



2023  
LENTEN  
DEVOTIONAL

A GIFT TO YOU FROM THE  
SPIRITUAL FORMATION TEAM  
OF WESLEY MEMORIAL







## PRAYER FOR LENT

Triumphant Lord, you who invite us to die to ourselves so that we might find ourselves anew, I pray that we would not be too full of to-do lists and anxieties during this season of Lent. I pray this so that there is space for You to do Your work of transformation in me and in my life. Grant me, I pray, the grace to welcome your Spirit's work to mortify my flesh and to breathe the renewing life of Jesus in me, so that I might participate in his sufferings and know the power of his resurrection during this forty-day pilgrimage. In the name of the One who heals us by His wounds. Amen.

## THANK YOU

This devotional is provided to you by our Adult Spiritual Formation Team. Thank you to all the members of our Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church family who contributed to making this Lenten Devotional. A special thank you to Cathy Weaver for her support and guidance in helping to make this devotional possible.



# LENT

In the Christian tradition, some time is set aside as sacred time; time when we live differently, time that is hallowed, time that is offered to God for unique activity. We set aside the Lord's Day each week as a day of special remembrance and worship. There are annual observances such as Christmas and Easter. There are special seasons like Advent and Lent.

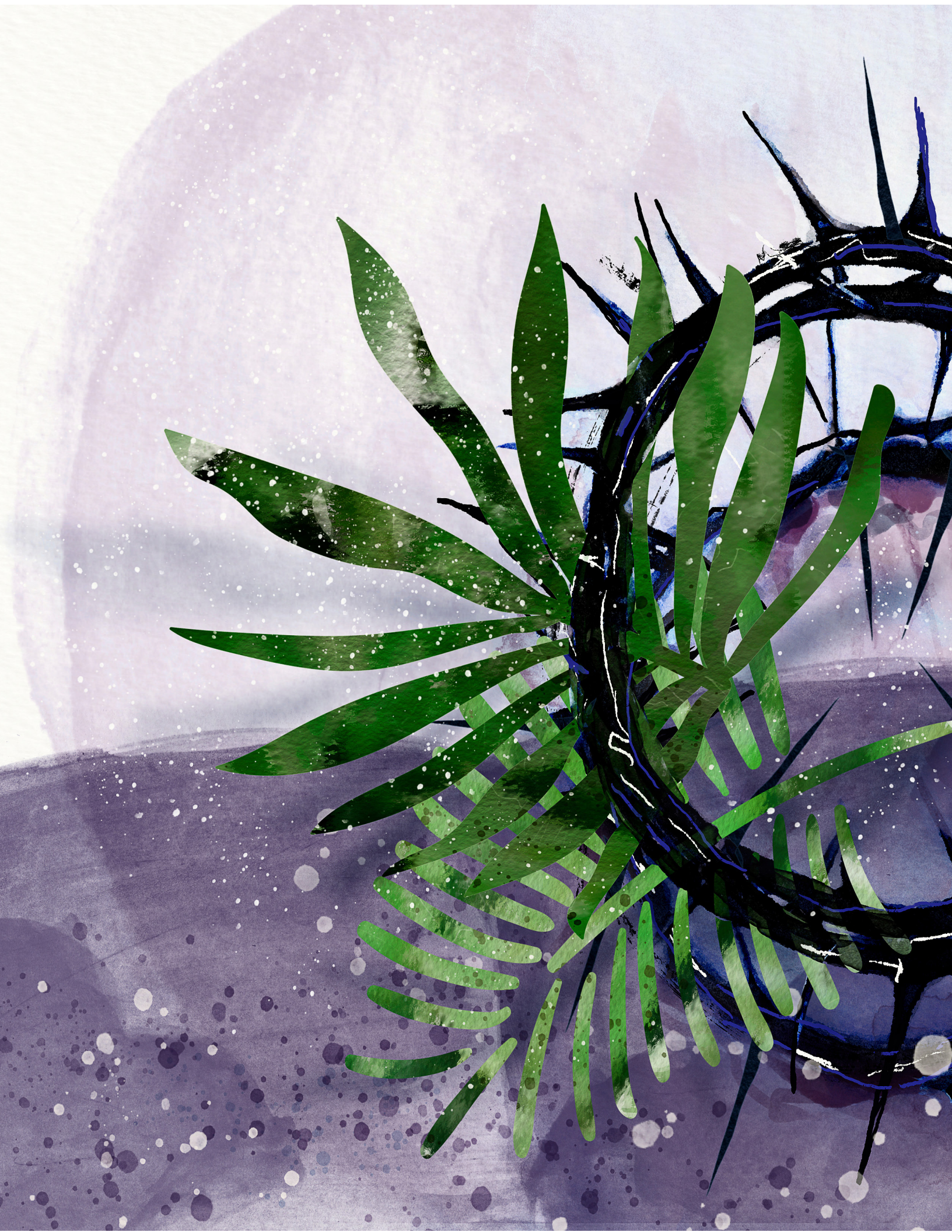
Lent is a season of the Christian Year where Christians focus on simple living, prayer, and fasting in order to grow closer to God. The season of Lent is forty days, not counting Sundays, which begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday. The forty days represents the time Jesus spent in the wilderness, enduring the temptation of Satan and preparing to begin his ministry.

Lent is a time of repentance, fasting and preparation for the coming of Easter. It is a time of self-examination and reflection. In the early church, Lent began as a period of fasting and preparation for baptism by new converts and then became a time of penance by all Christians. Today, Christians focus on relationship with God, growing as disciples and extending ourselves, often choosing to give up something or to volunteer and give of ourselves for others.

Sundays in Lent are not counted in the forty days because each Sunday represents a "mini-Easter." This is why you will see the designation "Sunday in Lent" rather than "Sunday of Lent" in the naming of these Sundays. On each Lord's Day in Lent, while Lenten fasts continue, the reverent spirit of Lent is tempered with joyful anticipation of the Resurrection. For this devotional, we have provided you a devotional for the forty days of Lent, the Sundays in Lent, as well as one from Easter.









## SHROVE TUESDAY PANCAKE SUPPER

The Wesley 100 Men will be selling tickets for the annual Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper which will take place on February 21st from 5:15 - 6:45 p.m. in the Dining Hall. Tickets are \$7 each and will be available in the Bridge Café before and after the 9:45 a.m. service in the Bridge Café and before and after the 11:00 a.m. service in the Narthex. You may also pick up your ticket from the church office during the week. Kids under 12 eat free.

## ASH WEDNESDAY SERVICES

Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church marks the beginning of Lent with the observance of Ash Wednesday. . Please join us at one of our two (2) special Ash Wednesday worship services which will include the imposition of ashes.

**Wednesday, February 22, 2023**

12:00 p.m. in the Chapel

6:00 p.m. in the Sanctuary

## CHILDREN'S ACTIVITIES

Easter EGG-stravaganza Family Event

**Sunday, April 2, 2023**

3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Register at [wesleymemorial.org/egg](http://wesleymemorial.org/egg)

Please bring candy to donate and place in the labeled bins around church for the Easter Egg-stravaganza!

## HELP US ADORN FLOWER CROSSES FOR EASTER

Help our crosses BLOOM with new life on Easter Sunday. Crosses covered with chicken-wire and palm branches will be placed OUTSIDE in front of the Sanctuary and near the Bridge Cafe entrance. Members and friends of Wesley Memorial Church are invited to bring flowers (purchased or from your garden) to adorn the crosses starting Saturday, April 8, 2023.

On Easter Sunday, these crosses will serve as the background for family photographs taken by a professional photographer.

## EASTER PHOTOS

As a gift to you, on Easter Sunday there will be a photo station set up to provide you with a free digital image and a free 4x6 photo print. The photo will be taken of you by the flower crosses, located outside in front of the Sanctuary and the Fellowship Hall after both the 9:45 a.m. and 11 a.m. services.



# HOLY WEEK SERVICES

## **Palm Sunday**

**Sunday, April 2, 2023**

8:30 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Chapel

9:45 a.m. Contemporary Worship in the Fellowship Hall

11:00 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

## **Wednesday, April 5, 2023**

6:00 p.m. Vespers in the Chapel

6:45 p.m. - 9:00 p.m. Valley of Blessings Sedar Meal in the Dining Hall

## **Thursday, April 6, 2023**

7:30 p.m. Maundy Thursday Service in the Sanctuary

## **Friday, April 7, 2023**

7:30 p.m. Good Friday Service in the Sanctuary

## **Saturday, April 8, 2023**

7:30 p.m. Holy Saturday Service in the Sanctuary

## **Easter Sunday**

**Sunday, April 9, 2023**

7:00 a.m. Sunrise Service at the Columbarium

7:30 a.m. TV Service on WGHP FOX8

8:30 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Chapel

9:45 a.m. Contemporary Worship in the Fellowship Hall

11:00 a.m. Traditional Worship in the Sanctuary

LET'S SHARE  
THE JOY  
OF THE  
RESURRECTION  
TOGETHER!





## WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22

### Of Ashes and Sin

*For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge. (Psalm 51:3-4)*

*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, so that sinners will turn back to you. Psalm (51:10-13)*

For years, I have cherished the practice of receiving ashes on my forehead on Ash Wednesday as a reminder of my mortality and my sin. I tend to keep them visible all day, not as any badge of “goodness,” but really as the opposite: as a quiet proclamation that I recognize, like David, my own sin.

Lent is a time to take a look at where we are on our Christian journey. Yes, sin will always be a struggle in this life, but the presence of the Holy Spirit helps us hold fast to Jesus, and we become more capable to withstand the power of sin. Yet we must be careful to not relax! Like any addict, we may be clean now, but could be only one small step from falling back into that addiction. Being a Christian doesn't mean we are “scotch-guarded” from sin. It means that we have been washed clean by the Master. And as we well know, walking in the world means getting dirty, and we find we must renew that cleansing action. As John Wesley put it: you and I continue to move toward perfection (completeness) in Christ. That lifelong journey is really the day by day recovery of cleansing and walking in His newness.

Questions for reflection:

- How does the concept of “day by day recovery” fit with your own experience?
- Have you seen yourself and others grow in the grace of God over time?

Nick Scandale



# THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23

## 40 Days in the Desert

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you, and lead me along the path of everlasting life. (Psalm 139:23-24)*

I did not observe Lent, that is truly use the 40-day period from Ash Wednesday until Maundy Thursday as a time of spiritual development for my faith journey until I was well into my adult years. I grew up Southern Baptist in a small eastern North Carolina town and, frankly, I had never even seen ash crosses on foreheads until my freshman year in college.

But as I have grown in the Methodist tradition these past 43 years, I have come to deeply value these 40 days of walking my own personal desert. Of exploring those ideas, practices, and feelings that are coming between God and me. Of stripping away the frivolous and getting to the core of my faith. Of yearning for God's touch. His guidance. His grace. His forgiveness.

Of accepting that Christ bore the weight of all of my sins as he suffered and died on the cross.

We all have deserts in life – times of despair, isolation, illnesses of body and spirit, droughts of finances, affection, and energy. For me, however, the desert of Lent is an intentional desert.

