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ANATOMY  
OF A  
**DISCIPL**

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2021

GLENN MEMORIAL UMC

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## A DISCIPLE IS ...

Lent is a time for reflection and preparation. In the early church, candidates for Baptism would spend Lent studying the way of a disciple to prepare themselves for Baptism on Easter morning. This season, we are using Lent as a time to contemplate what it means to be a follower of Christ. What are the characteristics that mark those who seek to emulate Jesus? While we certainly won't cover them all, we have chosen six traits from the Lectionary readings for this season. A disciple is: Forgiven, Devoted, Foolish, Light-Hearted, Connected, and Humble.

This devotional, written by staff members at Glenn, is a guide to that journey in the hopes that Lent will be a season of drawing closer to God, closer to each other, and closer to the people God has called us to be. This could be a great time to spend a few minutes each day contemplating what it means to be a follower of Christ. Our prayer is that the Holy Spirit would work in each of us in this season of reflection and preparation.

—Rev. Brent Huckaby  
*Associate Pastor for The Gathering,  
Spiritual Formation, and Young Adults*

# THE FAST OF THE DISCIPLE

Ash Wednesday, February 17

Scripture  
Isaiah  
58:1-12

When the word “fast” comes up in conversation, lots of things come to mind. Maybe you think of a dieting trend, or a juice cleanse. Maybe, like me, you grew up in a culture where “fasting” during the season of Lent entailed giving up something like ice cream or eating meat. In its highest form, we often think of faithful fasting in the person of a guru living in the wilderness, refusing to associate with the harmful things and abstaining from any luxuries in life through strict asceticism.

Yet here, we see that God speaks through the prophet Isaiah of the fast that God chooses. That’s a good place to start, when it comes to what our fasts should look like.

And when we read through the passage, we find something shocking. While the fasts that we choose are inward-focused and fixated on self-discipline, the fast that God chooses is characterized by reckless self-forgetfulness. Each of the tenets listed above in God’s fast is focused directly on the Other: loosening bonds of injustice, breaking the yoke of the oppressed, providing for those who are most in need. Where we often stick ourselves into a cycle of self-piety and guilt, God is ultimately focused on loving others.

Ash Wednesday is a day of turning back toward God, and recognizing the things that keep us separated from Holy communion with God and one another. And as we begin this season together, this passage asks the question: if you have a fast, and it never affects your neighbor, is it a fast that God chooses?

# THE FAST OF THE DISCIPLE

Thursday, February 18

Scripture  
Luke 4:  
16-22

Again, we see the fulfillment of “the Fast that God chooses,” this time in the person of Jesus, fully God and fully man. After initiating his time of itinerant ministry with a period of trial and temptation in the wilderness (kind of like the guru from last week, actually), Jesus shows us that such isolation is not a goal in and of itself, but is rather a beginning to the journey of reckless outward love.

Upon his return from a period of fasting and temptation, Jesus immediately goes to the synagogue of his hometown in Nazareth and reads a scroll from the prophet Isaiah before the congregation. It happens to be a combination of Isaiah 61:1-2 and the Isaiah passage that we read yesterday. Following this reading, Jesus says what is probably the shortest sermon in history: “Today, this scripture has been fulfilled just as you heard it.”

With the period of fasting as his preparation, Jesus boldly proclaims the fulfillment of Isaiah’s words in the fact that he is living them out. Jesus, the Christ, will live a life of reckless self-forgetfulness to change the world forever. In a whole new sense of the word, we see that this is the fast that God chooses.

**Meditation:** What is the end goal of your Lenten fast? Is it in line with the goal of the fast that God chooses?

# THE FAST OF THE DISCIPLE

Friday, February 19

Scripture  
Matthew 6

Like the theoretical, ascetic guru in the wilderness that we have referenced these past two days, we often have an idea that discipline is centered around self-denial, and that at its peak it means going without. This is especially the case with the idea of fasting.

But isn't any discipline done in pursuit of some higher goal? If you are disciplining yourself to exercise, but don't have a vision of what you are working toward, the discipline will fade. If you are saving up money, but you don't have a vision of what that money is being saved *for*, *then you will find it is much easier to break open the piggy bank.*

In this passage from the sermon on the mount, Jesus is quick to point out that nobody enters into a discipline without a reward in mind. There's nothing wrong with that! After all, why would you intentionally choose to do something hard for no reason?

Everyone seeks a reward in discipline—the difference comes in the reward that you seek. If you give something up and boast to your friends about how hard you have worked and how pious you are, then the credit that you receive and the points that you earn are the clear reward. They are why you sacrificed, and you reached your goal.

But if the reward that you seek is something further and lasting, grounded in God's joy in humanity rather than human happiness for yourself, then the shape of your fast will look different.

**Meditation:** What goal is guiding your fast through the season of Lent? What is the vision, the picture that you are hanging up above your fasting "piggy bank"?

*"For the real difference between happiness and joy is that one is grounded in this world, the other in eternity. Happiness cannot encompass suffering and evil. Joy can. Happiness depends on the present. Joy leaps into the future and triumphantly creates a new present out of it"*

-Elise M. Boulding

# THE FAST OF THE DISCIPLE

Saturday, February 20

Scripture  
2 Cor.  
5:20b-6:10

Here, in Paul's second letter to the church in Corinth, he "boasts" of the hardships that he and his fellow disciples have gone through. Read through it—it is an extensive list! Beatings, imprisonments, riots, sleepless nights, hunger, verbal abuse, oftentimes seen as fake, unknown, and dying...

And yet, through all of this, God has sustained them. Not just sustained them, but given them joy and happiness! The last line of the passage above is such sweet music to our ears: the picture to hang over our piggy bank for this season of Lenten discipline.

Pastor Eugene Peterson single-handedly and poetically translated the entirety of the Bible in a translation known as "The Message." Read through his translation of Paul's plea to the Corinthians below: feel the emotion in his invitation to the deep joy that is the goal of discipleship!

*...terrifically alive, though rumored to be dead; beaten within an inch of our lives, but refusing to die; immersed in tears, yet always filled with deep joy; living on handouts, yet enriching many; having nothing, having it all.*

*Dear, dear Corinthians, I can't tell you how much I long for you to enter this wide-open, spacious life. We didn't fence you in. The smallness you feel comes from within you. Your lives aren't small, but you're living them in a small way. I'm speaking as plainly as I can and with great affection. Open up your lives. Live openly and expansively!*

*(2 Corinthians 6:8-13, The Message)*

# A DISCIPLE IS FORGIVEN

Monday, February 22

Scripture  
Psalm 25:  
1-10

Like many (most? all?) of us, we have a dedicated junk drawer at our house. If I'm being honest, we have multiple junk drawers at our house! One day I was looking for something in the drawer and came across a wonderful surprise—a birthday check I never cashed! It wasn't "retire-early-and-live-at-the-beach" money, but it was a nice boost to the week. There it was—a gift given out of generosity and love that I was just letting sit in the junk drawer. Needless to say, I quickly made a mobile deposit and started thinking of how I could use this newfound money.

