me that I don’t have to journey on my own.

Today, I invite you to sit with that chorus and see what rises up in you. What part of your spirit needs to hear God’s love? How might God’s healing, rather than judgment, meet you there?

**Prayer:** Loving Parent, adjust my vision and help me to see your loving-kindness rather than unending judgment. Remind me that you long to walk with me in my struggles and that you will never abandon me. Amen.

*Ezekiel 17:1-10 (NRSVUE)*

*The word of the LORD came to me: O mortal, propound a riddle and speak an allegory to the house of Israel. Say: Thus says the Lord GOD: A great eagle with great wings and long pinions, rich in plumage of many colors, came to the Lebanon. He took the top of the cedar, broke off its topmost shoot; he carried it to a land of trade, set it in a city of merchants. Then he took a seedling from the land, placed it in fertile soil; a plant by abundant waters, he set it like a willow twig. It sprouted and became a vine spreading out but low; its branches turned toward him; its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine; it brought forth branches, put forth foliage. There was another great eagle with great wings and much plumage. And see! This vine stretched out its roots toward him; it shot out its branches toward him from the bed where it was planted so that he might water it. It had been transplanted to good soil by abundant waters, so that it might produce branches and bear fruit and become a noble vine. Say: Thus says the Lord GOD: Will it prosper? Will he not pull up its roots, cause its fruit to rot and wither, its fresh sprouting leaves to fade? No strong arm or mighty army will be needed to pull it from its roots. Look, it has been transplanted. Will it thrive? When the east wind strikes it, will it not utterly wither, wither on the bed where it grew?*

**Reflection:** Huh? What is going on here!? Have you ever felt this way when you are reading the Bible? Sometimes I come across a passage that really makes me scratch my head and pull out my study Bible to gain more clarity. I frequently feel that way when I am reading Ezekiel. Ezekiel is a really interesting book in our Old Testament, because in Jewish tradition it actually came with a PG 30 warning label, because some of the visions and topics were considered too intense for young readers. Just think about that whole valley of dry bone situation, am I right? Ezekiel was a young man who was destined to become a priest when the unthinkable happened; the Babylonian exile! The Israelites were taken from their home, without any idea when or if they would ever return. Ezekiel is moping down by the river one day when he has his first vision from the Lord. Today in chapter 17, we hear a vision of two eagles and a vine. Why would God ask a prophet to speak in riddles and allegories? The short answer is that this would protect the information from people outside of the community, and it would also encourage the intended recipients of the message to really concentrate on what is being said. Here we see a critique on international politics from 598 BCE, and a reminder that God will restore the people through the house of David. Jesus is a direct descendent of David, and it is through him that God will save us all! I think passages like this are a great reminder for us to be paying attention to the way that we see God working in our world today. The Holy Spirit is still moving and working within our communities, and we are Christ led people called to share the good news.

**Prayer:** Creator, Son, and Spirit one, help us to listen to your still speaking voice, and lend us your eyes so that we might see how best we can share the good news of your great love with our community. Amen.

AND/OR

*Annunciation of the Lord*  
**Tuesday, March 25, 2025**

*Rev. Frances Chester*

*Luke 1:26-38 (NRSVUE)*

*In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."*

*Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God. And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. For nothing will be impossible with God." Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.*

**Reflection:** Being raised a Protestant "the Annunciation" was an event I heard about only in Advent. Our Catholic and Orthodox siblings, however, get particular about this very human process that happened to Mary.

Nine months before Jesus' birth at Christmas is March 25, thus the angel Gabriel visited her around this date.

As one who has been pregnant, I appreciate the church fathers' recognition of the bodily reality of creating a human being. For nine (really, nine months plus a few weeks), Mary had to contend not only with her changing body, but the equally real and potentially devastating position she would be put in, as an unwed, pregnant teenager.

For bearing God's son, for claiming God's power in her very flesh that uplifts the poor and forgotten and sends the rich away empty (see Luke 1:46-55), Mary is highly exalted, and rightly so.

**Prayer:** O Mighty One, you have done great things for us through Mary. Thank you for her strength. May we see her as an example of what you can do through one otherwise seen as an "NPC," a non-player character in the playground of the wealthy and powerful.



*Luke 13:18-19 (CEB)*

*Then Jesus asked, “What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to? It is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds perched in its branches.”*

**Reflection:** As live into the kingdom of God here on Earth, I often ask myself: what does the kingdom of God look like, and how am I supposed to live into it? We are reminded in our scripture for today that the kingdom of God is like a weed. A pervasive, invasive unwanted weed by most people’s standards. It overtakes a garden and kills the other plants that are growing there. It makes the land difficult to take care of and the garden is good for nothing other than this weed. It subverts the status quo, it subverts the expectations of most people. But...but!!! It is a shelter for those with no home, it becomes a refuge of protection for those who need it. It is a safe space for those who are dependent fully on God for their cares and needs. Are we like this weed? Are we a person and a church that is a shelter for those in need? Are we there for people who need protection? Are we willing to subvert the powers that be for the sake of the kingdom of God?