Many Biblical deserts were intentional and restorative. They were wildernesses for wandering. They were grazing tracts for the herds of the Israelites during their journey to the Promised Land. They were a sacred place where Christ went to speak to his Father, to face his foes, to emerge fortified for the battle.

Pause now and wander. Fast and then graze. Speak to our Father. Most importantly, listen for His voice and His message just for you. Then emerge from this wilderness closer to Christ and truly understanding victory over the grave.

Cathy Weaver



## FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 24

### Experiencing Lent Anew

*Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you. (1 Peter 5:6)*

I grew up in a Baptist Church in which we did not observe the Lenten season. It wasn't until last year when I read another devotional from a fellow Baptist that I decided my husband and I would attend our first Ash Wednesday service. As soon as I entered the Chapel that day, I could feel a change in my heart towards the meaning of the Lenten season. I went into the service unsure if I wanted to fast from anything, but as soon as Pastor Ken began to speak, I knew exactly what the Lord wanted me to do.

Lent provided me a time to step back, pause and recognize my humanity. It helped me focus on my relationship with God and not on the worldly things that took time away from that relationship. It allowed space in a busy season of life. Lent reminded me, humbled me, and took me back to the cross. I know this Lenten season the ashes will awaken my spirit when placed on my forehead; I ask that the Lord strengthen my spirit, soul, and body during this season.

Abbigail Felton





# SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 25

## Reflections from Funerals

*And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)*

Two funerals for respected physician colleagues on one day brought these thoughts:

- A funeral brings contact with others from all walks. Many life focal points become insignificant. It is a time for reflection about our mortality, our relationships, and that with our Creator.
- In dying, we bring our friends, family, and many we did not know we had impacted, all together.
- This is what Jesus had to do in order to bring all those who would live after Him, to Him and to each other forever.

Faith in idols of financial abundance, social influence, political power, or intellectual superiority, drives pursuit of that which can never provide peace. The faith to transform a life is but a small step - "as a grain of mustard seed." Matthew 17:20 . . . *if you have faith the size of a mustard seed... nothing will be impossible to you.*

Its magnitude is tiny, its direction unique. Trusting idols of our lives leaves us ultimately exhausted. A step of faith in our Creator, even in a child-like fashion, will be followed by a transformation of our very being.

Philippians 4:7 *And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding.*

We deceive ourselves when we grasp onto things outside of the relationship with our Creator. We despair over imperfection, our weakness, become weary when we rely on our strength, but then discover peace when we rest in the comfort of our Creator and rely on His provision. 2 Corinthians 12:9 My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.

Bose Ravenel

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 26

## The Peace of Christ

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. (John 14:27)*

I doubt if anyone would deny that peace is a precious commodity. This is a lesson taught well by the chaos of living in a broken world. One definition of peace is “tranquility.” Whether it is the feeling generated from time spent in some favorite part of God’s creation or the comfort felt in the presence of those who make us feel safe, it seems obvious that we all strive for a sense of peace in our lives.

Jesus, too, spoke of peace. This passage in John’s gospel, occurs on the night of the Last Supper. Although the disciples still don’t seem to fully understand Jesus’ forwarnings of His ultimate betrayal, they do seem to realize that something dire is about to happen. They are gripped in despair, confusion, and even false bravado as they try to reconcile their expectations with this very troubling news. And here we see Jesus, facing this crushing task in just a matter of hours, comforting the disciples and promising peace... HIS peace.

This was not the temporal peace mentioned earlier. Jesus’ peace is so much more profound because it’s derived from that same Spirit that promises to “never leave us or forsake us.” It is found in the assurance that the believer’s destiny is secure. It is the serenity provided by the Holy Spirit which empowers us to endure and overcome the trials of this life. And just as Jesus promised His peace to His disciples that night, He offers it to each of us today, even in the midst of our greatest challenges. What an amazing gift!

This Easter as we celebrate Jesus’ victory, which is now our victory, my prayer for all of us is best expressed by Paul’s familiar petition in Philippians, that “the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” always!

David Adams



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 27

## It Took a Cross....

The most famous cross in all time and eternity; it took the Cross of Jesus Christ on Calvary for God to forgive his children.

It took the cross of Jesus to pour out his blood to give the gift of his love to human sinners like you and me. His precious, glorious love that would turn their darkness into the light the father would bring. It took a cross to make a way for mankind to know and see and understand and feel the love of Father God and Jesus. Jesus said in John 16:27 "For the Father, loves you, because you have loved me and have believed that I came forth from God. Now I leave the world and go to the Father."

It took a cross for Jesus to glorify himself and the Father. In John 17:1 Jesus spoke these words and lifted up his eyes to heaven and said: *"Father, the hour has come, Glorify your son that your son also may glorify you; as you have given authority over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as you have given him, and this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent. I have glorified you on earth. I have finished the work which you have given me to do. And now, O Father, glory me together with yourself with the glory which I had with you before the world was."*

It took a cross to bring death to the body of Jesus to pay for our sins, so that he could bring life and love to his people who were dead in trespasses and sin. It took the blood of Jesus on the cross to know that "greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends, ye are my friends."

What a precious gift the Almighty God has given us, that when his son was hanged on the cross for us, we can receive the eternal weight of glory which Paul talks about in II Corinthians 4.

Thank you, Jesus, for creating us to have hearts to receive that "eternal weight of glory" - that deepest love from you and the Father God. As Oswald Chambers has written: "Keep yourself before God for this one thing only – my utmost for his high test. I am determined to be absolutely and entirely for him and for him alone."

It took a cross for Jesus to say, "these things I have spoken to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." For Jesus said in John 14:6, *"I am the way, the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father except through me."*

And that took a cross.

Ginger Keziah

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 28

## Wait for the Lord

Like many of you, I had high hopes for the new year. However, I quickly found that the earthly struggles I was facing at the end of December 2022 have followed me into January of 2023. When I encounter difficulty, I try to remember the words I frequently hear from Jeff Patterson: When in trouble, pray the Psalms. So, this has been my mission during my worldly struggles this year. As I face a problem, even those I feel I can never overcome, I try to find a Psalm that coincides with what I'm experiencing. God never fails. This will continue to be my mission during this Lenten Season, and I hope this mission becomes a life-long habit.

Many of us are familiar with Psalm 27, however, I would like to delve a little deeper into the words of King David: The Psalm begins,

*The Lord is my light and my salvation—  
whom shall I fear?*

Although familiar with the scripture, I know I struggle with doubt, I stress constantly, and I fear greatly. However, as Christians, we know that the Lord will deliver us, so there is no entity so great or so small that we should even entertain the idea of fear if we have faith on our side.

This Psalm continues to discuss how your name may be slandered by those here on earth, but there is:

*One thing we must ask from the Lord,  
this only shall we seek:  
that we may dwell in the house of the Lord  
all the days of our lives,  
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord  
and to seek him in his temple.*

If we've repented and we understand the errors of our ways, we should have no fear. Doubt, stress, and fear are not concepts created by God. We must exalt him in all we do! The more I see he has done for me, the more I understand that I have no reason to entertain these thoughts. God will provide. There is so much to glean from this one Psalm, but I know that during this Lenten Season I must focus on seeking God in all of his Glory, I must learn to fully understand the magnificence of his divine beauty, I must learn to seek him above all things, and most importantly, when I feel more lost than found, I must follow Psalm 27:14 and learn to do one of the most difficult tasks there is:

*Wait for the Lord;  
be strong and take heart  
and wait for the Lord.*

Work with me my friends, have patience, repent, and wait for his good things to come.

Bryant Thompson



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 1

## First Big Last

*I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you.  
(Psalm 32:8, ESV)*

When my two children were toddlers, the Easter Bunny left a trail of jellybeans from their beds to their baskets. Since we lived in a two-story home, this was quite a trek and caused a lot of excitement and suspense in their young minds and hearts. While my children may not remember all the details of their excitement, I do! There are many photos recording their delight as well as my special memories of their jellybean journeys.

This Lenten season begins my “first BIG LAST” at Wesley Memorial...I plan to retire February of NEXT YEAR so my perspective has shifted. As I close my eyes and reflect upon my Lenten journeys over the last 22 years these are my GOD moments: the precision, love and care as Joe Gamble assembles the torches for Palm Sunday and the altar flowers for Easter...the 7 am Easter Service in the columbarium (it is my 2nd favorite service of the year only behind the 11 pm service on Christmas Eve)...Bishop and Jean Stockton and their desire for this congregation to “Live Alive” which I try to do by “adding” a Bible Study, book study, service project each Lent rather than giving something up...the flower crosses at each service on Easter Sunday (I am always amazed at the beauty as individual flower offerings become so much more when combined...if you don’t have flowers in your yard, bring greenery or purchase a small bunch of flowers)...the photo booth and photo memories in front of the flower crosses...the children -- whether it be banner processions, singing or ringing handbells...Dixie Klemme, Dottie O’Connor and all the people who change paraments and provide communion during the season (this has to do with my position in facilities and ALL of the many volunteers who work tirelessly behind the scenes to make everything possible) ...all the special music, musicians and orchestras (I highly recommend the Seven Last Words of Christ offered on Good Friday!)...for the wonderful men of Wesley 100 and their gift of Shrove Tuesday to begin Lent and to Roddy who shows up every year to make all the batter in the large commercial mixer and to Tom for leading their efforts the past few years...

My faith journey at Wesley Memorial has been a little like the jelly bean trail...certainly not a straight line, with ups and downs, but always knowing there was something special at the end and knowing someone who loves me has a plan...God has a plan for me! Hopefully, you have been able to tell my reflections are full of the love, laughter, joy and renewal of THE PEOPLE of WESLEY MEMORIAL. Treat this Lenten season as your “first BIG LAST” ... add a class or study, attend a service you have never attended, attend worship and introduce yourself to a stranger...Live Alive in Jesus Christ!

While downloading my Bible verse, I found a Jelly Bean prayer listed. Here it is: Jelly Bean Prayer - Red is for the blood he gave, green is for the grass he made. Yellow is for the sun so bright, orange is for the edge of night. Black is for the sins we made, white is for the grace He gave. Purple is for the hour of sorrow, pink is for a new tomorrow. A bag full of jelly beans, colorful and sweet, is a prayer, is a promise, is an Easter treat!

Cindy Dominick  
Manager of Building Usage and Hospitality



THURSDAY, MARCH 2

## This is Required of Us

*He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? (Micah 6:8, KJV)*

Father God, Lord of Mercy, be with your children during this time of Lent. Help us to focus on YOU and understand you on a deeper level through our prayers, fasting, and study. Open our eyes, open our hearts, and open our minds as we grow closer to you. In Jesus' name. Amen.

What does the Lord require of us daily? Our reading in Micah lays this out quite clearly. First, we are required to do justly. Justly is an adverb defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “in a way that most people consider to be morally fair and reasonable.” As the Lord requires, we must follow His Commandments and apply them to others just as we expect them to apply them to us. Live a life that is above reproach and allow the Lord to work through us.