It reminded me of a conversation we had in a seminary class discussing baptism and forgiveness. Many of us had grown up with the idea that God withheld forgiveness until we asked for it; until we admitted how bad we were and begged God to love us. Our professor stopped us and said, "No! The point of Jesus was just the opposite. What we claim in baptism is that God has written the check. It's ours. The question is not 'will God forgive us?' God has done that. The question is 'will we cash the check?'"

The forgiveness and love of God are not waiting to be earned, or even asked for, they are there waiting to be lived into! So cash the check. Fall into the love and forgiveness of God that is already there.

**Meditation:** Spend some time picturing yourself falling into the love of God that is already there. Close your eyes, breathe deeply and feel the warmth of God's presence around you.



# A DISCIPLE IS FORGIVEN

Tuesday, February 23

Scripture  
Genesis 9:  
8-17

The story of Noah is a bizarre one that doesn't paint a particularly loving picture of God! God doesn't like the way humans are behaving, so God decides to just wipe everyone (except eight people) out and start all over. Then God tells those eight people, "maybe that wasn't a great idea, so I promise I'll never do that again." With this picture of God, it's easy to live in fear, believing that God's mind could change again and we could all be in big trouble!

The story of Noah is a giant step forward in their understanding of God. As they are learning about God, as they are growing in community, the writers of the Bible begin to see God in new ways, and we see a picture of God emerge as one who will not destroy, one who has "set my bow in the clouds," a sign that this is a God of peace.

Lent is a great time to dive deeper into our understanding of God, to be open to change and to commit ourselves to following God more fully, wherever that might lead.

**Meditation:** Spend some time thinking about how your understanding of God has changed. Ask God to help you be open to growth as you seek to be more like Christ.

# A DISCIPLE IS FORGIVEN

Wednesday, February 24

Scripture

Mark I:

9-15

“Turn around when possible.”

“Turn around when possible.”

“Turn around when possible.”

Anyone who’s taken a wrong turn while using their GPS heard those words in a very specific way as they read them. I always wondered why they didn’t program them to get louder and louder and eventually yell, “You’re never going to get there going this direction! Will you please turn around before you are completely lost!!!!”

In some ways, that’s how I’ve come to understand Jesus’ call to “repent and believe in the good news!” There’s a place, a state of mind, where Jesus is trying to lead us. It’s away from fear, anger, and shame. It’s away from violence, scarcity, and greed. But it requires a turn, a changing of the mind so we can go in a new direction. This is not an easy turn, as much of the world around us is not heading in that direction, but it is “good news!” It’s a turn that leads to peace and community. It’s a turn that leads to justice and love. This Lent, Jesus speaks to us, calling us into a new way of being.

“Turn around. There’s a better way to be.”

**Meditation:** Where do you need to turn around? In what areas of your life would following Jesus take you in a better direction?

# A DISCIPLE IS FORGIVEN

Thursday, February 25

Scripture  
Psalm  
25:11-18

Read verses 16-18 a few times. Notice the words the Psalmist uses to describe themselves.

Lonely. Afflicted. Troubled. Distressed.

Amidst a global pandemic that is now reaching the one year mark, those are feelings many of us have experienced.

Lonely, as we've spent time away from friends and family to keep us all safe. Afflicted, either by the disease itself or by the changes it has brought to our life. Troubled, as we seem to not make headway and find ourselves stuck. And all of this leads to distress. The feeling that things are not right and aren't going to be.

The Psalmist trusts that God hears them, and has the confidence to lay their requests before God. What do they desire? Grace. Relief. Forgiveness. Protection. Do those sounds like things you desire as well?

A little grace in the midst of a difficult time. The acknowledgement that this is hard and we're doing our best.

Relief from the constant anxiety and stress. A break, a change that would bring a little peace in the midst of chaos.

Forgiveness. We've not done everything right. Much of the time we haven't even known what that would be! But we want to know it can be better and we can be better.

One of the great characteristics of the Psalms is their honesty. They show us we can bring to God the things that trouble us, and we can name the things we need. Spend time in prayer today naming the things that are heavy on your heart and those things that you need.

# A DISCIPLE IS FORGIVEN

Friday, February 26

Scripture  
Ephesians  
4:31-32

There are numerous places in scripture where forgiveness of others and forgiveness from God are connected. Jesus says that “if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly father will also forgive you” (Matthew 6:14). Does that mean God’s forgiveness is unavailable if we hold grudges against others? That doesn’t seem to be what we see elsewhere.

I think it has more to do with what we see in these verses in Ephesians— forgiveness is a flow. We can’t accept and live into the forgiveness of God if we are unwilling to forgive others. The hardness of our hearts toward another will harden our hearts towards God’s forgiveness for ourselves. As we said earlier in the week, God’s forgiveness is there, but we have to take it in order for it to have an affect on our lives. Withholding forgiveness from others makes it harder to accept forgiveness for ourselves. The judgment I place on others, I often point right back at me.

Lent is a time when we think about forgiveness for ourselves, but it can also be a time when we practice forgiveness for others. In doing so, we open the floodgates to experience forgiveness in new ways and to see the beauty of forgiveness when it is flowing all around us.

**Meditation:** Where are you withholding forgiveness? How can you offer that in a safe way that opens you up for more peace?

# A DISCIPLE IS FORGIVEN

Saturday, February 27

Scripture  
Psalm  
145:1-9

As the week comes to a close, where have you seen the goodness of God? When we focus on forgiveness, it often leads to a lot of introspection about ourselves and our relationship to God and others. While this can be good, it can also take on a negative aspect. Hopefully, that has not been the case this week for you!

Either way, today take the time to be grateful and think through these questions:

Where have you seen love this week?

Where have you seen compassion this week?

Where have you seen mercy this week?

Where have you seen the majesty of creation this week?

**Meditation:** Spend time giving thanks for the answers to the questions above. Allow yourself time to be grateful for the good things this week.

# A DISCIPLE IS DEVOTED

Monday, March 1

Scripture  
Mark 8:  
31-38

Peter's audacity in this pericope (pəˈrɪkəpē—that's a fancy seminary word for small passage of the text) has long amused me. "Who does he think he is?" "Didn't he know who Jesus was by this point?" "Was Peter in the habit of taking Jesus aside for a talkin' to?" are all questions that run through my head. But then when we step back and see what Peter was so concerned about, we

start to see him as a compassionate, devoted disciple. He was worried that Jesus talking about these wild notions of suffering and rejection were going to lead to precisely those predictions: suffering and rejection. It would be like your favorite quirky professor standing up in front of the tenure review committee and predicting their own failure and expulsion from a beloved university. Any devoted student would pull the professor to the side to ask, "What are you doing?!" We can only imagine poor Peter's reaction when Jesus responds by rebuking HIM and calling him Satan. The comparison points toward the ways Satan tempted Jesus with "the easy way out" to avoid suffering during Jesus' 40 days fasting in the wilderness. Now Peter, like Satan, is pointing towards a way that avoids all suffering and rejection. By his rebuke and admonition against setting his mind on human things, Jesus reminds Peter (and us), that avoiding all human suffering and rejection is not possible for the way of the divine. Clearly being a devoted disciple is not easy—and if Peter teaches us anything here, it's safe to say that we need to listen to Jesus' teachings more than we rebuke them.