**Prayer:** Dear God, as we wait for Easter morning, help me to live more fully into what it means to be the kingdom of God here on earth. Show me how you want me to embrace kingdom values and help me to enact that vision in the world. In Jesus name, Amen.

*Psalm 32:1-4 (NRSV)*

*Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.*

*Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*

*While I kept silence, 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.*

**Reflection:** Every Sunday at Rosedale, we take the time together in worship to offer a prayer of confession together, speaking words that invite us to consider how we have sinned. We spend a few moments in silent confession, before singing a Kyrie and hearing the good news of God's love in an assurance of pardon. Wherever you worship, I'm guessing that you confess your sins with your congregation on Sundays, too.

Have you ever wondered why we confess our sins to a God who knows our hearts and who forgives our transgressions and covers our sins? Have you ever wondered why we confess and ask forgiveness even as we believe that in Christ's death and resurrection, we have been set free from our sins?

The Psalmist reminds us how deeply important it is to speak the words that weigh heavy on our hearts, saying, "while I kept silence, my body wasted away...my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer."

Silence will hold us back, especially when we are keeping silent about the truths about ourselves and our lives that we believe are unspeakable. Sharing our truth, our loud, with God and with one another, will set us free to live in the joy of forgiveness and grace. Sharing our truth will set us free to offer others forgiveness and grace.

So speak, trusting that the God who hears you already knows your heart and loves you wholly and eternally. Speak, trusting that your community will love you, too.

**Prayer:** Holy God, happy are we when our transgressions are forgiven and happy are we when we speak our truths and find that we are still loved and worthy of love. Help us to be brave and break the silences that are weighing heavily on our lives, telling the truths that will set us free. Amen.

*2 Corinthians 4:5 (NRSVUE)*

*The one who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a down payment.*

**Reflection:** In 2022, we sold our home in St Lawrence and bought our new home in Pottstown on the same day. It was a wild day. However, since the purchase of our new home was contingent on the sale of our old home, we were somewhat cash-poor. So when the seller asked for several thousand dollars for a “good faith deposit”, I was stumped. We needed to come up with the cash to prove that we were serious, but it could not come from a gift or a loan. It had to come from us. So I went to a local gun shop and I sold several of the antique guns that my grandfather had left to me in order to get the cash we needed to settle on the house. That money represented a very important part of myself, and was like one final gift that my beloved grandfather could give me after almost 20 years. If we had decided to walk away from the purchase, that money would be lost, but since we finished the transaction, it counted towards the sale of our new home. That’s what deposits are for.

They show the buyer that you are not going anywhere, and they remind you of the stakes at hand.

That’s why I love this metaphor so much. Jesus left his disciples with a promise to come back, but left behind his Spirit as a sort of “down payment” to show that he was serious. However, it’s been about 2,000 years, and he has not returned. Are we to believe that Jesus backed out on the deal? Did he leave his security deposit and wander off to a more well-behaved planet? Of course not! That’s the thing about the Spirit. She is alive and she constantly reminds us that God is with us right here and now. Whenever we feel her touch or hear her voice; whenever we see her power or her beauty, we are reminded that Jesus did not leave us, and his promises are as true today as they were when he walked the Earth.

**Prayer:** In the times when we feel alone and like the world is falling apart, remind us of your promise to never leave us. Help us to tune ourselves to the frequency of your Spirit that we might be reminded of your promise. Amen.

*Luke 15:1-10 (NRSVUE)*

*Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, “This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.” So he told them this parable: “Which one of you, having a hundred sheep and losing one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness and go after the one that is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my lost sheep.’ Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.*

*“Or what woman having ten silver coins, if she loses one of them, does not light a lamp, sweep the house, and search carefully until she finds it? And when she has found it, she calls together her friends and neighbors, saying, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the coin that I had lost.’ Just so, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”*

**Reflection:** Have you ever gotten lost? Like really lost. Once on the walk back to camp at night my flashlight stopped working. Becoming lost in the dark is disorienting. With nothing to guide you on your way, you literally walk in circles making no little headway towards your goal. Thankfully, I didn't stay lost and disoriented for long. Someone showed up with a light to guide me home. Where are the dark places in your life that you have become lost? How can the light of the Gospel and the light of God's people help guide us to the places we need to be?

**Prayer:** Holy God, come and find us once again. Save us from the things that we cannot save ourselves from. Open our awareness to you. Help us to trust in your love for us and your ability to always bring us home. Amen.