Second, we are required to love mercy. As with living a just life, we must also have mercy. Our LORD God is a merciful god as He loves us even when we are most undeserving. HIS mercy for us is far beyond our mortal comprehension. However, if we strive to have mercy in our lives upon people in our lives who have been dealt a bad hand or have wronged us in a way that we are able to forgive, then we can follow the example set by God.

Finally, we are required to walk humbly with the Lord. To be humble is not a sign of weakness. Quite the contrary. It is a sign of great strength to be able to swallow your pride, give glory to the Lord, and give thanks to Him for the talents bestowed upon you. Let your ACTIONS speak much louder than your words, and do not perform acts for accolade or praise. Let the Lord work through you daily and accept His blessings as you allow Him to bless others through your work.

Joshua 1:9 reads, “Have not I commanded thee? Be strong and of good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the Lord thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” During this time of Lent, brothers and sisters, do what is required of you, and do it with great courage. This is what is required.

God Bless you all!

Chase Tobin



## FRIDAY, MARCH 3

### The Value of Suffering

*Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)*

In the early 1970s, I was told I needed back surgery. High Point Memorial Hospital had just brought in a young neurosurgeon named Jimmy Johnson. It was unusual that a man as young as me needed to have back surgery. I was married and had three kids under 6 years old. The most serious problem I faced was that I worked on straight commission for a local paper company. I was confined to two weeks in the hospital but to no avail, I had to face surgery. I was at home for three months without working. I remember this period of time as a low point in my life.

However, one of the highlights of this problem was what I learned from some people older than me. I never will forget one afternoon my kid's pediatrician came by for a visit. We talked and prayed together and his closing remarks as he left my room were, "Jordan, sometimes the Lord lays you flat on your back so you can look up, and see how you have been blessed."

At that time in my life, I was more interested in supporting my family than hearing his suggestion, but over the 54 years since that day, I have realized that he was right on with his advice to me. In our church family at Wesley Memorial, we all have problems and pain and everyone has suffering in their lives. At that age I was not smart enough to know this fact, but now I know that the way we react is the key. I had my priorities but they were not in the correct order. That experience planted something deep in my heart. I learned I lacked compassion for others, and since that ordeal I have tried to do more for the people who are not as blessed as I am. We are all suffering in some way, and we all can reach out to each other in ways that make that pain a little easier to bear.

Fifteen years ago, I put a small sign on my nightstand that reads, "Whose life will be better because I woke up this morning?" I read it every morning before my day begins. I truly believe that by suffering along life's journey, God has made me a better and more compassionate person. And I believe we all can make that choice to find a way through suffering to have compassion for others, and in so doing learn the value of suffering.

Jordan Washburn

# SATURDAY, MARCH 4

## Hope in the Glory of God

*We exult in hope of the glory of God (Romans 5:2b)*

Many of us have been dismayed at what has been happening in our nation and the world in recent years, and this dismay is leading many to lose hope for the future. We make plans and have expectations, and we have high hopes. However, often those expectations only produce disappointments and our high hopes are dashed.

The disciples had high hopes when Jesus entered Jerusalem. He had declared Himself to be the much anticipated Messiah, and it looked like all of their expectations were being met. However, in just a few days, their hope came to an end as they watched Jesus die on the cross and be taken to the tomb. All their hopes were dashed, and they became dejected.

In Luke 24 we see an example. On the first day of the week two disciples left Jerusalem and were walking toward Emmaus, and along the way they were discussing what they had seen when Jesus joined them. They did not recognize Him, and in response to His question, they stopped walking and looked discouraged. They said that they were hoping that Jesus was the one to redeem Israel. They had lost their hope.

Hope is vital, but it is only as good as what it is built on. You see, their hope was built on their ideas and expectations, and we tend to do the same thing. But the only one we can depend on is God. It was the resurrection that gave the disciples, and us, the hope we need.

Dr. Daniel M. Sweger



# SUNDAY, MARCH 5

## Joy and Pain

*Sing for joy, O heavens!*

*Rejoice, O earth!*

*Burst into song, O mountains!*

*For the Lord has comforted his people*

*and will have compassion on them in their suffering. (Isaiah 49:13, NLT)*

Joy is that which springs from our hearts unbound, perhaps one of the few unhindered emotions we possess. Stiflers that we are, it follows that we should have at least one pure and unrestricted response to our finer moments in life. Joy is big. Joy is bright. And joy is contagious.

But joy is also mysterious and downright complex. The prophet exclaims in Isaiah 49:13: “Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth; break forth, O mountains, into singing!” For the Lord has comforted his people, and will have compassion on his suffering ones.” And there you have it: suffering. How can this joy we know exist so closely to pain? Can there be joy in suffering? The answers seem inexplicable and leave us wanting to turn blind eyes to anything but joy.

Truth is, the road to joy for Christians is littered with pain. And no better example exists than Christ’s Passion: the archetype of pain. In the span of one week, Jesus faced his accusers, was chastised, beaten, and killed – pain the likes of which we’ll never know. But understand that joy emerged, just as he promised, when the pain became a memory and darkness fell away like the scales that would fall from Saul’s eyes on the road to Damascus.

Knowing this, then, we cannot skip over the pain in our lives. We must learn to wrangle this “other” emotion and hold it closely, much as we cherish our joy. Lent gives us the space to do this. Throughout this bittersweet season, we can hold and even honor the pain in our lives, knowing that the pain Christ endured for us was indeed tempered with the joy that followed. Lent sparks not only our faith, but also the courage to wander and even linger along that pain-strewn path, the joy of resurrection always looming large.

Pastor Lisa Tanico  
Pastor of Congregational Care and Senior Adults

MONDAY, MARCH 6

## What kind of love?

*And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. (Luke 22:44)*

I was at the gym this morning, devotedly working to keep the old bod in condition, when I heard the most agonizing, guttural scream. If you are a regular gym-rat, you are used to the usual grunts and thumps as sweaty bodies push themselves to the extreme of their physical endurance. This sound was a little more than that. This cry was borderline anguish, and indicated that the issuer had extended himself beyond the absolute maximum of what his body and mind could endure. The sound that came from that man was chilling. What kind of crazy, all-in insanity would make a man do this?

In 2015 a video titled “A message signed with blood to the nation of the Cross” was released. In the video, 21 Coptic Christians in orange jumpsuits were marched along a beach in Libya where they were forced to their knees and, while Allah was praised, they were beheaded. Subtitles described the Christians as “people of the Cross, followers of the hostile Egyptian Church.” As the cameras rolled, the peaceful Mediterranean waves lapped red with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus Christ. What kind of crazy, all-in insanity would make men do this?

Some 2,000 odd years ago, Jesus knelt in a garden praying in such agony that the physician Luke records he sweat great drops of blood that fell to the ground. Hematidrosis is a medical condition in which extreme anguish causes tiny blood vessels surrounding the sweat glands to constrict, dilate, and rupture, forcing blood to effuse into the sweat glands. Jesus, being God, knew all that was going to happen to him. That he would be betrayed, tried, beaten beyond recognition and hanged to die for every vile and heinous sin of the world. And yet. What kind of crazy, all-in, kind of insanity would make a man do this?

The kind of crazy, all-in insane love that would make the Father give his only begotten Son, because he loved the world. He loves you. He loves me.

Priscilla Smith



## TUESDAY, MARCH 7

### The Lesson for us Go-mers

*On that day, says the Lord, you will call me “my husband,” and no longer will you call me “my Baal.” For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be mentioned by name no more. I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground, and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will take you for my wife in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. (Hosea 2:16-20, NRSV)*

Few stories in the Bible are as unlikely as the prophet Hosea's. He's called by God to marry an “unfaithful woman” — and not just a slightly unfaithful one, either. Go-mer, the woman he finds, has followed in her mother's footsteps and is wallowing in the life of a prostitute. Hosea marries her and she bears him three children. The children may or may not be his — with Go-mer there's just no telling — and when done with all that, she runs away. So of course, God tells Hosea to bring her back. Which he does. Everyone lives... well, ever after.

The story serves as an analogy for the people of ancient Israel. As Hosea was to Go-mer, so God will be with you. Only more so. There will be rupture. There will be punishment. But God will always bring them back, and if necessary, He will do it over and over again. That is the essence of God. His loving kindness, his grace, his mercy, knows no bounds.

That lesson is for us Go-mers today, too. No matter what we do, God loves us in a deep and abiding way that passes all our understanding. There is assurance in that ...

... And maybe, just maybe, a model, too.

Is this what our loving relationships could be like? Could we care so deeply for another that all transgressions — both ours and theirs — could be overcome?

It seems a stretch, but with God's creations you never know.

Tucker Mitchell

## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 8

### The Highways of Life

What a blessed time Easter is! Jesus is risen.

What a reminder to thank God for the goodness of the past and to trust Him for the opportunities of the future.

And what an opportunity to re-dedicate our commitment to follow Jesus in our life and in our work.

Luke 24:13-19 depicts the experience on the Road to Emmaus when Jesus appeared to two of his disciples and commanded our faith in Him. What a holy time that was, a couple of days after His ascension into Heaven.

But it all started on the road to Damascus with the conversion of Paul (Acts 9:3-6). Our faith begins with our total commitment to read God's word, do His work, follow His will, and worship Him.

In Luke 10:30-37 we learn to love one another as we read about the road to Jericho with the Good Samaritan reaching out to help others. Jesus said if you've done it unto the least of these among you, you've done it unto me.

And in Matthew 27:26-34 we read about the road to Golgotha (Via Dolorosa) and the suffering of Jesus Christ. Adversity in life is almost certain but out of it can emerge abundance with conviction and faith.

Four roads that can describe our life's experience. From Damascus to Emmaus.

In this Lenten season, as we anticipate the sunrise on Easter morning, let us remember that God loves us. That we are on God's side. With faithful courage, all things are possible.

Nido Qubein



## THURSDAY, MARCH 9

### Greater Hope and Assurance

*Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. (Romans 12:12)*

Easter and the resurrection have always been the guiding star in my life. They say when life throws you lemons, make lemonade. I am a firm believer that knowing that Christ gave the ultimate sacrifice in order that I might be saved, I can weather any storm here on earth.

It is easy to find joy when life is running smoothly and your worries are lessened, but I believe it takes the tough moments to bring you closer to God and deepen your faith. I believe that for every tough day, God provides you with even greater hope and assurance that can sustain and nourish you. Jesus' journey through the wilderness, though lonely and hard, brought him closer to God and through prayer gave him a great understanding of his purpose.

We must also listen (and pray) to reveal our own purpose – in the joyful, mountaintop moments where we pray our gratitude for the life we have been given and in the challenging, difficult times when we reach to God with our struggles and our pain. No matter the journey, God knows our every thought and need, and he is there for us even when all hope seems lost.

I pray you find God in every moment of your life journey, whether in those moments of greatest joy or in the darker days of pain and weeping. May we all have faith as Jesus did that God walks with us through whatever life may bring.