**Prayer:** *Dear God, speak to us with open teachings once again and open our minds and hearts that we might truly hear. Help us, Holy Spirit, to set our minds on divine things, not on human things. For the ways we are tempted to avoid all suffering and rejection, tempted to take the easy way out, lead us and guide us in your ways even when it is not easy. Help make us devoted disciples. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS DEVOTED

**Tuesday, March 2**

Scripture

Mark 8:

34-38

Careful what you wish for. We just prayed together yesterday that when we are tempted to take the easy way out, that we will be led to follow God's calling even when it is not easy. So take a deep breath and re-read—slower, this time—Mark 8: 34-38.... I'll wait. :)

After a year of pandemic life and hundreds of thousands of people literally losing their lives—loved ones of each of us—these words of Jesus are hard to swallow. It gives us pause to think about what we think about “profit” and “gain” and what beliefs and practices of our lives even identify us as followers of Jesus in the first place. Certainly it is easy to point fingers at yet another adulterous and sinful generation” and to easily become defensive at Jesus’ seemingly harsh words and apparent disregard for the sanctity of human life. Biblical scholars and philosophers will debate and we will sit here and wonder if He is talking about saving or losing our lives figuratively or literally. Body or soul? Clearly being a devoted disciple is not easy.

**Prayer:** *Dear God, we do want to be your followers. But we confess we are not quite sure what that means for us today. We pray for your Holy Spirit to continue to lead us, guide us, convict us, and inspire us in the way that leads to your life. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS DEVOTED

Wednesday, March 3

Scripture  
Psalm  
22:22-31

My daughter recently learned how to ride her bicycle without training wheels. But she will only ride on level ground and with her Dad balancing the bike to start off, as evidently Mom doesn't do it right. We keep cheering for her each time she pedals away from us and comfort and encourage her when she loses her balance, falls, and has to start over. Sometimes the bicycle stays in the garage for days.

Picture riding a bike and then soak in this beautiful psalm of devotion. This is the God we worship; this is the Life Jesus spoke about gaining. And it seems this might have the summary of this week's focus on a disciple being devoted.

- *I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters* (Sharing the Gospel—check!)
- *In the midst of the congregation I will praise you* (Attending worship—check!)
- *He did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.* (Authentic prayer life—check!)
- *My vows I will pay before those who fear him* (Keeping our baptism/confirmation/church membership vows & pledges—check!)
- *The poor shall eat and be satisfied* (Caring for those in need—check!)
- *Future generations will be told about the Lord, and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn* (Faith formation through Christian education for younger generations and working for justice and peace to ensure the lives of future generations—check!)

Clearly being a disciple is not easy, but perhaps it does get easier the more you practice. Just like learning to ride a bike. We will inevitably lose our balance and fall down, but you never forget how to ride. And there is a loving Heavenly Parent running alongside cheering us on and ready to comfort us when we fall down..

**Prayer:** *"I will tell of your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you," dear God. Help me to be emboldened to share your love this week with others. In my own family, in my own neighborhood, in unique and creative ways during this year of quarantine life to keep one another safe. Since we can't safely be in the midst of a congregation inside the walls of our church buildings, inspire our thoughts, words, and deeds to keep our baptism vows and care for those in need in new and meaningful ways. In Christ's name we pray, Amen.*



# A DISCIPLE IS DEVOTED

Scripture  
Romans  
4:13-25

**Thursday, March 4**

A reckoning, indeed! When we have our pre-baptism or church membership meetings with families, the pastors share that when the historic questions are asked to affirm (or reaffirm) the baptism and membership vows, that the answers are always in the affirmative: “Yes” or “I will” or “We do.” But based on this beautiful passage by Paul in his letter to the Romans—recalling the faith of Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament—wouldn’t it be fabulous if with a good, Southern drawl our next new members answered, “I reckon!”?

*On behalf of the whole Church, I ask you:*

*Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness,  
reject the evil powers of this world,  
and repent of your sin?*

I reckon.

*Do you accept the freedom and power God gives you  
to resist evil, injustice, and oppression  
in whatever forms they present themselves?*

I reckon.

*Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior,  
put your whole trust in his grace,  
and promise to serve him as your Lord,  
in union with the Church which Christ has opened  
to people of all ages, nations, and races?*

I reckon.

Or put another way, “Will you strive to be a devoted disciple of Jesus?” I reckon.

**Prayer:** *Gracious God, we give you thanks that we can truly reckon our trust and beliefs and hope and faith in you. We give you thanks that through Jesus you had a true reckoning with sin and death and evil once and for all, so that we can, through faith, renounce spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world, and repent of our sin as we accept the freedom and power You give us to put our whole trust in Your grace just as Abraham, Sarah, and Paul did, and promise to serve Christ as our Lord in union with the Church. Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS DEVOTED

Friday, March 5

Scripture  
Genesis  
17:1-7;  
15-16

“Speaking of Abraham and Sarah” .... (“Speaking of \_\_\_\_\_” is a favorite phrase of my children these days when you haven’t actually spoken of something that they want to talk about!) But since Paul DID speak of Abraham and Sarah, or of course first it was Abram and Sarai before their God-

directed name changes, we take the time on this Lenten journey to look at them, too. For this week’s theme of “A Disciple is Devoted,” you can’t get much more devoted than Abraham and Sarah who even as an elderly couple, packed everything they owned and traveled hundreds of miles to start their lives over because of their belief and devotion to God.

We [shared a cute video](#) to teach this story to our Zoom Children’s Sunday School recently and one of the astute Kids @ Glenn announced after the video, “That’s RIDICULOUS that even after they followed God’s directions and traveled all that way, they STILL had to wait even longer to have the baby that God promised!” I couldn’t deny that the whole story is a bit ridiculous and required the devoted faith of Abraham and Sarah then and devoted faith of us NOW to even believe. For each person, for each generation, it takes devotion and faith to believe and to act for the truth of God’s love and promises to live on for the next generation. But because of this devoted faith, we can cheerfully sing and dance together [the children’s song](#), “Father Abraham had many sons, and many sons had Father Abraham, I am one of them, and so are you, so let’s all praise the Lord! Mother Sarah had many daughters, and many daughters had Mother Sarah. I am one of them, and so are you, so let’s all praise the Lord!”

**Prayer:** *God of Abraham and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, we pray that you will continue to speak to our hearts and minds during this season of Lent of what it means for us to be faithful, devoted disciples of you. While we see that no family tree is perfect—especially yours or ours—we give thanks that your love works through the love of family relationships from generation to generation. Inspire us this week to reflect on the repentance, forgiveness, or reconciliation that you may be calling us toward in our own hearts or relationships. In Christ’s name we pray, Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS DEVOTED

Saturday, March 6

Scripture  
Mark 8:  
31-38

Well, hopefully these verses look familiar if you've been reading along each day. This is the same passage we looked at a few days ago and like any good students of Scripture (or any literature for that matter) recognize, it's always a good thing to re-visit as we reflect. So if you haven't re-read the entire passage yet, I invite you to do so now.