*Luke 15:15-21 (NRSVUE)*

*So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that region, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, and no one gave him anything. But when he came to his senses he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands." ' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

**Reflection:** The parable of the Prodigal Son has always been a story that stands out to me as one of the most challenging because to live a life of complete acceptance and joy in God, no matter the circumstances behind that brought that person to God, the father forgives and welcomes them.

To be faithful to this degree, complete and overall acceptance and belief in God is hard to live into. May we choose our hard correctly as we wrestle with the specifics where God's focus only seems to be on one more returning.

Maybe it is the specifics that stand in the way of a more faithful life, if so, you are invited to re-align your focus and desire on to be closer to God's. I know my prayers with regard to this faithful transition and to strive daily to be completely faithful as anything less than 100% means there is work to do tomorrow. There are no if, and's or but's when it comes to unconditional love.

**Prayer:** God yesterday, today, and the future, prepare our hearts to be softened to that of the highest levels where there is no separation between who we might include as your children. In difficult times, in even darker and colder nights, remind us that the sun will come again and may our courage never waver when it comes to following your will. Amen.

*Psalm 53: 1-3, 6 (CEB)*

*Fools say in their hearts, There's no God. They are corrupt and do horrible deeds; not one of them does anything good. God looks down from heaven on humans to see if anyone is wise, to see if anyone seeks God. But all have turned away. Everyone is corrupt. No one does good—not even one person! Let Israel's salvation come out of Zion! When God changes his people's circumstances for the better, Jacob will rejoice; Israel will celebrate!*

**Reflection:** In this Psalm, we see the deep consequences of human separation from God. The psalmist describes how all have turned away from God, how everyone has become corrupt, and there is no one who does good. Psalm 53 invites us into the realization of humanity's brokenness. The words of this psalm strike at the very core of the human condition: our tendency to deny the presence of God and our own tendency to fall into harm.

Lent invites us to examine our hearts, to confess the ways we have turned away from God, and to acknowledge our need for God's redemption. This season is a time to deepen our faith, to embrace the grace and forgiveness offered through Christ, and to allow God's love to transform our hearts. The message of Psalm 53 is not only about the corruption of humanity; it is also about God's faithful promise to restore and redeem us. Thanks be to God!

**Prayer:** God, as we journey through this season of Lent, we recognize the ways we have fallen short and turned away from you. We thank you that, despite our foolishness, you have provided salvation and forgiveness through your Son, Jesus. Help us to turn back to you with humble hearts, seeking your grace and restoration. May this season draw us closer to you, Amen.

*Psalm 53:1-4 (NRSVUE)*

*Fools say in their hearts, There's no God. They are corrupt and do horrible deeds; not one of them does anything good. God looks down from heaven on humans to see if anyone is wise, to see if anyone seeks God. But all have turned away. Everyone is corrupt. No one does good—not even one person! Are they dumb—these evildoers—devouring my people like they are eating bread but never calling on God?*

**Reflection:** Beware—fools and foolishness abound today! The history of April Fools' pranks is rich and long spanning the centuries from false reports published in the outlets of the 1700s to doctored photos of dinosaurs roaming Chicago in 1906 to Spaghetti Trees and the Jovian-Plutonian Gravitational Effect in the mid-20th century to Duolingo on Ice of last year. With the rise of AI, it's even easier to be fooled by falsified media. We live in an era where epistemology (the theory of how do we know what we know) is becoming more crucial. The Bible has some ideas about knowledge, truth, and belief, but the most foolish thing we can do is deny the presence of God. All wisdom starts with God. All we know stems from the One who created all. Even today, in our digital world, cutting through all the clutter, claims, and chaos, is God. When we come across something that we are unsure about, a claim that sounds too good to be true, a story wilder than we can imagine, may we stop to call on God. Seek the Holy One's counsel, and be attentive to the whispers, words, and wisdom that comes from there.

**Prayer:** Gracious God, we live in a time of much foolishness. Help us to listen to your voice and the voices that point us toward you. Give us grace to discern your words and the courage to follow. Amen.

*Luke 9:10-17 (CEB)*

*When the apostles returned, they described for Jesus what they had done. Taking them with him, Jesus withdrew privately to a city called Bethsaida. When the crowds figured it out, they followed him. He welcomed them, spoke to them about God’s kingdom, and healed those who were sick.*

*When the day was almost over, the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so that they can go to the nearby villages and countryside and find lodging and food, because we are in a deserted place.” He replied, “You give them something to eat.” But they said, “We have no more than five loaves of bread and two fish—unless we go and buy food for all these people.*

*(They said this because about five thousand men were present.)*

*Jesus said to his disciples, “Seat them in groups of about fifty.” They did so, and everyone was seated. He took the five loaves and the two fish, looked up to heaven, blessed them, and broke them and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. Everyone ate until they were full, and the disciples filled twelve baskets with the leftovers.*

**Reflection:** As I reflected on this familiar passage, what stood out this time were Jesus words of response to his disciples: “You give them something to eat.”