Lore W. Fariss  
Co-Lay Leader  
Wesley Memorial Administrative Team



FRIDAY, MARCH 10

## Choosing Forgiveness

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12: 18-21)*

"Like carrying cantaloupes in your backpack!?" our oldest daughter exclaimed after reading her nightly devotional with us. We were confused and inquired what she meant. She explained that in Sunday School they had discussed how sin, like unforgiveness, is like piling your backpack full of cantaloupes, which just weighs you down. Not only were we moved by how simply she articulated such a big truth, but how it paralleled the lesson we had just shared with our middle and high school students the previous Sunday when discussing Romans 12.

As we broke up into small groups to read aloud Romans 12:9-21, which has the subtitle, "Behave Like a Christian," we asked each group to pick a verse that stood out to their group. When it was time to share what spoke loudest to them, each group brought up verses with the theme of blessing instead of cursing (verses 14, 17, 19, 20, 21). The students consistently shared how difficult it is to choose forgiveness, especially to those who have wronged you, and choosing to trust that the Lord would right the wrongs. We encourage everyone to read Romans 12.

This Lenten season may our hearts be tender to hear the themes of forgiveness the Holy Spirit wants to work in each of our hearts. Is there someone that you need to forgive? Is there someone you need to ask forgiveness from? May we have the trust and courage to allow God to search our hearts to highlight any "cantaloupes" that we need to surrender to fill our backpacks with the Fruit of His Spirit. May we each take time to make room for His love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23).

Steven & Jessica Nelson



SATURDAY, MARCH 11

## Trusting in our Father

*“Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:25-34, NIV)*

During my senior year of college many years ago, I was asked to share with the other students in my college ministry a biblical passage as a word of encouragement as we approached the end of the school year. I chose Matthew 6:25-34.

I tend to be a worrier, so I cling to passages like this that remind believers in Christ that God loves us and that He is in control. Near the end of His compelling Sermon on the Mount, Jesus doesn’t just instruct us in Matthew 6 not to worry; He tells us why. He reminds us that because God cares for the birds and grass, how much more will He care for us. Indeed, we—you and I—are created in God’s image, not animals and plants (Genesis 1:26-27). We are His beloved (Colossians 3:12).

This season of Lent powerfully reminds us how much God loves us. In this season, we stand face-to-face with the reality that God did not just tell us how much He loves us, He showed us. “For God so loved the world that He gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16).

I still often worry more than I should. But Matthew 6 continues to remind me—and us all—that “God’s got this.” When we struggle with trusting in Him, let us look around at His creation and see how He beautifully cares for our world. And let us look to the cross and resurrection and remember how He lovingly cares for us—and how He reigns victorious over all that worries us.

Natt Gantt

# SUNDAY, MARCH 12

## Set Apart to be... Holy

*Create in me a clean heart, O God... (Psalm 51:1-17)*

*You have been set apart as holy to the Lord your God... (Deuteronomy 14:2)*

I am often fascinated by the interplay of a holy God with an unholy people. God's Spirit is not sullied by fraternizing with us, nor is God intimidated by our sin. God stands with us in our natural, sinful state as humans to continually make us a holy people, new creations in Christ.

But what does it mean to be holy? Merriam-Webster defines holy as a "religious or morally good; exalted or worthy of complete devotion as one perfect in goodness and righteousness." According to this definition, only one being can fit this description of perfection: God alone. Therefore, we need a more accurate description of "holy" for human beings.

In biblical terms, "holy" means to be set apart for a specific purpose. In Exodus 19:6 and Deuteronomy 14:2, God declares Israel as a holy nation, set apart. There are times when aspects of moral righteousness or godly devotion are connected to "holy" people. Nevertheless, on its own, the term holiness does not refer to piety or perfection. When the Bible calls something holy, it is not speaking of purity or righteousness. Rather, it is something "set apart" from everything else in order to glorify God.

Considering this, your coffee pot, which serves a specific set apart function, could be considered "holy." Your toothbrush (which I assume you do not share with others. All God's people said, "amen") is set apart for specific purpose and function, and thus by this definition, your toothbrush is "holy."

Prayers we pray during Lent can reflect the heart of Psalm 51: have mercy on me, wash me, create in me a clean heart and a right spirit. All of these foci point to a deeper desire in the heart of the praying Christian: A desire to be set apart, to be ready and willing. A desire to continue to be God's new creation, created to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). When you feel the nudge to pray such prayers, be encouraged. It is the Holy Spirit at work within you, shaping you.

Pray with me: God help me to see that when you challenge me, it is for my good. Help me to see that when you call me to be set apart, it is so that we can more perfectly hear your voice and be in alignment with your will for my life. Amen.

Pastor Clark Chilton  
Associate Pastor

MONDAY, MARCH 13

## Joseph of Arimathea

*When it was evening, a rich man from Arimathea named Joseph came, who himself had also become a disciple of Jesus. He approached Pilate and asked for Jesus' body. Then Pilate ordered that it be released. So Joseph took the body, wrapped it in clean, fine linen, and placed it in his new tomb, which he had cut into the rock. (Matthew 27:57-61)*

*"He was assigned a grave with the wicked, but he was with a rich man at his death, because he had done no violence and had not spoken deceitfully." (Isaiah 53:9)*

While doing my Bible studies, I often like to ponder over what the potential back-stories could possibly be. Sometimes, I fill in the blanks myself. And, the story of Jesus' burial is one that is so interesting to me.

Joseph loved his Messiah so much that he gave him the last gift that He could receive at the end of His earthly life... a place for His body to be entombed in. I'm sure that Jesus' mother Mary appreciated this display of generosity. And, generous it was. I assume it was comparable to one of us giving up our paid burial place in the cemetery of our choice.

To me, it is significant that Jesus was buried in a tomb that had not been used before this... just as, when He was an infant, He had occupied a womb that had not been previously occupied. At the risk of inserting any humor into the upsetting story of Jesus' death, I can only imagine Joseph of Arimathea returning home that evening to his wife. "Well, they've killed Him." I suppose he would lament to his spouse. "I gave up our family tomb for his burial."

"What!?" she might reply. "Now, where am I supposed to bury you when you pass on?" The domestic dispute might have continued for the remainder of the weekend. Until...

Jesus exited the tomb of His own accord that first Easter Sunday morning.

As the saying goes... we can't outgive God. Joseph's gift was returned to him, and his wife certainly didn't need to worry about another person occupying the family's tomb.

Jesus returned the earthly gift... and gave the Arimathea family back so much more... exactly what He has given us — ETERNAL LIFE!

Laura Mize



TUESDAY, MARCH 14

## The Suffering Servant

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

*Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12*

One of the more familiar passages read during the Lenten Season is frequently referred to as “The Suffering Servant,” found in the book of Isaiah, who was prophesying the advent and eventual death of the Messiah, some 700 to 750 years prior to the actual crucifixion of the promised One. The passage is fairly general regarding the description of the manner in which Jesus would be rejected as the Messiah, yet quite specific about why and how He would suffer, and which would lead to his crucifixion. Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would be disfigured and his body marred beyond human likeness by the crushing blows he would receive; that He would be despised and rejected; that he would be pierced and crushed; and that he would be oppressed and afflicted.

Nearly 800 years later, the four Gospels would be written, and in each of these we see even more the specific severity, the treatment that Jesus received during the day and night of interrogations, first, by the religious leaders in Jerusalem; then being severely beaten by the Temple guards, probably with a whip, the lashes of which were tied to sharp pieces of bone and metal that would literally tear the flesh off the back and anywhere else on the body and face the lashes might land. He was then taken to Governor Pilate, who was unable to find any guilt in Jesus. He then sent Jesus, under guard, to King Herod, who also did not find him guilty, and who subsequently sent him back to Pilate. Pilate then yielded to the pressure of the Jewish leaders and the crowd they had gathered and who were now in a frenzy, yelling, “Crucify him, Crucify him.”

Pilate then handed Jesus over to his palace guards, who pressed into his head a crown woven of thorns, and they spit on him and struck him on the head again and again with a wooden staff. They then proceeded to take Jesus just outside of the city walls to be crucified, having Jesus bear the burden of carrying his own cross.

Finally reaching the Hill of Golgotha, they drove spikes through his wrists and ankles to the cross. After nearly three hours of hanging in agony, in the midst of mocking and shame, he committed his spirit to God, and he died. To ensure that he was dead, a Roman soldier thrust a spear in his side, out of which spewed water and blood.

But why? Why did this happen to the Son of God? Isaiah tells us, “Yet it was God’s will...” (53:10). But why was it God’s will to allow His Son to suffer such agony and pain. And again, Isaiah gives the answer: “*But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.*”

All was accomplished by God’s will through the death and resurrection of His Son so that we, you and I, could be redeemed, forgiven of our sin, which brings us peace with God when by faith we trust in Jesus as our Savior.

*“My sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought  
My sin, not in part, but the whole.*

*Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, Praise the Lord, O my soul.”*

Steve Young

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 15

## Don't be an Actor for Jesus

*Be careful not to practice your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:1-6)*

Looking back on childhood memories of the Lenten season, I remember my dear sweet mother instructing my sister and me to sacrifice something every year. At that age, sacrifice is nominal – sweets, a favorite toy, tv show, play time, etc. It was sometimes SO HARD to give up that one thing for Lent, but it also seemed like a game, because we told EVERYONE that we were giving something up for Lent. Cute for children, but what did we really learn?

Matthew 6 tells us that it is not what we give up, but the intent of the heart, and how we choose to portray that act. Jesus tells us not to give, fast or pray like the hypocrites that put on a public show. This draws my mind back to all the whining I did as a child, and even as an adult when a church I attended would call a fast for everyone. Those first few fasts were more about me than about whatever we were to pray about because I had not learned to shut up and pray – and I was telling anyone who would listen how “HARD” my day was because I had to give up food and only drink water. That did not give God the glory – it was merely me performing a ritual and calling attention to myself – look at me – I love God so much that I am not eating today. Great actress I was, though I missed the point.

The crowd will clap, shout the proverbial “Hosanna” one day, and “Crucify Him” the next. The crowd is fickle, but God changes not. The rewards of the flesh are instant and gratifying, but nothing is as nourishing to the soul as the rewards of Christ Jesus, the living water of the Holy Spirit, or the sense of utter peace after spending quality time in solitude with the Lord.

Jesus tells his disciples to go to their rooms and shut the door. This is not really a reprimand; it is an invitation. In the ancient Middle East, the “inner room” was equivalent to a pantry and was in the inner part of the house with no windows or other openings aside from a door to seal it off. In the “inner room” we are free from the crowd, from the pressure to perform for others, sealed off from the unstable, fickle desires of others.

This Lenten season, let us learn to borrow our desires (treasures) instead from the One who desires us. Let us go to the “inner room” for “detox” from the crowd and allow God to sober our hearts and awaken our souls to His deepest desires for us. Our deepest desires are hidden in God, like a treasure. If we seek His will, His desires for us, we will truly capture the spirit of this Lenten season. This treasure is everlasting, worth a million more times than all the gold and diamonds in the world. This Lenten season, unplug, find your personal “inner room,” and dedicate it as a sacred space for Lent. Return to it daily and seek the most priceless gift – deeper relationship with our heavenly Father.