And now, in the spirit of creativity that several of us learned during our "Praying in Color" workshop a few months ago, I invite you to do something that's likely a bit out of your comfort zone. Go find a piece of blank paper and some colored pencils, crayons, highlighters/markers, or even just a blue pen and a black pen. And then after you say the prayer below, take time to draw or doodle words or images in different colors that come to mind as you re-read this passage yet again. Here's the words that popped out to me:

Son of Man // 3 days // behind // setting your mind // divine things // human things // called the crowd // followers // deny // cross // follow me // save // life // lose // gospel // profit // forfeit // ashamed // sinful // glory // Father // holy angels

**Prayer:** *Dear God, open my mind and heart to hear your teachings. Open my mind and heart to hear your calling. Set my mind on divine things, not on human things. Show me what it means to lose my life for the sake of the Gospel. In Christ's name I pray, Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS FOOLISH

Monday, March 8

Scripture  
I Cor.  
I: I8-25

When it comes to discipleship, we have to acknowledge the elephant in the room: the call to be a disciple is typically not the pragmatic option. For major planners and structured individuals (I count myself among you!), this is discomfoting news. I rest easier at night when I know the game plan, have the money in the bank to make it happen, and I've got a neat schedule of how it will get done and when.

But the difficulty of discipleship is that it often calls us to act when God moves, not according to what we have planned. We see this in Moses, being suddenly called to lead the Israelites out of Egypt. We see this in Mary, whose life was turned in a moment upon finding out she would give birth to the Son of God. We see this in Peter and Andrew, when they immediately drop their nets and follow Christ to become "fishers of men." If we were in their shoes, one of our first statements might be, "Yes, great Rabbi! ... And when you have a moment, can we discuss our retirement options?"

In today's scripture, my study bible notes that "the wisdom the world" is meant to indicate "the educated elite who trust in their own cleverness." We at Glenn are a congregation with enough credentials to fill the walls of our sanctuary. This equips us to do wonderful things to show love to our fellows and our neighbors. But as we navigate this time of turning back to God during lent, we must take stock: How might we also be trusting our own cleverness over God? How might we benefit from being a little more "foolish" in our discipleship?

# A DISCIPLE IS FOOLISH

Tuesday, March 9

Scripture  
I Cor.  
I:22-23

Having recently come out of the advent season and Epiphany, most of us are familiar with the strange nature of Jesus' arrival. Born to parents that were of little renown (if known at all), Jesus arrived in the small town of Bethlehem and soon after fled to Egypt. When able to return, his family raised him in the backwater town of Nazareth rather than the wondrous Jerusalem.

He was not raised as a prince or soldier or political leader, despite the power to "turn the world" that was foretold.

And then, the ultimate foolishness: Jesus predicts his death will be on this cross, the ultimate symbol of shame and defeat. Is this a joke? What kind of deliverer can he be? It is no wonder that Peter pragmatically announces that this foolishness cannot be so! Success cannot end in shameful death, beloved rabbi!

Yet it is all the more shocking when Jesus says that it absolutely must be so, and tells Peter "get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to Me. For you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." (Matthew 16:23)

Jesus' foretold crucifixion was a scandal to those who believed in his power, and seemed foolish to those who didn't.

# A DISCIPLE IS FOOLISH

Wednesday, March 10

Scripture

I Cor.

I:22-23

We revisit yesterday's scripture reading, but with a different lens.

As Christians in 2021, we sometimes lose sight of the fullness of what the symbol of the cross was in the Roman empire. Crosses are now sold as Jewelry, made out of pure gold or silver as a symbol for hope and faith. But for those living 2000 years ago, a cross was a three-hundred pound wooden apparatus constructed by the Roman army and planted deep into the dirt. It was a device used to dissuade anyone to oppose the established empire through the public display of a shameful death.

Theologian James H. Cone, in his groundbreaking *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*, observes the inability (or refusal) of American Christianity to connect the experience of Jesus' crucifixion to the unjust lynching of black men and women throughout the past centuries. Despite the blatant similarities of these terrible actions, we often choose to view the cross in the abstract rather than acknowledging the difficult truth—Jesus was lynched. In a public and shameful spectacle, Jesus was violently executed in a manner reserved for the most despised people in society. The law of the land did not protect him as it should have. Government Peace-keepers squabbled over who got to take his robe. Angry crowds shouted and mocked him as Jesus struggled for air before breathing his last.

And all of this, Jesus, fully God and fully man, freely chose for the sake of being in solidarity with the oppressed. The scandal of grace; the foolishness of unconditional love.

*"The gospel of Jesus is not a rational concept to be explained in a theory of salvation, but a story about God's presence in Jesus' solidarity with the oppressed, which led to his death on the cross. What is redemptive is the faith that God snatches victory out of defeat, life out of death, and hope out of despair."*

*-James H. Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

# A DISCIPLE IS FOOLISH

Thursday, March 11

Scripture  
Isaiah  
29:13-16

In Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, he quotes this passage from the prophet Isaiah. He uses this quote to demonstrate what he means by the message of the cross being "foolishness to those who are being destroyed ... [but] the power of God for those of us who are being saved."

Isaiah is known for being a prophet of hard truths, and this passage is a prime example. His image of our supposed "fear" of God (read: respect toward God) being "human command that has been memorized" hits especially close to home. What practices have we committed to memory with no urgency? With no sense of God being a part of the "why" of our practice?

**Meditation:** What are the ways in which we, the clay, have ordered our lives in a way that says, "the potter doesn't understand?"



# A DISCIPLE IS FOOLISH

Friday, March 12

Scripture  
John 2:13-  
22

When reading the stories of scripture, it is all too easy for us to insert ourselves into the shoes of the protagonist. Of course I'm Noah, and not the wicked! Of course I'm David, and not a cowering Israelite or the bullying Goliath! Of course I'm the prophet, and not the crowd that mocks him!

Here is yet another passage of clearly right and wrong characters. The money changers charged too much for the animals they sold for sacrifice because they knew they could add a hefty "convenience fee" for travelers who had come to the temple on pilgrimage. A greedy action, many would argue. Others might say that they are just an example of pragmatic and shrewd capitalists at work—a textbook lesson of the concept of supply and demand. The "invisible hand" moving as it does, right? It's for the good of the economy.

And yet Jesus is so appalled, he drives out the profiteers with a "whip of cords!" A shocking condemnation of an ongoing practice that so many had simply come to view as the norm. After all, people seeking profit was just an expected part of society—it was the water that the disciples swam in.

Jesus' extreme act of sincerity pierces through the established norms and powers of the Temple to remind everyone present of God's intent: the Temple as a place of connection to God, not a space for personal profit. The accepted worldly, pragmatic wisdom is suddenly seen in its true light. In one swift motion, Jesus the Christ makes foolish the profiteering wisdom of the world.