Jesus calls us to feed our neighbors. In our world today many of our neighbors are hungry for food, for companionship, for conversation, for connections. Many of our neighbors hunger for hope, for healing, for joy, for peace, for love. Many of God’s children are hungry for what will offer them an opportunity to thrive, to grow, to flourish in life.

How are we responding to Jesus’ calling? Are we suggesting they go somewhere else to find what they yearn for? Are we sending them away? Or, are we feeding Jesus’ people? We can feed people by showing up at food pantries, homeless shelters, long-term care facilities, hospitals, community events. We can respond to God’s whispers by rising up and listening to the cries, the screams of God’s children—children who hunger, who feel isolated, who live in despair. We can respond to God’s Spirit’s nudges by caring enough to offer our time, our resources, our treasures so our neighbors are fed with food and with love. How will you feed your neighbors in this Season of Lent? How will you follow where Jesus leads?

**Prayer:** God of Grace and Glory, help us remember to care for your children. Help us show up with food, with drink, with hope, with grace, with love. Help us live in ways which reveal we are following the way and the words of Jesus. Help us be love in the world today.



*Isaiah 43:1-3a (NRSVUE)*

*But now thus says the Lord, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you, and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;*

*when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.*

**Reflection:** “I have called you by name; you are mine. I will be with you...they shall not overwhelm you...I am the Lord your God.” We are claimed by God who desires to journey this life’s journey by our side. When chaos overwhelms, God is there. In the midst of judgment, God is there. There is no place, no time, no cause for which God is not with us. This is the peace that passes all understanding.

**Prayer:** Receive now, O God, the breath that I breathe. Let its life-giving movement awaken me to your life-giving movement that fills and surrounds me.... And may it be, that I as I move from this sacred time of prayer, I might only look to my breath today to find your presence still abiding with me. Amen.

*A Pilgrim Psalm: Psalm 126 (NRSVUE)*

*When the Lord restored the fortunes of Zion, we were like those who dream. Then our mouth was filled with laughter and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, "The Lord has done great things for them." The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced.*

*Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like the watercourses in the Negeb. May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy. Those who go out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, carrying their sheaves.*

**Reflection:** Ironically, as I was looking for the Scriptures for today I saw Psalm 126 listed. The irony is because I wrote a devotional piece for the Advent Devotional on this Psalm entitled "Ascending Grace." This Psalm is one believed to have been used by pilgrims going to Jerusalem, sung by those who journey in faith toward God's promises. It recalls the joy of God's restoration—how the people laughed and sang when the Lord brought them home from exile. Yet, it also acknowledges that the journey is not over. There are still tears to be sown before the harvest of joy is reaped.

Lent is a season of pilgrimage, walking the road of repentance and renewal. Like the psalmist, we remember God's past faithfulness and long for future restoration. Our sorrows and struggles are not the end of the story—God's promise is that those who sow in tears will reap with shouts of joy.

**Prayer:** Lord of the journey, as we walk through this Lenten season, remind us of Your faithfulness. Turn our sorrow into joy and our waiting into celebration. May we trust in Your promise of restoration. Amen.

*John 11:45-58 (NRSVUE)*

*Many of the Jews, therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did believed in him. But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. So the chief priests and the Pharisees called a meeting of the council and said, "What are we to do? This man is performing many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation."*

**Reflection:** Oh no! Jesus is helping the poor, healing the sick, welcoming the foreigner – all in the name of God! What should we do?

Stop him!

The Jewish officials were concerned with Roman retaliation. They feared Rome would dismantle the system that recognized the Jews as their own nation of people, in response to Jesus' growing popularity and message to tear down the mighty. But the Jewish leaders also feared for themselves and their power; that angering Roman leaders meant the structures that provided the Jewish leaders with privilege would be removed leaving them without authority or influence.

**Prayer:** Loving Creator, we pray that we never hold so tightly to our privilege and to our power that we seek to stop those who want to help the poor, heal the sick, and welcome the foreigner.

Amen.

*Isaiah 43:16-21 (NRSVUE)*

*Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down; they cannot rise; they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth; do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches, for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.*

**Reflection:** The 40-day period of Lent is traditionally a time of fasting and penance, with a focus on Christ’s suffering and sacrifice. Faithful folks often “give something up” - some habit or pleasure - as a practice of solidarity with Jesus and his 40 days in the wilderness when he fasted and faced temptations in the deserted place. It is in that time that God was preparing Jesus for his coming ministry.