Melissa Caudle

THURSDAY, MARCH 16

## Who do you say I am?

*Jesus: Who do you say I am?*

*Peter answered "You are the Christ". (Mark 8:27-29)*

In this chaotic world in which we live, that question echoes through the years to each one of us, and the answer to that question determines the way we spend our days on this planet. Is Jesus a wonderful teacher, a role model, or is He God's Son who gave His life for me?

I was raised in the Methodist church. Eighty-seven years ago the church was the center of life for the community. The neighborhood was virtually empty on Sunday morning except for a few who were considered a little strange. I learned the Bible verses, the songs, performed in the Christmas and Easter plays and learned to pray at an early age. I even became the church organist when our organist resigned immediately after Sunday service.

I had never had a conversion experience when my heart was "strangely warmed," but I knew I was going to Heaven. It was not until I was married that I was challenged by this question: "Who do you say I am?" And I was surprised that I did not have an answer. I was challenged by a minister who said "I have been a minister for 25 years but a Christian for five. That's the kind of comment that will make a Methodist congregation sit up and take notice. During this pastor's time at our church, I had my strangely warm experience where I came face to face with Jesus and gave my life to Him. I wish I could tell you that everything was perfect after that, but it wasn't. Many times I went my way but was always drawn back to Him. I cannot imagine my life without Him now and I continue to learn so much in this journey especially in the tough times. My wish for you this Easter is that you will ponder this question and commit your life to Christ. Can you answer the question? "Who do you say I am?"

Pat Colonna



## FRIDAY, MARCH 17

# The Peace That Surpasses All Understanding

The Lenten season is a special time for all of us. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ has made it a special time by giving up His life to save us. We love Him so much for that.

But this time is also a sad time for me, but a journey that I will remember forever. In 2003, my son, Jimmy, died on Easter weekend. Jimmy had Muscular Dystrophy that would not get better. It was so hard for me to think about anything else. As I look back at that time, I remember a Sunday at church before Jimmy got so sick. We were praying in the chapel, and I had a warm feeling hit me. Something told me Jimmy was going to be okay. I didn't realize at that time that God would be calling Jimmy back to be with Him.

In just a few months, Jimmy started to get sicker. I prayed and was so worried that he was being taken away from me. I was angry in a way, but I think it was because I was so scared. We had to put him in the hospital, and I knew when we took him that he would probably not come back home. When he got so bad, I went to the chapel in the hospital and prayed. When I did, that same feeling came back to me that Jimmy would be okay. I may not have him with me, but he would be okay.

The day of his funeral, I had another feeling come over me that I cannot explain. It was a feeling of peace! The Holy Spirit bore witness to me that day. My Lord and Savior had taken my son with Him.

I will always have memories of Jimmy and he will always be in my heart. I will also remember that I was not alone in this process. Jesus was by my side.

I want to leave you with this scripture to read:

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made know to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:4-7)*

Tish Schultheiss  
Administrative Assistant to the Pastors

## SATURDAY, MARCH 18

### Let the Children Come. Drag Them If You Must!

*Luke 18:16 (NIRV) reads: But Jesus asked the children to come to him. "Let the little children come to me," he said. "Don't keep them away. God's kingdom belongs to people like them."*

The Lord has blessed my husband, Nick and me with four very strong-willed, wild, unbridled, beautiful brunette-headed girls. They run around the church before and after services like they own the place, and If I'm anywhere around, you've very likely seen me huffing and puffing, exasperatingly herding them like sheep (or cats, rather). I wouldn't have it any other way.

I grew up in a Spiritually divided household. My parents often worked weekends, so my grandparents, both who were deeply rooted in their faith in Christ, would take my brother and me to church on Sundays; let's be real: they didn't just take us to church, they dragged us there whether we liked it or not! I spent countless Sunday mornings sitting in the same pew, on the same row, absolutely bored out of my mind.

When I was almost 10 years old, the Holy Spirit knocked on the door of my heart, picked up my feet, and dragged me up to the front of the church. Before I knew what was happening, I mouthed to the Preacher Man "What must I do to be saved?" Fast forward to 30 years later and here I am dragging my own children to Sunday Funday, and to Games & Gospel on Wednesday nights, and to every church-sponsored event that we can squeeze into our busy family calendar!

The point is, if you have children, grandchildren, foster children, neighborhood children, any children who are in your care or influence, drag them to church. It's okay if they're bored, it's okay if they run around the church like wild animals, like they own the place. Let them come to church and come to Jesus, just like he tells us we ought to in Luke 18:16.

Much Love Always,  
Amanda Douglas-Martin

## SUNDAY, MARCH 19

# The Pure Milk of God's Word

*Like newborn babies, you should long for the pure milk of God's word. It will help you grow up as believers. (1 Peter 2:2)*

All I had to do was say, "It's time for a scavenger hunt! I hid 12 Bible verses throughout this room, and ..." BOOM! They were off. My directions were not done, but 22 kids were climbing over each other, scrambling behind benches, literally scraping the walls, trying to find the little pieces of paper with Bible chapter and verse and locations written on them. I'm not exaggerating; it was pure pandemonium.

Kids want nothing more than to go on a scavenger hunt. It's like a race, only better. Who can find it first? Once they found the papers and clinched them in their little hands, they went flipping through the classroom Bibles desperately, wanting to be the first to stand up at the front and read. I've never seen so many Christians eager to open their Bibles and read!

Yes, the thrill of the hunt and the joy of competition helped create this scene. But there's something more going on. Have you ever wondered how to create a hunger for God's Word in our children? I have good news: It's already there. They already "long for the pure milk of God's Word," and all we have to do is share it with them. Young people want to know where to go to find Jesus. He is the treasure.

Is your soul longing for something that this world, these people, these places, these things, and this existence cannot satisfy? The woman at the well was looking to fill her bucket with water, but her true thirst would never be satisfied with water. When she found Jesus, she left her bucket behind. She went running to tell everyone about who she had found: the Living Water.

I want to challenge us all to take our longings and dig into God's Word this Lent. Let's get those Bibles open and the pages marked up. Dig in with the pure thirst of a child on a scavenger hunt. What we are looking for is Jesus. His Words are the Words of life, and He is the only thing that will satisfy.

Ann Marie Chilton  
Director of Children's Ministries



# MONDAY, MARCH 20

## God's Will is Our Will at Wesley Memorial School

*For the body does not consist of one member but of many.*

*The body of Christ, or the people that are the whole of humanity, are a team. The body is not supported by one person, but by all of us. We are one, we are strongest working together in unity. Teamwork is the key to living life in harmony, so that we can do God's will. (1 Corinthians 12:14)*

As we enter the Lenten season and reflect on God in human form, Jesus, several examples of loving unconditionally and nurturing people of all ages are demonstrated.

**Jesus taught his disciples to** *"Let the children come to me. Don't stop them! For the Kingdom of God belongs to those who are like these children."* (Luke 18:16 NLT)

At Wesley Memorial School (WMS), we are finding new and meaningful ways to bring ministry, fellowship, partnership, and building relationships into our school family, Wesley Memorial Church, and the Community. It's the little things that help create an atmosphere that is nurturing, learning and growing next steps of development (especially spiritually) and **following God's commandment to Love One Another.**

Jesus challenged his community by saying *"You are the light of the world... let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your Heavenly Father"* (Matthew 5:14-16 NLT)

At Wesley Memorial School, there is a "feel" that we are creating in the hallways, on campus, and in our community.

*The WMS Staff* are: building community and teamwork, sharing their gifts and dedication to educate children spiritually and academically, communicating with parents to strengthen a partnership between home and school, and growing their own spirituality.

*The Children* are: showing empathy, sharing their hearts, worshiping and praising, building life-long friendships, learning about Jesus, spreading their wings in daily development and learning.

*The Parents* are: volunteering, participating in church worship services and events, attending parent workshops, advocating for their children, building relationships with teachers, and other parents.

*The Congregation & Community* are: praying for and supporting WMS, volunteering, sharing ideas, and donating to the Rainbow Scholarship Fund.

Jesus reminded the religious leaders of his time, *"You must love the Lord your God with all*

*soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: Love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:37-39)*

As WMS celebrates 60 years as a ministry of Wesley Memorial United Methodist Church, we continue to commit ourselves to the mission of offering a safe and nurturing environment, imparting programming consistent with the highest types of Early Childhood education, but also providing an atmosphere in which teachers, children, and families are learning to live in a Christ-like way.

May this Lenten Season be full of the Grace and Peace that our Father shares with us every moment of every day.

You are all invited to come and visit the WMS anytime.

Blessings,  
Susan Kelley, Director of Wesley Memorial School  
Sandi Todd, Assistant to Wesley Memorial School  
and the WMS Staff



## TUESDAY, MARCH 21

### We All Become Little Children

*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it. (Proverbs 22:6)*

I'm convinced that becoming a parent is one of the most humbling blessings we can experience, and indeed it is a blessing, as in the beginning God blessed his human creation and commanded them to be fruitful and multiply! Part of this blessing, no doubt, is the humility which it inevitably brings.

We quickly see ourselves in our children. We watch them make the same mistakes we made, and we pray daily for their protection. But we pray also for discernment in directing their steps. In light of the enormity of this task Proverbs 22:6 seems like an almost insulting oversimplification.

It's a complicated world! Which way do we direct the steps of our children? For the authors of the Old Testament this would have likely started with the 617 laws of the Torah. Thankfully for us, Jesus provides much simpler instructions saying, "I am the way and the truth and the life."

So it's clear. We are to direct our children towards Jesus. We are to make every aspect of our lives reflect the mercy he has shown us. Every meal is a reminder to give Him thanks. Every night is a chance to dedicate the final words of our day to Him. When we work, we can demonstrate what it looks like to work joyfully for Him. When we consume media, we can teach about guarding our hearts and minds. Every blessing is an opportunity to point to Him! Every trial is an opportunity to trust and to rejoice in Him! And when our children begin to show interest in following Jesus we are to let them come sit in his lap. For unless we all become like children we cannot enter His kingdom. And in that sense, maybe our children can help direct our steps as well.

Amen!

Nicholas Martin



## TUESDAY, MARCH 21

### Of Humility and Repenting

*Then Job answered the Lord:*

*"I know that you can do all things and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me that I did not know. 'Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you declare to me.' I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes." (Job 42:1-6, NRSV(UE))*

Humility doesn't come easy for mankind, not even humility before God. We believe we should be in control. We expect the world to work the way we think it works in our tiny little human brains. It is a shock when it does not.

But as Job discovered, there's more to the cosmos than meets the human eye. The God who stores snow in warehouses and makes all creatures great and small is beyond our imagining, our conception ... heck, we can't even figure out how to say His (or Her) name.

This is a daunting revelation, but it comes with comfort, too. There is a God — we can hear Him from the whirlwind — and He is interested in all we do.

Join Job in repenting that we might do more. Go forward in faith.