**Meditation:** Instead of entering into this story as the protagonist (Jesus) or the antagonist (the money changers), I invite you to enter into it from the perspective of the disciples. How was this a wake-up call? What did this demonstrate about Christ?

Today, what "wisdom of the world" is the water that we swim in? What act of "foolish" sincerity in God's wisdom would change it?



# A DISCIPLE IS FOOLISH

Saturday, March 13

Scripture  
Matthew  
20:1-16

Yesterday, we focused on an action that Jesus took that cut through “worldly wisdom” to get at the wisdom of God. Today, we hear a parable from Jesus that demonstrates the same.

Jesus deliberately pays the workers who came last first, and the workers who came first last. From our standards, it is hard not to argue the case for the early workers. They’ve been working here since the sun rose, and these others clocked in right at 4:30 p.m. To say that they deserve to be paid the same as the early workers is insulting!

That is, until you realize that a denarion is equal to a day’s wage. Those who worked all day were paid fairly, so the landlord held up his end of the bargain. Anything beyond that that he gave to others is just extravagantly generous, and he can do with his money what he wants!

Besides, can’t we think of reasons why these workers might have been neglected from being the first picks? Maybe these workers weren’t lazy, as we first assume. Perhaps they were Samaritans, looked down upon in Jewish society. Perhaps they had a physical disability or disease that precluded them from being available at the early morning. Perhaps they struggled from addiction, or homelessness, or severe mental health issues.

Dr. T. Scott Daniels of Nampa College Church of the Nazarene argues that what we see here is a tension between “an economy of merit” and “an economy of need.” Worldly wisdom reinforces the economy of merit: that those that earn the most in life are the ones that most deserve it. They must have done something right: working hard, being punctual, or exceptionally intelligent and clever.

But Jesus knows that this isn’t the whole story. The Samaritan and the Israelite were hired at different rates. The person with the disability may be seen as having less to contribute, and the person experiencing homelessness may be seen as unreliable or questionable. And so he says that the landlord rightly pays out based on an economy of need rather than one of merit. Those who have get what they are owed, and those who have not get what they need. It is enough.

**Meditation:** In what ways does our worldly wisdom not give opportunity to those in need? What foolishness is needed to disrupt it?

# A DISCIPLE IS LIGHT-HEARTED

**Monday, March 15**

Scripture  
John 3:19

Darkness is good. It offers sanctuary when our bones are weary and our brains screaming, and for the sightless, darkness is no longer barrier to a good and beautiful life. The book of Exodus even tells us that darkness is the dwelling place of God (20:21). But when I'm navigating through a dark house filled with toe-stubbing obstacles, I want some light. In fact, I can say quite honestly that I love the light, except when I don't.

So, it's easy to see (sorry) why John describes Christ as light. Christ reveals our God whose dwelling place is deep darkness, and Christ's love shines like light revealing every person as holy and wholly deserving of abundant life.

Like the sun rising, Christ comes, a light spilling across the landscape, filling shadows, illumining ... everything. And that is Good News, of course. But here's the thing about light: Shine it out there and it will show you the way. Turn it around, and it highlights every scar, every blemish, every wrinkle of truth.

Our lectionary recognizes that Lent is a season for honesty and that the Truth that comes as hope for our souls might also arrive with all the subtlety of Wile E. Coyote's anvil. So, the Scripture this week directs our eyes and minds toward Christ, the cross, and our own souls. The shadows are tempting, but for a little while, let's dare to trust the light.

**Prayer:** *God of Grace, in this holy season, let your Word reveal your truth and ours, that every barrier between you and us might come crumbling down. Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS LIGHT-HEARTED

Tuesday, March 16

Scripture  
Numbers  
21:4-9

Numbers 21:4-9 tells a strange story. Wandering in the wilderness, the grumbling Israelites are attacked by poisonous snakes, and God's prescription is, well, strange. Look upon the bronze serpent and be healed. Sounds downright idolatrous, doesn't it? In fact, I wouldn't believe a word of it, if life didn't constantly prove it true.

A man comes home to find his family waiting for him, but this is no surprise party. "You say your drinking isn't a problem, Dad? Let us tell you the pain your addiction has caused us." And, in that moment, a bronze bottle of liquor is lifted up.

A couple sits with a counselor, and the words hang in the air, revealing wounds too long ignored. Can healing begin?

I look at a Black Lives Matter sign or a rainbow flag, and I feel the twinge of old lies rooted deep within me. And in the pain is possibility.

Turns out there are lots of bronze snakes hanging around, and there is one all of us share—the cross. Our passage from John's Gospel this week says, "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (3:14-15). Look at the cross and see our human arrogance and violence at its worst. Look at the cross and see the One whose mercy is our hope and healing.

**Prayer:** *Christ our Savior, we come to you as we are; receive us in your mercy and by your grace make us whole. Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS LIGHT-HEARTED

Wednesday, March 17

Scripture  
John 3:16-  
17

God loves the world.

You might want to memorize that sentence. It is the sentence from which every other sentence follows. It is true now, and it was true at the beginning of the beginning.

“Let there be light,” God said. And when God was done with creation, God added, “It is good.” And it was. I hold my new grandchild in my arms, and I can say with certainty, “He is the most beautiful child ever.” Really? Yes, because love says so. “It is good,” God said, and so it is.

God loves the world. God doesn't hate the world. God doesn't love PART of the world and hate another part. There is, however, a persistent problem. People loved by God do terrible things to other people loved by God.

And that brings us again to the cross. As we've said, it is judgment on our violence, yes, but the cross is also the purest, most powerful declaration of God's love. On the cross, Christ said, “I will take your rage, but I will not pay it back. I will not stop loving you.” God's love will not let us go. God loves the world into being. God loves the world on Good Friday. And God loves the world on Easter, Creation's second act.

God loves the world. And by that, I mean God loves you. You might memorize that, too.

**Prayer:** *God of all creation, let me walk in the light of love. Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS LIGHT-HEARTED

Thursday, March 18

Scripture  
Ephesians  
2:8-9

It is the gift you are given when you have no gift to give back. It is the check picked up to your great relief.

It is the friend who calls when you need her most. It is the friend who doesn't bother to call but shows up because you need him.

It is the one who lies beside you through years, a night at a time, in sickness and in health. And it is the child who leans against you through a movie.

It is the note that says "I love you" and the love that notes the sadness in your eyes.

It is the teacher who sees in you possibilities and the assistant principal who cares enough to hold you accountable.

It is the anthem that lifts your eyes toward heaven and the sermon that reminds you of what you didn't know you knew already.

It is the key under the mat, the extra room made ready and the bed turned down, before you even knew you were coming home.

It is grace—the love that loves you no matter what and loves you enough to do what is needed.

As we move toward Good Friday and Easter this year, can you trust that what you need is given, that those old ways you need to let go can be let go, and with Easter a new life and a new way begun? Simply put, such trust is faith.

**Prayer:** *Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me. Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS LIGHT-HEARTED

Friday, March 19

Scripture  
Psalm  
I 07 : 2 - 3

A thankful people has returned from exile. By land and sea, beset by many perils, they traveled, but God brought them home. That's the story told by our psalm this week, and it might just be the story of the whole Bible—home lost, home found again.