It is also a traditional practice during Lent to treat Sundays as “mini Easters,” days of rest and celebration of the Resurrection, when folks refrain from fasting and penance, rejoicing in Christ’s defeating death.

In reading this passage from Isaiah on a Sunday - “mini Easter” in Lent, I feel this long exhale of my spirit. That, yes, there are trials and temptations, and the work of deep introspection, confession, and fasting can feel really daunting, even exhausting. However, the Lord also promises that a new thing is coming; God is going to make a way, and therefore we can continue to hold onto hope, trusting that this time will not last forever.

So today, allow yourself that big exhale. Settle in a little bit to the “mini-Easter” celebration that promises even death will be defeated, that pain and suffering will not last forever, that love will have the final word. Praise be to God!

**Prayer:** God of Resurrection, we breathe with you today, pausing our intentions of wilderness walking to remember that evil does not have the final word, but you do. May this reminder sustain us in the days ahead as we continue to journey with you. Amen.

*Hebrews 10:19-25 (NRSVUE)*

*Therefore, my brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

**Reflection:** Although we don't know the specific group of people that received this letter, we do know a few things about them. It is called, the letter to the Hebrews, because the audience receiving the letter had a vast knowledge of the writings of our Old Testament, or the Hebrew Bible. This was a group of people who were going through a lot all at once. They were going through the growing pains of learning what it means to be church together in community, and they were going through persecution from the wider community. This probably explains the passage that we read today, which contains a call to us to persevere. It is through our connection to Christ that we are made clean, but more than that we are made children of the King. We are part of the royal priesthood, the family of Christ! Through our relationship with Christ, we find faith (verse 22), hope (verse 23), and love (verse 24). As a colleague of mine who is a Baptist minister loves to say, we may be walking through Friday, but Sunday is a'coming! From the letter to the Hebrews, we find a reminder that even when things feel impossible, we are grounded in faith, hope, and love!

**Prayer:** Precious Lord Jesus, thank you for your great love for us. Help me to continue to grow in my faith as I rest in the hope that is found in your resurrection. Amen.

*Judges 9:7-15 (NRSVUE)*

*When it was told to Jotham, he went and stood on the top of Mount Gerizim and cried aloud and said to them, “Listen to me, you lords of Shechem, so that God may listen to you. The trees once went out to anoint a king over themselves. So they said to the olive tree, ‘Reign over us.’*

*The olive tree answered them, ‘Shall I stop producing my rich oil by which gods and mortals are honored and go to sway over the trees?’ Then the trees said to the fig tree, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the fig tree answered them, ‘Shall I stop producing my sweetness and my delicious fruit and go to sway over the trees?’ Then the trees said to the vine, ‘You come and reign over us.’ But the vine said to them, ‘Shall I stop producing my wine that cheers gods and mortals and go to sway over the trees?’*

*So all the trees said to the bramble, ‘You come and reign over us.’ And the bramble said to the trees, ‘If in good faith you are anointing me king over you, then come and take refuge in my shade, but if not, let fire come out of the bramble and devour the cedars of Lebanon.’*

**Reflection:** In the oldest parable of the Bible, we glimpse the people of Israel struggling under a leadership vacuum. The previous judge, Gideon, has died, leaving behind 70 sons. Another son, Abimelech, borne from a “secondary wife,” challenges his elders to accept either the rule of 70 men or a single man, himself. They choose Abimelech, who in turn hires “worthless and reckless men” to murder the 70 sons (Judges 9:4-5).

One escapes, Jotham, who is the youngest. When the time came to make Abimelech king, Jotham stood at the top of Mount Gerizim, a prominent location known for God’s reaffirmation of covenant with the Israelites, and offered his story of the three trees.

Notice the three trees – all figure in Old and New Testament theology and faith – refuse to leave the purpose to which they have been called. Finally, the trees seek out the bramble or thorn bush, who delivers an ultimatum: bow down under my shade (picture tall trees stooping below scant shade of a bramble) or else suffer the fires I will issue forth.

The bramble is not suited for shade and cannot deliver on what it promises as leadership; the result is destruction. So Jotham made the comparison of the bramble to Abimelech’s leadership, which turned out to be short with a brutish end.

The character and quality of the one providing leadership matters, in churches, families, and governments.

**Prayer:** Lord, forgive us when we seek rulers promoting their own power rather than seeking wisdom. Equip us as leaders to promote the way of the King who wore a crown of brambles on his way to death, that all of your creation might have life abundant. Amen.