Tucker Mitchell



## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 22

### Why Fast?

*There, by the Ahava Canal, I proclaimed a fast, so that we might humble ourselves before our God and ask him for a safe journey for us and our children, with all our possessions. ...So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer. (Ezra 8: 21,23 NIV)*

*When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show others they are fasting. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to others that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. (Matthew 6:16-18, NIV)*

*So after they had fasted and prayed, they placed their hands on them and sent them off. (Acts 13:3 NIV)*

Throughout both the Old and New Testaments, we read about fasting. Fasting means going without food, and sometimes also without drink. In the Bible, fasting was a spiritual discipline practiced by both the Jews and Christians. As the church began observing a season of Lent, the 40 days of Lent represented the 40 days that Jesus spent in the desert being tempted by the devil (see Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus fasted for 40 days in the desert, which God enabled Him to do supernaturally.

Why should we consider fasting today? As a teenager, I remember talking with my friends about what we were going to “give up” for Lent. I usually chose chocolate and I kept to my chocolate fast for the 40 days. As I look back, I realize that my giving up chocolate was, as silly as it may seem, an effective spiritual practice. It made me think about the season of Lent, focus on God, and devote more time to Him each day. As I think about fasting today, I think of four “Ss”:

1. Single-focused
2. Serious
3. Sacrifice
4. Saints

Fasting makes us single-focused on God and His will. It shows God that we are serious. Fasting is an act of sacrifice. Many saints that have gone before us fasted regularly and I think Lent is an opportune time for us to read some of their writings. Perhaps we can learn from Brother Lawrence as we read *The Practice of The Presence of God* or Joy Dawson as we read *Intimate Friendship with God*. Fasting can take many forms such as not eating during a certain period of a day or not eating for a 24 hour period. Please consult your doctor if you have any medical concerns or before undertaking an extended fast. Let us all consider how we can fast and pray for our church, our friends and family, and ourselves during this Lenten season.

THURSDAY, MARCH 23

## Our Gethsemanes

*Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!" (Matthew 26:36-46)*

The Garden of Gethsemane is a grove of olive trees found at the foot of the Mount of Olives. This garden is the location of an ancient olive press used to squeeze oil out of olives; the word "gethsemane" means oil press. During our recent trip to the Holy Land, we saw an olive tree that was over 2,000 years old and could have even been there at the time of Christ. This is where Jesus went to pray the night He was betrayed.

After the Passover meal Jesus led the 11 disciples to Gethsemane. During the night He told His disciples He was "overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death." Jesus needed to pray and pour out his heart to God. He asked his closest friends, Peter and the two sons of Zebedee (James and John), to stay awake with Him during the night.

Jesus prayed that night to His Father three times. Before each time of prayer, He asked His disciples to stay awake and keep watch for Him but they could not stay awake. "The spirit is willing, but the body is weak." (Matthew 26:41). Alone in the garden of Gethsemane, preparing to face the hour of betrayal, trial, and the painful death of crucifixion, Jesus was going to have to face it without them.

Jesus prayed "My father if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Jesus chose to stay in Gethsemane and to obey the Father out of His love for us. He was willing to die an innocent man and to bear the punishment for the sins of the world.

Gethsemanes are inevitable for all believers. In 1 Peter 1:6-7 scriptures remind us that trials and sufferings will come into our lives. Scriptures teach us God will use suffering to build character and purify our faith.

When we get to that point where we feel so alone and no one is able to understand the depth of our struggles, God is still there to walk through it with us. For me, Jesus' actions provide a model of how to face my emotional, physical, and spiritual struggles in life. When He calls me to face my Gethsemane, I will not face it alone for I trust God to work all things for good, when I truly commit to His will. God's love carries and holds us through our pain in peace and joy.

*Prayer: Heavenly Father, help me follow the example of Your Son, who spent everything so that I might possess real life that includes experiencing intimate prayer with You.*

Linda Smoak



## FRIDAY, MARCH 24

### Be Still and Really Know...

*Be still and know that I am God. (Psalm 46:10)*

*The Lord your God, goes before you, He will fight for you. (Deuteronomy 1:30)*

Many times in this modern life, I have conveniently replaced God with Google or Siri. Instead of running to God first for His thoughts and solutions, I find myself running to my phone or computer to “ask Siri” or Google answers. Instead of strengthening my faith, I become paralyzed with fear because Google has told me I have numerous diseases or conditions I didn’t even know I had and am headed for certain death.

This happened in February 2022, when I landed in a Charlotte emergency room with a resting heart rate of 154 beats per minute. “Graves Disease,” I was told after multiple tests. I was in a state of thyrotoxicosis.

After spending the weekend in the hospital, the first thing I did was turn to Google and look up everything I could find on the topic. This led to lots of rabbit holes, leading me to think I had all kinds of problems I did not really have. Two different doctors at different appointments demanded I stay off Google. In this case, it was hurting me, not helping me.

I did as they advised and turned my attention to God and His Word. Constantly exhausted due to my system being toxic and in overdrive, I spent hours sitting, communing with God first. Now that He finally had my undivided attention, His message to me over and over was, “Be still and know (really know) that I am God. Be still, be quiet, be patient and the blessing will come. I will sustain you and bring you through the fire. I will fight your battles and move mountains. Just watch and see.”

The strengthening of my body, mind and soul that was taking place in me in the midst of great weakness, would be needed sooner than I knew. The lessons I learned during this challenging time of stillness, God knew would be necessary. After 7 months, my numbers and energy normalized at the same time I received word from my sister that she was diagnosed with Stage 3 Ovarian Cancer.

God did as He promised He would during our quiet times together. He fought for me and moved mountains to heal me in perfect timing to walk in confident faith and hope alongside my sister through her battle with cancer.

God is alive and working even now for our best interests. He is relevant, He is the Great Physician, Comforter, Healer. Be still and listen for His voice. He is a trustworthy PromiseKeeper.

“I have hope, I have a future. I’m a child of the Mountain Mover!” – KingsPorch “Faithful Still”

Kim Kennett

## SATURDAY, MARCH 25

# How Deep the Father's Love for Us

*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to The Father except through Me. (John 4:16)*

I am the last of four girls in my family, so when I was little I was picked on. A lot.

Daddy would save me. Be it from one of my sisters (one threw shoes; another pulled hair; and the other locked me out of the house) or from a crushing wave in the ocean or from the stiff, itchy petticoats I was forced to wear under Sunday dresses (a good slathering of his shaving lotion did the trick), Daddy was always there. He always took care of me. I loved my Mom tremendously – yet, Daddy was my hero.

He would lead us in family devotions every night before we went to bed. “Go to sleep with Jesus, wake up with Jesus!” he would say. The only pre-emption from our devotions would be Billy Graham crusades on television. Every night of every crusade that ever was televised, Daddy watched – and so did I. I gladly sat beside him, listening to the Rev. Graham as intently as I could. I was six years old.

I would hear him say that the only way to our Father God in heaven was through His Son, Jesus Christ. He said we must be born again. He always invited whoever wanted to ask Jesus into their heart to come down onto the field to acknowledge Jesus before everyone present. (It was only when I was in middle school that I realized football was played on those fields when Billy Graham wasn't using them.) I asked Daddy to explain things that Rev. Graham said, wanting to make sure I understood.

“Jesus knew what He was doing when He took the penalty – the consequences – of the sins of all who have done wrong and who have come to Him to ask forgiveness,” Daddy explained. “He suffered on that cross and died a terrible death for us. But God raised Him from the dead and He is alive today – back in heaven, right beside His Father. When we ask Him to come into our hearts we are telling Him we don't want to sin anymore. We want His constant presence with us, right inside of us. We want that separation of our sins to be gone so that we will be part of His family, forever, and spend eternity in heaven with Him. That time will last forever – and because His grace and mercy and sacrifice saved us from our sins, it is the greatest gift we will ever receive from anyone. Jesus has given us new life – that is how much He loves us!”

My childish comprehension and childlike faith merged into a river of tears. My father had led me to my Heavenly Father's Son, who has opened the gates of heaven to me. As much as I loved – adored! – my father, I realized I loved Jesus even more. His love was so great for me that He, alone, could save me – from myself.

What so many find incomprehensible is really not that complicated. Not to a 6-year-old, anyway.

For thirty years now Daddy has been sitting at the feet of Jesus, worshiping Him and, I am sure, asking Him many things. I imagine he has had some conversations with Billy Graham, too.

## MONDAY, MARCH 27

### Correcting Our Life's Course

*Now repent of your sins and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped away. Then times of refreshment will come from the presence of the Lord, and he will again send you Jesus, your appointed Messiah (Acts 3:19-20, NLT)*

The great baseball philosopher, Yogi Berra once had two observations, both relevant for us today. “When you come to a fork in the road, take it” and “If you don’t know where you’re going, you’ll end up someplace else.”

In a profoundly twisted way, these “warnings” to be aware of our direction in life and to recognize when a course correction may be needed are exactly what Jesus calls all of us to do. Repentance is turning from sin and changing direction toward God in faith. The fork in the road is a 180-degree rotation from where we were headed. We may have been on a path that clearly was not serving us well or one where we didn’t know where we were headed. But through the grace of Jesus Christ and responding through repentance, our sins can be wiped clean, and we can be refreshed.

Yogi probably didn’t set out to write a prayer for cleansing and pardon when he came up with those two quotes but David’s prayer in Psalm 51 is one we can use for repentance, forgiveness and restoration:

*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.*

*(Psalm 51:10-12, NRSV)*

Wade Tanico



TUESDAY, MARCH 28

## Waiting... Alleluia!!

*Jesus said to her, I am the Resurrection, the Truth, and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever believeth in me shall never die. (John 11: 25 - 26)*

As a moving holiday, Easter falls on the first Sunday after the Paschal (Passover) moon which is the first full moon after the Equinox (the first day of Spring on the Gregorian calendar). And Lent falls on days preceding Easter, reflecting on the 40 days of Jesus fasting and being tempted by Satan. This is a dark time in the Christian calendar.

With the colder weather and shorter days, this becomes a dark time for me also.

My melancholy leads me to look INward. With more INside time I spend more time studying and praying which leads me to INtrospection and eventually to INspiration.

As the Lenten Season comes to a close and the weather warms and the days lengthen, I spend more time OUT with OUTside activities. My mood improves. I find myself looking OUTward.

By Easter Sunday I am ready to shout OUT loudly.... ALLEUIA!!!

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ is OUTstanding proof of the Victory over Death. It is an OUTward Promise of Eternal Life for those who accept him and try to live according to His Commandments. I become motivated to make OUTward efforts to show kindness, love, and generosity.

Alleluia! Praise God! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Brenda Bradner



## WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29

### A Prayer for Dying ... and Living

*In you, O Lord, I have taken refuge;  
let me never be put to shame;  
deliver me in your righteousness.  
Turn your ear to me,  
come quickly to my rescue;  
Be my rock of refuge,  
A strong fortress to save me.  
Since you are my rock and my fortress,  
for the sake of your name, lead and guide me.  
Free me from the trap that is set for me,  
for you are my refuge.  
Into your hands I commend my spirit;  
redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth. (Psalm 31:1-5)*

In this season of Lent and especially as we approach Passion Week, I think about these words from the Psalmist. How we die often tells how we lived. On Good Friday, as Jesus was dying, he said this prayer of faith and trust. “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” Even in his suffering, Jesus knew the language of the Scriptures. There is trust in the prayer, there is commitment in it, there is reunion with the Father in it.