Joachim Jeremias, the late German theologian and New Testament scholar, told of a visit to Israel, where he had spent part of his childhood. While there, he called on an old friend, who was Jewish. In the friend's backyard was a simple tent erected for the Festival of Booths, which commemorates Israel's time wandering in the desert, living in tents.

On the tent, his friend had placed two simple hand-written signs. The sign on the left side said, "From God", the one on the right, "To God." Contained in that simple scene, said Jeremias, was the whole of human life: from God, to God, and in the years between, a tent.

How's the journey going for you these days? Feeling exiled? Wandering? Or maybe life is good—quite comfortable, nicely settled. Wherever you are, if you look closely, you'll spot the tent poles and stakes. You're not there yet.

This Lenten road, with its trials, its cross and nails and, ultimately, its empty tomb, reminds us. There are no dead ends, no barriers, that can forever bar our way. The God who created us in love will bring us all the way home.

**Prayer:** *Loving Shepherd, guide me along the way, until at last I am home in your love. Amen.*

# A DISCIPLE IS LIGHT-HEARTED

Saturday, March 20

Scripture  
Ephesians  
2:10

“For we are what [God] has made us,” the apostle says.

Let’s linger there for a second. Interestingly, the phrase “what [God] has made us” can also be translated “work of art.”

Changes the feeling, doesn’t it? But wait, there’s more! The word literally means “poem.” Wow. “For we are God’s poem,” the apostle says.

I’ve never thought of the church as a poem, but I kind of like the idea. Imagine you and I are a poem, written by God to bring harmony, meaning, love, beauty even, to a world of shouting and violence? We who have been saved by God’s grace are God’s love poem for the world.

We “poem-people” were “created in Christ Jesus for good works,” the apostle continues. Don’t rush over that phrase either. The very power of creation is at work here. We’re talking about a new life in Jesus Christ.

This week we talked about the light of Christ that is both truth and mercy. Now, that light shines through us poem-people who are created anew in Christ.

This week we talked about grace. The new life of the poem-people is a way BORN of grace that IS grace, a way of living that is mercy and compassion and welcome and love.

And this week we said our journey is from God ... to God. And along the way? The light of Christ dawning, grace upon grace.

**Prayer:** *God of power and love, who with one word brings life from nothing, create me anew in Christ, whose way is truth and life. Amen.*



# A DISCIPLE IS CONNECTED

Monday, March 22

Scripture  
Jeremiah  
31:31-34

As we all know, this month marks a year of pandemic living in the U.S. I remember flying back from New York on March 14th, determined to make the most of a season that would be behind us in just a few short weeks.

But, as you know, here we still are. And if you're like me, I sometimes find it difficult to think of who I was a year ago in comparison to my current self.

The same, of course, and yet the transformation that happens within all of us under traumatic or difficult circumstances is hard to reconcile with who we understand ourselves to be. Memories of days past nudge us to recall the momentum we felt moving into a new decade. The recollection, if we let it, causes us to pause with gratitude, grief, anxiety, and maybe nostalgia.

Like the last year has oftentimes felt, Jeremiah's principal subject is survival. Jeremiah is trying to recognize the promise to God's people while also coming to the harsh reality that Babylon has caused mass destruction. He is often described as the "weeping prophet," he knows that the best is yet to come, and yet cannot shake how the communal life of his people has been upended and fully collapsed. This work of connecting things we know to be true is *difficult*. When faced with tragedy, despair, or pandemics, we all might begin to ask our own questions of faith. How do we reconcile things falling apart with hope for better?

During these days before Holy Week, we'll focus on connectedness, and we'll center our time around this passage from Jeremiah. The Lord's new covenant does not wipe out the old one, but restores it, connecting it to the past, the present, and the future. A disciple is tasked, too, with this work of connectedness— to our past, our situation today, *and* the future. It is crucial to our life of faith, this weaving together the various stories and experiences that we have into a cohesive narrative with the Divine. Whether you feel shaky or quite steady in this moment, we take this week to feel grounded. For today, I invite you to *remember*. Where have you been? Who came before you? Where have we been as a community in the past? What are the experiences, people, places that have formed you?

**Meditation:** Pinpoint a specific memory that means a lot to you. What about it sticks out to you? What did you learn? What do you regret? What makes you feel relaxed, anxious, happy, sad thinking about it? How does it inform who you are today? If the memory is related to a person, or a community, I invite you to take a few minutes this week to maybe write a quick note reminding them of the memory and expressing gratitude for that shared moment in time. Say a quick prayer of thanksgiving for them. If it is a place that is accessible to you, maybe spend some time there this week, even if it is not physically accessible and you "visit" in your mind or with pictures of the place.



# A DISCIPLE IS CONNECTED

Tuesday, March 23

Scripture  
John  
12:20-33

I find myself looking too much into the future or dwelling too much on the past more than I'd like to admit. Staying in the present may be the most difficult aspect of connection because for better or worse, everything is raw or fresh when we're in the moment. Having to deal with the things right in front of us can cause immediate joy or immediate pain, and we are often faced with the uncertainty of multiple outcomes at once. In a society that boasts many options and opportunities for distraction, being alert to what God is doing *now* is hard.

And yet, in this passage John invites us to consider not just what's ahead but the present. *The time has come.* It is here, and what happens right in this moment directly contributes to the days to come. We also see the here and now in the second part of John—the death of Jesus will mark the defeat of the power of evil, and yet those listening to his words are called to live into that truth right now. I wonder how we can practice presence right now to what is just in front of us— not dwelling on the past, be it the things we wish we'd done differently or looking back on how good we once had it. Similarly, not only looking towards the future—the better days ahead where we will be able to gather together in person, to attend summer concerts, to better spring breaks. Both the past and the future are important, but these passages also call us to be connected to the present. As disciples, we must be present to the here and now, recognizing that Christ's intuitive peace is what we hope to replicate in our own lives and that, even in our moments of pause, God is present and active.

**Meditation:** Take time to practice the 5-4-3-2-1 exercise. Acknowledge 5 things you see around you, 4 things you can touch, 3 things you can hear, 2 things you can smell, and 1 thing you can taste. Practice this as many times as you'd like throughout the day, but even practicing once can both bring us to the present and reduce anxiety.

# A DISCIPLE IS CONNECTED

Wednesday, March 24

Scripture  
John  
12:20-26

Just as importantly as the present, looking to the times ahead can keep us grounded and connected. Holidays, anniversaries, the “when I get a new [fill-in-the-blank]” or a whimsical “when we move to [fill-in-the-blank]” can keep us going when we have something to look towards. Looking ahead is integral to the ethos of our faith— though Christ was our redeemer in the past and is now, we also hope for a day when Christ will come again and make all things right.