*Luke 18:34 (CEB)*

*The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what he was talking about.*

**Reflection:** Are we lacking in wisdom, in knowledge, or in understanding? Are the things of God hidden from us? May we always be in the habit of asking God for enlightenment and wisdom about what God cares about? May we always ask God to help us live into those things. May we always seek a deeper connection to God's unfathomable, pervasive cares. Every day, may we seek anew the wisdom that God would have for us. Because we always need to remember that we don't know everything.

**Prayer:** Dear God, give me wisdom. Amen.

*Hebrews 2:1-4 (NRSV)*

*Therefore we must pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.*

**Reflection:** I was curious about how many words per day we hear, on average, so I did what anyone would do and asked Google about it. It was hard to find any sources that explained how they got to this estimate, but the sites I did find all agreed that we hear somewhere between 20,000 and 30,000 words every day.

Even with all those words we're hearing, it's estimated that we remember about 17-25% of what we hear every day. It's important to be careful what we listen to, it's even more important that we be careful what we pay attention to and try to remember.

Today, let's heed the words from the letter to the Hebrews: pay greater attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away from it. Decide to pay attention to the story of Jesus that we hear throughout this season of Lent. Hold what we learn from Scripture, from these devotionals, and from our worship services close.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to listen to those voices that speak the truth, those voices that whisper kindness, those voices that sing in love. May our ears, our minds, and our hearts be filled with your Word, that by the gift of the Holy Spirit we can learn to testify to your mercy with every word we speak. Amen.



*Hebrews 2:18 (NRSVUE)*

*Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.*

**Reflection:** I've lived with major depression since I was 10 years old, and though I have understood that for most of my life, I only sought treatment when I was about 30 years old because of the shame involved. In my particular religious context, we were taught that depression was due to a lack of faith. We're too blessed to be stressed, right? So I hid my depression and learned to pretend like I had it all together when inside, I was falling apart. I couldn't possibly let people know the truth or else they would never respect me, and they would know that my faith wasn't strong enough to save me from myself. When I finally got up the guts to see a therapist for the first time, he said, "I feel like I can say this because we're both Christians. Have you ever considered the possibility that when you stopped praying as much as a ten year old, you allowed the demons of depression to enter your heart"? Honest to God. That's what he said. I finally got the courage to open up, and was met by my worst fears. Thankfully, I have a wonderfully supportive wife who convinced me that it's OK to change therapists, and I continued my journey to healing. As I found language for my struggles, I started sharing them with those around me and found that I was not alone. Far from it. Dozens of people in my orbit had not only struggled with depression, but also with the shame that kept them from reaching out for help. I found that my story had the power to transform people in ways that I needed when I was younger. Trauma can do that. Those of us who suffer and struggle are uniquely qualified to help those who have similarly suffered. My burden became my gift and I found healing by sharing it with others. I wonder what you have struggled with - what you have suffered through. I wonder how God can use you to bring hope and healing to people that the rest of us cannot reach. I wonder how God will transform your pain into salvation for many.

**Prayer:** Lord, heal our wounded hearts. Embrace us in our brokenness and help us to learn how to use our healing to heal the world. Amen.

*Leviticus 23:3 (NRSVUE)*

*“Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work: it is a Sabbath to the Lord throughout your settlements.*

**Reflection:** How are you doing with Sabbath? You know that thing that God tells us as people of faith to do repeatedly. Leviticus sums it up succinctly, “rest, so you can spend time with the community honoring God.” The rest of this passage of Leviticus goes on to say sabbath is the way of preparation and reflection for the Passover Celebration. “Rest and get ready; rest and reflect”, says God. As you stand on the precipice of Holy Week, are you ready?

Are you in the right mental and spiritual space that you are ready to pay attention to the events that are about to unfold? Are you spiritually tuned in enough to God so that you can reflect on the events of Holy Week? Take time to rest and reflect not just tomorrow on the Christian Sabbath, but today. Spend time in prayer and study getting ready for what is to come. Reflect on Jesus’ entry into to Jerusalem, his journey to the cross, and into the tomb.

**Prayer:** Lord, help us to get ready. Help us to rest and in our rest refresh us in body and soul. Tune our hearts and minds to a spirit of contemplation and reflection on this upcoming holiest of weeks. Prepare us to receive all you want us to receive and prepare us to experience this journey alongside you once again. Amen.

# ***HOLY WEEK***

***Palm/Passion Sunday***  
**Sunday, April 13, 2025**  
*Stryjak*

*Rev. Mark*

*Luke 19:35-38 (NIV)*

*They brought it to Jesus, threw their cloaks on the colt and put Jesus on it. As he went along, people spread their cloaks on the road. When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen: “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”  
“Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!”*

**Reflection:** This scripture in Luke’s Gospel brings the reader to the beginning of that fateful ride up to Jerusalem. The crowds make way for their king to come into their lives once and for all to provide them a life that is not governed by others, where oppression will hopefully be gone.

