



A LENTEN JOURNEY  
2025

Northminster Baptist Church

## A Lenten Journey 2025

I've never thought about the possible contradiction between the imposition of ashes and Matthew 6:16, which tells us, "And whenever you fast, do not look somber, like the hypocrites, for they mark their faces to show others that they are fasting." Is Lent not both a parallel of the fast of Jesus, Moses, and Elijah, and a long season of sorrow reminding us of our own mortality and the coming death of Jesus? Our ashes as a *memento mori* seem minor compared to most ancient cultures' expressions of grief, the visceral displays of mourning we see from Gilgamesh and Achilles: beating of chests, pulling of hair, tearing of clothing, pouring of ashes, lying prostrate, wailing aloud, not eating, not sleeping, not bathing. Can we emote so outwardly? Or are we called to stoic silence in the face of sorrow?

Perhaps this tug-and-pull sums up the way many of us feel about Lent, and even our lives as Christians in general. Do we wipe the ashes off? Do we keep them on? Do we give up something? Do we take on something? Do we talk about faith? Do we let actions speak for themselves?

In full transparency, I typed "Lent" into Google, and the first "People also ask" question to populate was fitting: "What are the rules to Lent?" The rules to Lent. What *are* the rules? Are there rules? I love rules. But I also kind of hate them. There's a lot of pressure that comes with rules. What if I break one? On the other hand, there's a lot of pressure with stripping away rules. For people with imposter syndrome (read: all humans), the stripping of the altar during Lent reminds us all too well of the vulnerability we have in relationship with God. If I take away all the trappings, what is left? Is it anything anyone can love? But also, what a relief to stop pretending.

Lent reminds us that God sees us always and all ways, in our sackcloth or not. Lent is a time for us to invite God in—to places God already is—to the parts of us God already knows and loves anyway.

## Ash Wednesday

March 5

*Isaiah 58:1-12; Psalm 51:1-17; 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10;  
Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21*

“For God .... remembers we are dust.”

–Psalm 103:14

Well over 20 years ago, there was a memorable moment at our Northminster Ash Wednesday Service. Rose Daniels, a toddler in her mom’s arms, received the holy ash cross. Returning to their seat, Rose looked back at the pastor and in the sacred quiet her strong, young voice rang out, “Thanks for the dirt!” This sweet memory serves as a reminder that each child of God comes from the “dirt” of the universe and will return to the “dirt” of the earth.

“... mortals are like grass ... like a flower... wind passes over ... it is gone.”

–Psalm 103: 15-16

The grass and flowers, like us, can look beautiful and reflect God’s glory, but only for a season. Because of our physical limitations, we will return to ashes.

### BIRTH-DEATH

However, our short lives are woven with mystery. We have, deep down, an inexplicable “knowing” of the eternal. We need no further explanation. Sacred ashes are simply reminders of our coming rebirth as promised by Jesus.

### BIRTH-HOPE-DEATH-ETERNITY

The steadfast love of God is woven in our dustiness, from everlasting to everlasting.

–excerpts from First Baptist Church, Decatur, GA

## Thursday, March 6

*Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 5:10-23; Acts 7:30-34*

This Psalm can be interpreted in a variety of ways. I believe God hopes, through this passage, we will understand that He isn't saying He will be what WE want Him to be or think He should be; God is not our servant and here to grant our every wish. Rather, God wants us to hear what God was trying to tell us – that He has promised to bless His people. God has not promised to keep us from pain, hurt, or tragedy. What He HAS promised to do is be with us to “go through, not around” these things in our lives. God has promised to give us the strength, through His presence with us, to bear whatever we face, not allow it to get ahead of us, not allow it to swallow us, not allow it to overcome us.

Father God,

We know you walk with us every day. Give us the strength to lean faithfully on you. Keep reminding us to trust you, to know that you have “plans to prosper us and not harm us.” Thank you for the grace and love you bring to us and help us to give grace and bless others as you have blessed us. Amen.

## Friday, March 7

*Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 6:1-13; Acts 7:35-42*

The Lenten journey is still fresh for us, only three days old. From here we are able to turn and see the short path that we have traveled so far, the revelry of Epiphany and the decisive shift of Ash Wednesday still in view. We have committed to a season of introspection, of confession, and of denial that we might better know ourselves and our God.

We read the story of the Exodus and somehow place ourselves into that same spiritual setting – able to look back at the places and parts of ourselves we’ve decided to leave behind, sometimes with longing and sometimes with regret. We cast ourselves as the same people who could not listen to Moses because their spirits were so broken. We need that brokenness – it is the essence of the journey we have so recently begun.

Let us pause today and look back. The journey of Lent is always both about what we have left and where we are headed. The celebration of Mardi Gras contrasts with the want of this wilderness path much as the call to confession and repentance contrasts with our innate desires to be self-righteous. Let us remember, grieve, and hope.

## Saturday, March 8

*Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Ecclesiastes 3:1-8; John 12:27-36*

Has there ever been anyone in history who knew more about time, and his place in the sacred flow of time, than Jesus? In John chapter 2, Jesus responds to his mother at a wedding banquet, “My hour has not yet come.” In today’s passage in John chapter 12, Jesus replies to Andrew and Philip, “...and what shall I say, ‘Father, save Me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I came to this hour.” (And a few verses earlier, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified.”) And from the cross in John chapter 19, “It is finished.”