Jeremiah writes about a future day where God will make a new covenant, one different from the broken one made at Sinai. This language of the text regarding the Lord as husband and referring to broken promises symbolizes a sort of divorce between humanity and divinity. There is a disconnect, both between Israel and the Lord, and between Israel’s vision of their future and what currently is. Like the past and present, the future can be filled with grief for us as well. Lots of joy, and maybe excitement, but looking ahead can also be anxiety-inducing. Do we *really* know what is to come? And what if things change? What if I screw something up that permanently changes what I thought the future would look like?

We get these little glimpses of what’s to come in these two passages. Jesus uses the seed metaphor to encourage his listeners that his death will bring new life, it bears much fruit. It is a symbol for the community of faith. Jeremiah’s passage gives us a glimpse into the community of faith as well, where all will have access to God because God’s ethos will be written on our hearts. God has already woven us together but we hope that that interwovenness birthed in community continues in the future. These communities of faith can be our beacon of hope while we learn to live in this Lenten space and anticipate an Easter morning.

We look to what’s to come, we rejoice, we may feel anxious, and we hope. Staying connected to this Hope is what will keep us grounded in our day-to-day, and begins to weave together what got us here in the first place.

**Meditation:** What are ways that you can latch onto hope today? Take time to be hopeful today, whether it’s anticipating the next time you’ll see a friend who lives far away or a goal you hope to accomplish this year. Take time to also welcome any of the feelings that accompany this hope— do you feel doubtful? Maybe a little anxious? Maybe just afraid or a little hesitant. Whatever the feeling, I invite you to pause with each one. Imagine what Jesus might say about each if he were in the room with you. When you’re ready, acknowledge the validity of all your sacred humanness, and find a little glimpse of hope to take with you.

# A DISCIPLE IS CONNECTED

Thursday, March 25

Scripture  
Psalm  
51:1-12

While studying Zen Buddhism at Candler School of Theology this summer, I was struck by the emphasis on mindfulness and the change that occurs when we are able to know what is within us and let go of what we must release. With meditations focused on the breath, my class would focus on the sound and feeling of our breath, checking in on each part of our body and the thoughts that arise with each inhale. To be present to others and to what God is up to, we must first be present to what is going on inside of us. Our psalm for today feels like these necessary moments of awareness. The psalmist is aware of their transgressions and their sin, and recognizes that they'd like to look differently in relationship to God. To make space for joy, for relationship, for a clear mind and heart, the psalmist must release what they know to be true about themselves in their humanity.

We've walked through the past, present, and future—now, we shift to find ourselves in those spaces. The psalmist connects this awareness to the restoration of Jerusalem and is able to both recognize his own wrongdoing and turn towards hope. Connection with anything or anyone else must first begin with grounding and connecting with ourselves. Otherwise, we begin to run the risk of moving wherever the wind blows, and becoming a shell of ourselves. We become so unaware of our own capacity for both good and evil and neglect to think critically of our actions. To know ourselves is to connect to the One who created us. And to create authentic relationships with God and one another requires us to first look inward, honoring all that we find when we do so. And so we face all of our beauty and all of our capacity for evil head-on, and pray—create in us clean hearts, God, and renew a right spirit within each of us.

**Meditation:** I invite you to use Psalm 51 as your prayer for today. If you feel comfortable reading aloud, feel free to do so. You can also meditate on each verse individually, pausing in between to reflect.

# A DISCIPLE IS CONNECTED

Friday, March 26

Scripture

John

12:20-33

My experience of God has looked differently in different seasons of my life. Growing up mildly Catholic, I experienced God as an old man in the sky who was to be feared and compartmentalized. Dealing with anxiety with flying, I found comfort in God being more like Lizzo, free and confident and lively, and capable of holding the plane with her own two hands.

The truth is that no two of us will understand the Divine in the same way, nor can any of us give any definitive physical attributes for God.

These passages give us a sense of connectedness to God regardless of who we understand God to be. Jesus promises to draw all people to Himself through his death on the cross. And we, those crazy Christians, sit here through Lent and believe it. Why? This groundedness and connectedness, these ways that we've all individually experienced the Truth we know. All of them valid, all of them connecting us to the One who would draw all people to God's self. We hold all of our experiences, some we might frown upon (as someone with evangelical baggage, I feel you!) and some views that are no longer helpful for us or others. It's comforting for me to see the Israelites had a change in experience as well. The old covenant and new covenant both validated, the breaking apart of relationship with God and the putting back together. We as humans ebb and flow, but God remains consistent. And for that, we express gratitude, continuing to connect in new ways with the One who created us.

**Meditation:** There is a lovely song by a young folk writer Taylor Leonhardt called "Surprising Me." We've sung it before as a meditation for our Contemplative Worship Services. I invite you to give it a listen today, or just meditate on the lyrics. What has surprised you about God? What is surprising you now? What are the things that ground you or "connect" you to God— those things that, though your experience of God may be different, are unchanging about God?

# A DISCIPLE IS CONNECTED

Saturday, March 27

Scripture  
Jeremiah  
31:31-34

Happy Saturday! We've explored a lot this week—our connectedness through time—the memories that carry us, awareness and tending to the here and now, and how staying connected to the future keeps us going. We've also talked about connecting to our deepest selves and our connections with the divine, and now we end with connecting with one another. Physical connection in these times is hard, I know. But I want us to reflect on the sort of *soul connection*, the connectedness that transcends understanding. That kindred spirit feeling when you meet someone who is so naturally similar to you, or the person who could not be more different from you but has gone through an incredible amount of life with you.

Jeremiah offers new perspective on relationships with the family of faith—no longer will they teach each other because all will know the Lord. God is creating a sort of egalitarian society here, and healing the wounded family. All are equal, all are God's and God is ours. It is a restoration of community, a hopeful future with one another. We see the widespread love of God in this John passage as well—*all people* will be drawn close.

Because we are connected to God, we are connected to one another. We can live and act knowing that there is enough for all of us, room to grow and room to be. Christ promises to bind us all together—as disciples, we are called to participate in this work as well. And we know that that can be difficult sometimes. But it is these deep connections that bind us and keep us, preserving us in the dark days and rejoicing with us in the sunny ones. We also stay connected in all of these other aspects through being connected to one another. Our trusted friends remind us of what we hope to be in the future and keep us grounded in who we've been. Our communities give us shared history with one another, and we share goals for the future. We grow as we help each other grow. Especially in this season of Lent, we are drawn closer to Christ as we care for one another.

**Meditation:** We started our week with writing a note to a particular person or community that has formed us in the past. I invite you now to spend some time reflecting on the folks that have carried you through this last year. Think of the folks you might've lost this year, the friends you might've lost touch with and would like to check in with. Take a moment with each to thank God for their presence, their imprint on your life, and the connectedness you feel/have felt to them through the family of God. If you are able and would like to, this would be a nice afternoon walk activity!

# A DISCIPLE IS HUMBLE

Monday, March 29

Scripture

Phi. 2:

I-II

In my life I have often been humbled by situations and by other people, but it is rare that I do the humbling myself! One reason for that is “humility” is often seen as a weak trait, whereas Paul is lifting it up as being quite strong. In this first century creedal poem, Jesus is not presented as a passive spirit, but one who does not seek power and control in the traditional ways, instead eschewing ego and greatness in order to fully give himself to God and to others.