And then, spoiler alert, it doesn’t turn out how they envisioned it, because God’s way is quite different from any human way of being in community. To be faithful is a strict discipline, which Jesus was portraying throughout his teachings, his praying in solitude, and providing himself the time to continually refocus.

During this Lenten journey are we riding into tomorrow on the back of a donkey, a work animal who can only serve others or are we more aligned with how Rome was governed in that day with power over many and to live with the force and threat of power? Clearly, we are all aligned with the work animal, the donkey who serves others and may our lives continue down this very precarious road with Christ.

**Prayer:** Holy God and eternal spirit, we seek your guidance, the ability to be courageous in the face of this world’s power and strength to re-align once more towards the life of your son who taught all your will. May it be so, Amen

*John 12:1-8 (NRSV)*

*Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus's feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, "Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?" (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) Jesus said, "Leave her alone. She bought it so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me."*

**Reflection:** In the passage from John 12:1-6, we see a beautiful picture of devotion and love demonstrated by Mary, the sister of Lazarus. Mary's act of anointing Jesus with expensive perfume was not just a physical gesture; it was a profound expression of worship. Mary's action was a sacrifice of both her wealth and her heart. She gave all she had, not out of obligation, but out of love and gratitude for the One who had raised her brother from the dead.

In the quiet moments of Lent, we are invited to ask: What are we willing to sacrifice to honor Jesus? Are there areas in our lives—whether time, resources, or comfort—that we can give back to God as an offering of love? This time is an invitation to reflect on how we worship and honor Jesus in our own lives.

As we walk through the last of these 40 days of Lent, may we follow Mary's example of extravagant love. May we be willing to pour out our "precious perfume"—whether in time, resources, or in serving others, to deepen our worship, moving beyond routine and rituals, into a more genuine, heartfelt offering. May we offer a devotion that fills the house, fills our lives, and gives glory to God.

**Prayer:** Lord, as we walk through this season of Lent, open our hearts to the extravagant love that Mary showed. Help us to reflect on how we can offer our own lives as living sacrifices—generous, sacrificial, and full of love for You. Fill us with Your fragrance of love, and may it overflow in everything we do. Amen

*John 12:23-25 (NRSVUE)*

*Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 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. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life.*

**Reflection:** Give up. Sometimes the best we can do is do our best and walk away. We cannot control others, and most circumstances are beyond our control. We can't stop the rain from flooding or the storms from coming. We can't help someone who doesn't want to be helped or who doesn't acknowledge there's a problem. We can't force people to adopt our perspectives or live by our beliefs. But we can plant seeds. Seeds of kindness and mercy. Seeds of truthfulness and grace. Seeds that are life-giving. Seeds that are ultimately tended to and brought to fruit by God. God doesn't call us to control the world but to love it. God sometimes calls us to plant the best seeds we can with the most thoughtfulness and care and then walk away. Walking away can be the toughest thing we do. Sometimes we must allow our need for control, security, and predictability to die so that God's plans of redemption and love may flourish. Giving up and giving over to God is the example Jesus gave us, a tough, but perennial, lesson of Holy Week.

**Prayer:** Giver of Growth, remind us of the unexpected blessings that can come from giving up. In those times when the best we can do is walk away, deepen our trust in your power to make new. Amen.

*Hebrews 12:1-3 (CEB)*

*So then, with endurance, let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right side of God's throne.*

*Think about the one who endured such opposition from sinners so that you won't be discouraged, and you won't give up.*

**Reflection:** Endurance—to keep going, to refuse to give up. When life feels challenging, when we don't see a way forward, when we want to give up, God speaks to us through the great cloud of witnesses who have gone before us. God speaks to us reminding us to pause, to breathe deeply, to take some time to rest, to step away from social media...and then to keep going. The world around us seems so fractured, so divided. It's easy to want to hide, to close our eyes and our ears, to withdraw, to believe there is nothing we can do. And, friends, we're not alone. We have Jesus leading us forward...Jesus who never gave up despite the looming cross. We have each other to share with, to listen to, to learn from. Together we can be love which rises up over hate. Together, in community, we can continue to love like Jesus loves, to be kind to our neighbors (and everyone we encounter is a neighbor). We can take time to listen to those who have different world views, different life experiences, different opinions, different dreams. Together, with the help of the Holy Spirit, we can endure, we can continue the race, we can spread more hope, more healing, more comfort, more compassion, more light, more love in the world.