“This prayer for Jesus wasn’t just for dying but was the heart of his living. Here is a prayer for all seasons: for waking up in the morning and sleeping at night; for facing a new challenge, for going to work or for retiring, for down times and up times, for the days in our life which are past and for today, and for the unknown future: ‘Into your hands, I commend my spirit.’

It’s like the Psalmist says, ‘No matter where I go, God goes with me. The Father is behind me and before me. If I take flight to heaven, God is there. If I make my bed in the pits of depression or under the earth, God is there. If I go over the sea’s horizon, God is there. His right hand will hold me fast. Even in darkness, God is light. Awake or asleep, the Father is with me.’

I share these words from a sermon I heard many years ago in Sarasota, Florida, because the message is timeless. Many blessings to all of you this Easter Season.

Ann Reece

THURSDAY, MARCH 30

## Unite in Christ

*“But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.” (Titus 3:9-11)*

The power in unity is exponential even in the mere physical realm. I was once told that a Clydesdale horse alone could pull approximately 8000 lbs. I assumed, that two in lock step could pull twice that. I was shocked to learn that two Clydesdales can actually pull over 35,000 lbs. Now that is amazing to me! What is even more remarkable is when we take it to the supernatural realm and see God's multiplication.

The devil is painfully aware of our power in Christ. I am certain that is why he spends so much of his time trying to divide Christians. If he can divide a husband and wife, drive wedges between friends, or succeed at identity politics, then he succeeds at chipping away at the power we have as brothers and sisters united in Christ.

There is no time better than the present to be a multiplier! Look for common ground and “play” there. We win in harmony. Consider some strict boundaries with divisive people. Be a part of God's army and battle for the ultimate win with brothers and sisters in Christ.

Allanna Ivy





## FRIDAY, MARCH 31

### Can You Let Your Basket Go?

Look at Exodus 2:1-10. Could you imagine having to hide your baby from the world? In Exodus 1:22, Pharaoh ordered all baby boys to be killed. My thoughts, especially during Lent, turn to Jochebed, Moses' mother.

Imagine Jochebed's fear every time she heard a noise. Would today be the day the soldiers kill her baby? She tried everything to protect her son and when she could no longer hide him, Jochebed made a basket and put her small baby in it, sat it on the edge of the water, and turned it loose. She let her baby go not knowing what his fate would be... only knowing that if she didn't, he would eventually be found and killed.

We know that Moses survived. His sister watched as the Pharaoh's daughter found him and that Jochebed was even hired as his wet nurse. But how did she know everything was going to be okay? She didn't. It seems to me that the things we are trying to be most "sure of" are the places where we are trusting God the least.

Yes, that tiny Hebrew baby boy in a basket becomes Moses. He wrote the first five books of the Bible and brought the 10 commandments down from Mount Sinai. But, was Jochebed sure that putting her baby in that basket was the right thing to do? She had to have great faith to let that basket go.

What do we have that we need to let go of? Throughout my life, my mother has told me: "Let Go and Let God." That is precisely what Jochebed did.

The season of Lent is not meant to be about what we want to "give up" as much as it is about where or what we need to put more in the hands of God. Spirituality itself is self-discipline; it's trusting.

"How can anyone see straight when he does not even see himself and the darkness, he unconsciously carries with him into all his dealings." This quote from Carl Jung reminds me of the season of Lent. The purpose of Lent: the self-reflection that is meant to draw us closer to the Lord and where we need to challenge our own sense of self-awareness. Jesus warned about seeing a speck in another's eye but failing to see the plank in our own. All progress begins when we learn to see and speak the truth about ourselves. "Search me, Lord..."

Deep formation starts with knowing ourselves. Both the conscious and unconscious parts. Both the healthy and hurt parts. And above all reminding us: the price of our brokenness was paid on that cross.

Jochebed displays great trust in God. Her courage, her clear thinking, and her creativity fulfilled

God's plan for Moses and the entire nation. Yet this came with a great sacrifice. She relinquished her son to the hands of God, to the nurture of someone else to adopt and raise him. This is the love of a parent, making great sacrifices and having the strength to do the difficult things that parenting requires. Not only is she the courageous and astute mother I hope to be, but I am reminded once again of the love and sacrifice we have from a good, good Father.

As God quietly orchestrated events in the life of Jochebed, be assured that He is working behind the scenes in your life as well. During this Lent season, ask yourself: What do you need to surrender to God?

I pray that this season of Lent will be one that leads each of us into a more disciplined, focused life. And I challenge you to ask yourself: can you let your basket go?

Melody Emerson  
Director of Communication and Connections



# SATURDAY, APRIL 1

## Do You Know Where You Are?

*But the Lord God called to the man, "Where are you?" Genesis 3:9*

For me Lent is a time of reflection and questioning my choices. What an amazing opportunity to have 40 specific days to reflect on my relationship with God and my path.

The first question God asks in the Bible is to Adam. God asks Adam "*Where are you?*" Genesis 3:9. Do you ever ask yourself that question? "Where am I?" Or "God where are you?" Yet, God knows exactly where we are. We can't hide from God, as Adam tried to do. God knows our heart and he knows our sins. He's always with us. Sometimes our sinful heart results in things like shame, pride, guilt, or selfishness which can make us feel as though we should hide. But God loves us, his children, through it all and in spite of our sinful nature.

During the 40 days of Lent let us reflect on the path we walk with God by asking "Where am I in my relationship with God?" and "Is this where I want to be in my relationship with God?" Are we hiding like Adam? The good news is we don't have to hide because God provided "The Way" when he sent his only son, Jesus, to die on the cross and take away the sin of the world so that we can have everlasting life with Him in Heaven. Jesus said in John 14:6 "*I am the way and the truth and the life.*" Isn't that the best news!

When we walk with God we don't have to hide! My prayer for us is to always stay on the straight path with God by our side and rejoice in Him for providing Jesus our savior.... The Path to everlasting life.

Jennifer Ayers



## HOLY WEEK

Just like there are special seasons, there are special weeks such as Holy Week. The week from Palm Sunday to Easter is a week set aside for us to remember and relive the most important week in human history, the week that changed lives and created the Christian community. We remember the last week of Jesus. From his entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, through his Last Supper with the disciples, into his death and burial, and his glorious resurrection from the tomb, we remember and relive. The Christian community observes the Sacred Triduum: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday. In the darkness of the night between Holy Saturday and Easter, Jesus Christ is raised from the dead. The tomb was empty at sunrise. Holy Week presents and interprets Jesus Christ to the world.

Holy Week worship touches all the senses. We see the descent of darkness and the return of the Light. We feel the agony of Christ. The smell of candles lingers in the air. We pray with Jesus in the garden. The silence of death touches us. We watch the darkness be overcome by light. We hear the sad and glorious words again describing the events that changed the world.

Pastor Jeff would like to invite you to join him in setting aside our special week and allow God to make it a holy experience. Block out these days and make them unusual. Let the way you observe this week be a witness to the world. Allow the Holy Spirit to do a new work. Let the sights and sounds of our worship services translate the life of Christ into our lives. Let the days that changed the world change your life.





## SUNDAY, APRIL 2

# Palm Sunday: A Temporary Celebration

*The next day the great crowd that had come for the festival heard that Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem. They took palm branches and went out to meet him, shouting,*

*“Hosanna!”*

*“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

*“Blessed is the king of Israel!”*  
(John 12:12-13)



On this day we remember Jesus was received triumphantly as he entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. Crowds gathered quickly and enthusiastically hailed him with loud hosannas. It probably pleasantly surprised the disciples.

They had come with perhaps some reservation. Opposition to Jesus and his teachings had grown more frequent and intense. They had heard Jesus reference his own death that would come. Still they held to their own version of how this would all play out. Whatever reservations they may have had were dispelled by the surging crowds affirming and celebrating Jesus and, in turn, them.

Jesus, however, was not caught up in the moment. Luke 9:51 says *“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem.”*

Jesus knew the fulfillment of his mission would bring rejection and crucifixion with its attendant suffering. He was under no illusion that the temporary celebration in Jerusalem would alter the course ahead.

Tears for some turned to cheers. Cheers for some turned to tears. Jesus will see them all in his journey during what we call Holy Week.

The thing that stands out for me is Jesus, knowing what lay ahead, resolutely went forward through the tears (transitory commitments) jeers, (disillusionment and abandonment) and tears (grief and loss) in order to provide God’s gift of forgiveness, restoration, and eternity. They couldn’t yet see it, some still won’t believe it, but to those who receive it, they are called daughters and sons of the loving heavenly father.



Pastor Ken Lyon  
Pastor of Church Vitality & Generosity

## MONDAY, APRIL 3

### God's Steady Embrace

*What is the price of two sparrows—one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your Father knowing it. And the very hairs on your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows. (Matthew 10:29-31, NLT)*

While walking in the breezeway between the media center and the administrative wing one day I discovered a robin that had flown into one of the windows in the breezeway. I had a heavy heart as I picked up the small broken body and cradled it for a moment hoping it was just stunned and might flutter to life.

As I waited and hoped I remembered Jesus' words in Matthew 10:29: "What is the price of two sparrows one copper coin? But not a single sparrow can fall to the ground without your father knowing it."

It brought me a sense of comfort remembering that the loving Holy One notices even the smallest in creation. Robins and sparrows are included in God's loving watchfulness. The passage also reminds me of the reality of life in that sparrows and robins do fall to the ground. Life and loss make the journey together and as they intersect with seeming randomness we are made acutely aware of our fragile existence.

That's why Jesus continues his teaching in verse 31. "So don't be afraid, you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows." If the creator of galaxies takes note of a fallen sparrow and robin, consider how much God cares for you.

Yes life and loss may and probably will touch us in painful ways but God's embrace is steady, certain, and, ultimately, will be restoring.

As I buried that little robin under one of the trees just outside the breezeway I gave thanks to have a God who always sees us and not only takes note of us but embraces us, wants the very best for us, and will hold us in the tenderness of his embrace.

Pastor Ken Lyon  
Pastor of Church Vitality & Generosity

TUESDAY, APRIL 4

## Redeem the Time

*Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. (Ephesians 5:15-16)*

There was a group exercise I used to use to help clarify what matters most to people. Each person was given a card with a number written on it. The number represented the number of hours a person had left to live. Some had a big number like 87,600 while others had a smaller number like 48. Each participant then wrote down what they would do with the hours they had been given.

The interesting result was the fewer the number of hours a person had the more they wanted to use them for their relationship with others. When the “sands in the hourglass” were fast being depleted their attention turned toward expressing gratitude, love, and care.

Friends, I recognize that life is sometimes very tough. Schedules get overcrowded, deadlines loom large and we feel overwhelmed. Our world seems filled with more and more tension and uncertainty as armed conflicts are in the news on a regular basis. There is no lack of things to worry about.