Many mystics call this the “path of descent.” It is choosing to love and to give, to seek to lavish the gifts we have been given on others so that we all might rejoice in these gifts. Jesus knew that you cannot run out of love, but that self-seeking can cut us off from love. So he set the example for us—humble yourself and love generously. Give all that you can and see the ways in which life is changed. Love, and life, works best when it is freely given.

The Sufi mystic Rumi puts it this way:

Love is reckless, not reason. Reason seeks a profit. Love comes on strong, consuming herself, unabashed.

Yet in the midst of suffering, love proceeds like a mill song, hard-surfaced and straight forward.

Having died to self-interest, she risks everything and asks for nothing. Love gambles away every gift God bestows.

**Meditation:** Re-read the poem by Rumi. Where can you be reckless with love today?



# A DISCIPLE IS HUMBLE

Tuesday, March 30

Scripture  
Mark II:  
I-II

One of the great losses during this time of social-distancing is our ability to celebrate together. As I read the scripture today, I can't help but be drawn to one of my favorite memories at Glenn — marching in the Atlanta Pride Parade. The streets lined with people, celebrating their right to be free and to be who they are and calling upon further change and acceptance. Thousands upon thousands of revelers lifting up a group of people who have been marginalized and oppressed. As we walked in the parade there was a feeling of lightness, a belief that the world really could be good and loving and inclusive.

In today's passage, as Jesus enters Jerusalem the crowd shouts "Hosanna, literally meaning, "God save us." They are marginalized, tired, and yet full of hope. In this Jesus they see one who can bring justice. In the end, it doesn't look like what they thought it would, but Jesus shows that the way of peace is the way of justice; that sacrifice and love bring about lasting change. The week will end very differently than anticipated, but in resurrection we see the power of life over death, of love over hate, and of justice over oppression.

The crowds believed a better day was coming. They believed that life could change for the better. Now, over a year into pandemic life, can we both see the reality of the world around us and hold hope? As resurrection Sunday approaches, may Jesus show us the way.

**Meditation:** Where do you see signs of hope in your life?

# A DISCIPLE IS HUMBLE

Wednesday, March 31

Scripture

John

12:20-26

Lose. Your. Life. At first read, this seems like horrible advice.

Darwin's evolutionary theories weren't around at the time, but it feels like someone could have told Jesus that billions of years of development had trained us to do exactly the opposite of what he is saying. Everything in us fights to keep and protect our life. And while this has more to do with physical than emotional or spiritual life, the concept is still intact. I have very little control of things in this world, and I would really like to hold onto the things I do have control over!

Jesus' example of the grain of wheat is a good one for us. Right now we are moving into spring, and the signs of life are all around us after a long winter. The darkness and cold are a part of our world, but new life springs from death. If you have time today, step outside and look for signs of new life. See that in the dying of winter a new life is gained in the spring. Just as in letting go of our life—our desires for control and power—we find new life in Christ—a life focused on love and service. Where do you see new life in nature, and where might God be calling you to new life in following Christ?

**Meditation:** Where do you see new life in nature, and where might God be calling you to new life in following Christ?



# A DISCIPLE IS HUMBLE

**Maundy Thursday, April 1**

Scripture  
John 13:  
1-17

At his first Maundy Thursday service after his election, Pope Francis continued the tradition of foot washing as an example of how to follow Jesus. However, this Pope made a slight change. Instead of choosing 12 important lay people in the church and doing the foot washing at a basilica in Rome, he asked to wash the feet of 12 prisoners at a detention center, including two women and a Muslim. He encouraged the priests who were at the service to spend less time in introspection, and more time caring for the world. "We need to go out...to the outskirts where there is suffering, bloodshed, blindness that longs for sight and prisoners in thrall to many evil masters," he said.

Jesus knows how the disciples see him. He also knows how the disciples see themselves, as fortunate ones to be so close to this revolutionary leader. So he gathers them together, washes their feet, and calls them to service and love. Once again Jesus chooses humility, and models it for us in a beautiful act.

Lent is a time to reflect, but it can also be a time for action. This Holy Week Jesus still calls us to service, and challenges our positions of privilege that we might follow him in humility.

**Meditation:** Spend some time re-reading verses 16-17 of our scripture today. How do they speak to you?

# A DISCIPLE IS HUMBLE

Good Friday, April 2

Scripture  
Matthew  
27:45-50

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” In Jesus’ final words before his death in the gospel of Matthew, he quotes a well-known Psalm. Psalm 22 begins as a Psalm of despair, a feeling Jesus and his followers would have been well acquainted with on this day. But the interesting thing about this Psalm is that it takes a turn. After crying out in despair, the Psalmist begins to recount the mighty works of God for God’s people. God had delivered them. God had saved them. Then, at the end of the Psalm we hear grand claims of God’s salvation both for the psalmist and for all of God’s people. Claims of justice and peace and protection.

Jesus turns to this Psalm as a reminder that, even in the midst of the darkness and pain, there is hope. The pain is real—Jesus’ cries are real—but they are not without hope. Good Friday is a time to be honest and hopeful. Honest about the pain, anxiety, loneliness, and suffering of ourselves and the world. But it is also a time of hope. In the cross we see that God is with us in the suffering, and that the current darkness is not the end.

**Meditation:** Take time to “cry out to God” with your pains and anxieties. Lay them before God and know that God is with you, working towards resurrection.

# A DISCIPLE IS HUMBLE

**Holy Saturday, April 4**

Scripture  
Luke  
23:50-56

*He is Not Here - Nancy Townley*

*The darkness of Saturday resides in our souls. Outside the sun may be shining, people may be going about their business; but we cannot forget what happened last night, how he cried from the Cross, his last words "It is finished" and "Father, into your hands I commend my Spirit."*

*No amount of noise, color, busyness can erase the darkness.*

*He is not here. He is not sitting with us, walking with us, comforting with us. We are alone. And we wait. For what we are not sure....for some sign of hope, some sign of life, some miracle that will mend our brokenness and bind up our wounded spirits.*

*He is not here. And we are frightened. We could count on him being present. What are we to do in this world without Jesus. Our souls are utterly bereft. Lord, God, where are you? Where is the hope? Come to us. Come, now.....please.*

*He is not here. And we wait.*

While we await the celebration of resurrection on Sunday, it is important to sit with the silence of Saturday. Maybe, in the midst of your Saturday, resurrection seems a little far away. It wasn't even on the disciples' mind. But maybe there are slivers of light in the darkness. Maybe there is the love of friends, the beauty of spring. Maybe what we wait for is not resurrection, even though it will come. Maybe we just wait, and look, for slivers of light, trusting that God is in them. And we live through Saturday, with just enough light to keep us going. Even for the disciples, Jesus was gone, but God was not dead. So even when our hope is lost, may we find slivers of light to keep us going, believing that we are not alone, that maybe God has not left us after all. We wait. And in that waiting, there is hope.

**Meditation:** Re-read the poem above. What must it have been like to be the disciple's on this day?