**Prayer:** Oh, Holy One, when life seems challenging, when we want to give up, remind us that you are with us. Offer us words of wisdom, words of wonder, words of encouragement which help us endure. Bring us together in community to share our concerns, to dream together, to find new ways to share your Good News which reveals that love wins, that life triumphs, that your kin-dom will come to fruition when we keep running the race together with Jesus. Amen.

*1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (NRSVUE)*

*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

**Reflection:** When you come to the table, what are you looking to receive? Forgiveness? Hope? Mercy? Love? Guidance? Inspiration? Christ? Spirit? Or maybe the question is better framed, "In coming to the table what are you seeking for God to accomplish through you?" In whatever manner you come, what is received is received as pure gift. And not gift to be hoarded or held for oneself. It is gift poured out into you, so that you may pour out its blessing for the sake of others.

**Prayer:** Ever Generous God, your gift of love knows no bounds. May the lives of all those who need to receive of your gift this day, receive it fully, abundantly, and overwhelmingly. Be it received through presence at your table or be it received through the embrace of those who have been fed there. So be it God. Amen.

**Good Friday**  
**Friday, April 18, 2025**

*Rev. Nicholas L. Pence, Jr.*

*Matthew 27:46, Jesus quoting Psalm 22:1 (NRSVUE)*  
*“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*

**Reflection:** Starting in 2025, I began offering a daily devotional on Psalms for the folks connected to Palm. I was in a text conversation with a parishioner who asked, as many have asked before, was Jesus really forsaken by God? If Christ knew the divine plan, why would he feel forsaken upon the cross? For the series I am using a commentary by James L. Mays from the Interpretation series who insightfully shares that in Jesus’ time the rabbinic practice accepted the use of the first line of a Psalm to refer to the entire text.

So now you have a homework assignment! In reflection on Christ’s Passion and death, remembering his quotation of Psalm 22, read the entire passage. Seriously, look up Psalm 22 right now.

I pray that what you will discover is the movement from that acknowledgement of feeling forsaken, to the entire creation praising God, to be again a people of hope. Good Friday invites us into the mystery of Jesus’ suffering. Like Jesus, we have all known pain and loss, yet Psalm 22 reminds us that even in our darkest moments, God’s plan is unfolding. As we reflect on the cross, we hold both sorrow and hope. Jesus bore the weight of sin, yet Psalm 22 assures us: redemption is coming.

**Prayer:** Lord, as we stand at the foot of the cross, help us to trust that even in suffering, You are at work. Teach us to wait in hope, knowing that Easter Sunday is coming. Amen



*Holy Saturday*  
**Saturday, April 19, 2025**

*Rev. Kimberly Berenotto*

*Job 14:1-2, 7 (NRSVUE)*

*A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last. For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again and that its shoots will not cease.*

**Reflection:** Today is a day of waiting, of stillness. With Jesus crucified and laid in the tomb, that stillness descends; hope has withered like a flower, shadows cast doubts on believers. Embrace the quiet of a sealed tomb, the coldness of cut rock, the darkness of not knowing what is to come. It is only in these moments that anticipation can rise for the tree that will sprout again, for the branches that will not cease, for new life to break forth.

**Prayer:** Holy Parent, carry us in this moment of darkness, hold us alongside the sealed tomb, keep us in the stillness of this hour. Fan the dim flame of hope within us ready to bring warmth and light where shadows and coldness have made their home. Amen.

# *Easter Sunday*

*Easter Sunday*  
**Sunday, April 20, 2025**

*Rev. Selina Hamilton*

*John 20:1-34 (NRSVUE)*

*Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb. So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him." Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb. 4 The two were running together, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.*

**Reflection:** One of the things I love most about the story of the resurrection as we hear it from the Gospel of John is the urgency of the moment. When Mary Magdalene finds the empty tomb, she runs to tell Simon Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loved. Hearing Mary's report that the tomb was empty, those two disciples ran to see what had happened. We even hear that the disciple whom Jesus loved outran Peter to get there first.

They're moving quickly because the moment calls for urgency. Jesus had died and was buried. The disciples had spent the sabbath in mourning. Now that the sun has come up on the third day, they've discovered that his body is missing.

But they still don't know what happened. Peter and the beloved disciple return home. Mary stayed. She faced her grief, and as she wept, Jesus came to her and called her by name, showing her that he had returned and instructing her to tell the other disciples.

It's easy to get stuck in the urgency of the moment, and then simply go home when we're not sure what is supposed to happen next. It's harder to finish what needs to be done and to sit still and wait, especially if we're sitting in grief or fear. But when we sit and face the moment, Jesus meets us there.

So pay attention to when it's time to rush and when it's time to rest, to face your feelings, and to wait for Jesus to find you.

**Prayer:** Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Lord, we ask that you help us to know when it's time to run to meet you and when it's time to slow down and wait for you to find us. Amen.