But wait, the scripture in Ephesians 5: 15-16 says “*See that you walk circumspectly not as unwise but as wise redeeming the time because the days are evil.*”

It’s an ancient word with an ever present truth. In our life journey and across the centuries all people experience times of challenge, uncertainty, and upheaval. I take this long ago scripture to say that when we find ourselves in such a time as this as God’s people our response is not to cower in fear or live in denial but to walk and live wisely recognizing that even now we are called to redeem the time.

That means we are called to be that Biblical salt and leaven making a positive difference as we can in the midst of imperfect and evil days. So how can we do that?

Consider your capacity to be an impact for good in your Wesley Memorial family and our larger community.

Make plans to volunteer in a way that is meaningful to you either at Wesley Memorial or some other fine community organization.

Use your social media accounts to affirm the God honoring work of your church and other community organizations you support.

Do something kind for another person, help a neighbor in need.

Those may not seem like big things but they are important things. Each of them will move the needle just a bit in a positive life-giving way that honors God and helps redeem the time.

Pastor Ken Lyon  
Pastor of Church Vitality & Generosity





WEDNESDAY, APRIL 5

## Living Water

My granddad loved a big garden. When he and my grandmother retired from dairy farming in Virginia they moved to North Carolina and into our home while my granddad built their retirement home over the next year. There wasn't room for a garden at our house and the property he was building on hadn't been cleared. My granddad got someone to let him plant a garden on their land a couple of miles away. I would go with him on Saturdays to tend the garden. My job was to pull weeds. The weeds were winning.

One hot Saturday I was complaining about how thirsty I was. I knew it would do no good because granddad wasn't going to leave before the work was done but I whined anyway.

Finally, he told me to go over to where there were four big oak trees across the field. He said a house used to be there and there was a handle pump on the well where I could get water. I found a well at ground level with a wooden slat cover and the once red, now rusted handle pump. Grabbing the pump handle, I started pumping fast and hard but to no avail.

Shouting at my granddad that it must be broken I sat down frustrated as well as thirsty. My granddad came over, pumped the handle a couple of times and then reached and pulled up one of the wooden slats. Underneath was a quart glass jar filled with water and sealed with a lid. I reached for the jar with the intent of drinking that water and quenching my thirst but my granddad stopped me.

He unscrew the top of the jar and began to pour the water down the hole at the top of that rusty pump as he worked the handle. After a time, a gurgling sound began to rise in the pump and soon clear cold water was flowing.

I drank my fill and was ready to go but my granddad said there's one more thing you need to do. Take the jar, fill it to the brim and then screw on the lid. I did as my grandfather told me and then put the jar back under the wooden slat. Granddad simply said "somebody else who comes after us may be thirsty too. "His homespun wisdom remains far beyond that old water pump.

In life I drink from wells others who have gone before have provided. Through their faithful work and generosity the church where I grew up and the churches I've served have provided the living water that Jesus says will satisfy the deepest thirst of my soul.

I am forever in debt to those men and women who had the vision to provide for those who would come after them. I wish I could pay them back but I cannot. What I can do is say thank you to them by doing for others as they have done for me.

During the season of Lent you've been hearing about our project to provide clean water to hundreds of people through well renovation and water filtration systems. This coming Sunday as we celebrate Easter we will receive our high impact offering to make that possible. I hope you'll be a part of that celebration of Jesus' resurrection and help make possible living water for others in his name.

Pastor Ken Lyon  
Pastor of Church Vitality & Generosity



## THURSDAY, APRIL 6

### My Way? No! Thy Way!

*“No,” said Peter, “you shall never wash my feet.”*

*Jesus answered, “Unless I wash you, you have no part with me.”  
(John 13:8)*

When we were in the throes of the Covid pandemic my wife Lydia helped with Covid vaccination clinics. She is a retired communicable disease nurse who, for well over 20 years, worked with the Union County Health Department.

During one of those Covid vaccine clinics, she had a group of special needs young adults from a group home to come for their shots. One young man had on layers and layers of clothing and was resistant to having any of them removed. He wanted to get his shot through the clothes and wasn't keen on considering any other way. He wanted what the shot had to offer but he wanted it his way

Sounds like Peter in John 13:8. The scene is what we call the Last Supper. Jesus knows his time of betrayal and the cross was drawing near. He also knew that his disciples had been arguing previously over who would be the greatest in the coming kingdom.

Jesus, knowing all that and motivated by his love for all of them, got up from his place of honor and began washing their feet. It was usually the task of the lowest ranking servant in the household, yet here was their teacher and Messiah kneeling to wash their feet.

When He came to Peter, Peter resisted. He wanted to control the situation. Jesus says “Unless I wash your feet you have no part of me.” Peter, still wanting to be in control, replies: “Then Lord, not just my feet, but my hands and my head as well.”

Jesus responds by telling Peter to let him (Jesus) determine what needs to be done.

Like Peter, I often want what Jesus offers but want it on my terms, my time, my way. What I don't recognize is that the layers of my wants limit what Jesus can for me. It's only as I yield those layers to him that I can receive the best of what he has for me.

Lydia has a wonderful way about her in situations like that with the special needs young adult. She not only explained in ways that he could understand, but her playful attitude made a game of getting him to yield those several layers of undershirts, shirts, and sweatshirts until at last, she could do for him what needed to be done.

After the shot, he didn't want those layers anymore. He wanted people to see what had been done for him and he was encouraging everyone to do the same. You might even say he became an evangelist in the best sense of the word.

## FRIDAY, APRIL 7

### **Forsaken. So We Have Hope!**

Forsaken... Is there any other word that describes the feeling of despair and hopelessness?

Forsaken... Nowhere to turn.

Forsaken ... The soul cries out.

“My God my God. Why have you forsaken me?” Those words uttered by Jesus from the cross craft a picture of desolation and agony.

It is said of Jesus that he was in every way tempted as we are but did not sin. It also seems to me that he experienced the depth of our suffering body, mind, and spirit. He experienced the frailty of our human frame fully and without any divine buffers.

His voice joins the voice of the Psalmist in Psalm 22 crying out. Some scholars believe Jesus was quoting a portion of Psalm 22 to direct anyone who heard him to remember the Psalmist's lament and to remember the Psalm's hope. Psalm 22 begins in forsakenness but does not leave us there. In the midst of suffering, there is also an affirmation of hope and confidence that God can be trusted in the crucible times of life. Take a few moments to read and reflect on Psalm 22 on the adjacent page.

Pastor Ken Lyon  
Pastor of Church Vitality & Generosity





*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.*

*Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel. In you our ancestors trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them. To you they cried, and were saved; in you they trusted, and were not put to shame.*

*But I am a worm, and not human; scorned by others, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; 'Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights!'*

*Yet it was you who took me from the womb; you kept me safe on my mother's breast. On you I was cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me you have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.*

*Many bulls encircle me, strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.*

*I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.*

*For dogs are all around me; a company of evildoers encircles me. My hands and feet have shrivelled; I can count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me; they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots.*

*But you, O Lord, do not be far away! O my help, come quickly to my aid! Deliver my soul from the sword, my life from the power of the dog! Save me from the mouth of the lion!*

*From the horns of the wild oxen you have rescued me. I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you: You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him; stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel! For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.*

*From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will pay before those who fear him. The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord. May your hearts live for ever!*

*All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the Lord, and he rules over the nations.*

*To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, and I shall live for him. Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it.*

## SATURDAY, APRIL 8

### Out of Total Darkness, Total Light!

*Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate's permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. Taking Jesus' body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.*

*John 19:38-42*

Several years ago I was on a mission trip to build houses for the poor in a Central American country. We had one day off during that week and went to a rainforest area. As a part of that excursion, we went into a deep cave. We were given strong flashlights and told to stay together in single file as we explored the caverns. A beautiful small river flows through the cavern. We enjoyed a few moments using our flashlights to look around the ceiling, the cave walls, and the crystal water. The guide then took us far beyond the flowing water to another section of the cave. It was completely silent. The guide told us to turn off our flashlights. We were plunged into total darkness and into total silence. We became very uncomfortable, disoriented, lost.

I thought about the darkness and the silence of the tomb where Jesus was laid after the crucifixion. Though it was a physical place for Jesus it also symbolized the spiritual, emotional, and mental state of the disciples. They have been plunged into total darkness by the death of Jesus. They could see no way forward and no way back. They were disoriented, afraid, lost. The voice they had trusted had been silenced. The despair must have been overwhelming.

Yet even there God was working, preparing the revelation of God's provision. In the tomb's silence and darkness of death, life would prevail by God's design and power. Out of the darkness, the light of the world, Jesus, would emerge. His followers, once rendered silent, became those whose voices could not be hushed now through almost 2000 years.

Jesus remains the same, Forgiver, Life Giver, Kingdom Bringer, Savior, Lord. Now is our moment to join with those faithful voices to speak into the darkness of this time that the Christ of all time may be made known.

Pastor Ken Lyon  
Pastor of Church Vitality & Generosity

# SUNDAY, APRIL 9

## Good News for a Weeping World

*Scripture Reading: John 20: 1-18*

Life had come crashing down around those early followers of Jesus. Life has a way of doing this. The disciples of Jesus were following their rabbi and learning amazing, life-altering truths about the Kingdom of God. Life had never been better. Living in close fellowship with Jesus was exhilarating. Then, it happened.

While in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover along with thousands of other faithful Jews, Jesus was arrested, brought to trial, condemned, and executed by the Roman authorities. In just a few short days, less than a week, they went from a joyful entrance into Jerusalem to the most devastating event of their lives. Life can often change suddenly and traumatically.

Some of Jesus's followers took his body from the cross and wept over the cold, bloody corpse. A couple of influential friends took a risk and asked the authorities for his body so they could give it a proper burial in a garden tomb. Proper burial is important to the Jewish community. Then, the hard work of grief continued and the disciples were trying to imagine what a life without Jesus would look like.

Mary of Magdala was a devoted follower of Jesus. She stayed as close as she could to Jesus through those painful final days. She returned to the tomb as soon as the Passover Sabbath had passed in order to perform one last act of devotion, anointing the body as it laid in the tomb.

When Mary returned to the tomb, the body was gone. The empty tomb brought only more pain. She assumed that some more indignities were being done to the corpse. She stood outside the empty tomb and wept. It was a serious display of mourning as the pain of recent events came rushing back to Mary. She tried to have a conversation with the supposed gardener. "Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have laid him, and I will take him away" (John. 20:15). I do not know how she thought she would transport the body, but love can make us do superhuman feats. Then she heard her name called, "Mary" (John. 20:16). Perhaps it was the way he said it. She had heard him call her name many times before. Suddenly, she knew it was Jesus. The tears stopped. Her breathing momentarily stopped.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is good news for a weeping world. As followers of Christ, we know that the worst, most painful news of this world, is never the last word. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the answer to our weeping. May the resurrection of Jesus Christ redefine all your reality.

Pastor Jeff Patterson  
Senior Pastor





More copies of this devotional are available at the Front Desk - please feel free to take a copy to a neighbor, a friend, or someone in need of a way to connect with God and with the community of faith during this Lenten season. You may also find the electronic version of this devotional online at [wesleymemorial.org/lent](http://wesleymemorial.org/lent).

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