In his day, Jesus was often thought of as a new Elijah. He could just as easily have been thought of as a new Qoheleth (the Hebrew form of Ecclesiastes). The prologue of Ecclesiastes begins, “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” Check, check, and check. Ecclesiastes/Qoheleth comes from the root assembly (or one who assembles). The teachings of Qoheleth were meant to be shared with the community. Check again. And Jesus would have understood precisely Qoheleth’s proclamation that “There is an appointed time for every event under heaven – A time to give birth, and a time to die.”

This fourth day of Lent 2025, this hour, right now, what is it time for you to do?

## **First Sunday in Lent, March 9**

*Deuteronomy 26:1-11; Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Romans 10:8b-13;*

*Luke 4:1-13*

**Monday, March 10**

*Psalm 17; 1 Chronicles 21:1-17; 1 John 2:1-6*

The passage in 1 John is always new and revelatory for those who say they belong to Christ—that we love one another as Christ loves us. Many times it is hard to always walk in neighborly love, when the affairs of the day take place. Keeping up the pace of life which at some times seems to disregard people's lives, oftentimes we find ourselves in a place of frustration with other people, and need to be reminded to take a step back, and remember that we are all people, fallible and fragile, and made in the image of the Creator. The more we learn to have compassion for our fellow people, the more we are in keeping with Jesus' commands to love one another, and become a more perfect and complete follower of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

“Forgiveness is the key that unlocks the door of resentment and the handcuffs of hate.”

—Corrie ten Boom



## Tuesday, March 11

*Psalm 17; Zechariah 3:1-10; 2 Peter 2:4-21*

To draw closer to God, Christians make the 40-day Lenten Journey along a road of prayer, fasting, and charity. The first step along that road begins with a prayer for renewed righteousness to see the face of God: “Hear, O Lord, my righteous plea; listen to my cry... Keep me as the apple of your eye; hide me in the shadow of your wings... And I—in righteousness I will see your face....” (Psalm 17).

Flannery O’Connor, the Catholic poet of the red clay hills of Georgia, offered this prayer:

“Dear God,

I cannot love Thee the way I want to.

You are the slim crescent of a moon that I see and myself is the earth’s shadow that keeps me from seeing all the moon. The crescent is very beautiful and perhaps that is all one like I am should or could see; but what I am afraid of, dear God, is that my self shadow will grow so large that it blocks the whole moon, and that I will judge myself by the shadow which is nothing. I do not know you God because I am in the way. Please help me push myself aside.”

—Flannery O’Connor, *A Prayer Journal*, 1946

The deepest longing of her heart was to know God. O’Connor’s Lenten prayer allowed her to step out of the shadows into the light of righteousness and see the face of God.

## Wednesday, March 12

*Psalm 17; Job 1:1-22; Luke 21:34-22:6*

Timothy Keller wrote, “When pain and suffering come upon us, we finally see not only that we are not in control of our lives but that we never were.”

When our path is blurred with pain, suffering, or scary moments, just remember—you are not alone. Embrace the challenges and even the stumbles. View them as stepping stones, not setbacks.

So take a deep breath, grab the hand of friends, and step boldly into the maze knowing God is in control and just let God be God in your journey.

“Good Grief, God”

How do you bear  
to look upon it,  
the awful beauty  
of our loss

till our grieving grip  
is loosened from the past  
and love’s brave battle  
bows in beauty’s call at last.

and how are we  
to bear it  
while we await  
the ashes of sorrow  
to ignite a living flame again?

And since we are not  
strong enough to mend  
our faithless fall,  
send a cool, calm breeze  
sweep us to our knees,  
breathe gently on us, please—  
till we break like bread to thank  
You.

Let the wailing winds have  
their way with us.  
Let their gales  
gust all around us

—Sherry Paige

over and under us,  
in, through and  
out of us  
forever  
in spite of us,

## Thursday, March 13

*Psalm 27; Genesis 13:1-7, 14-18; Philippians 3:2-12*

Today's Genesis reading recalls one in a series of promises or covenants God makes with Abram. It's a promise about two of the most highly valued things in the ancient world: land and offspring.

This is not the first time God has made this promise. Indeed, Abram has returned to the place where he once built an altar, surely to remember and perhaps to remind God of this same promise between them, just in case they each needed a sign that the covenant was still in place.

As Barbara Brown Taylor explains, a covenant "is a living thing... Its life thrives on its revival, and every time it is uttered, the promise is renewed."

Isn't this what our Lenten journey is about? We've been this way before. We even bought some souvenirs, took some photos, signed the guest book.

As we approach, again, the commemoration of God's new covenant with us, it's helpful to look back and see where we've already traveled.

And also to consider: what is God's covenant with us? Was it ever about territory and descendants? Or was it always about being in relationship?

## Friday, March 14

*Psalm 27; Genesis 14:17-24; Philippians 3:17-20*

The gospels of Mark, Matthew, and Luke record that after his baptism, Jesus was “led” (Matthew and Luke), “driven” (Mark) by the Spirit into the wilderness for a period of 40 days where he was tempted by “Satan” (Mark) or the “devil” (Matthew and Luke). Mark offers no details as to the temptations while Matthew and Luke record the same three “temptations,” although the ordering of the second and third temptations are reversed. Only Luke adds, “When the devil had finished every test, he (the devil) departed from him (Jesus) until an opportune time” (Luke 4:13).

When the 40 days in the wilderness were concluded, was Jesus immune to further temptation? I can’t speak for you, but I believe Jesus faced numerous other temptations to depart from what he believed was God’s mission for him. A powerful illustration of such a possibility was captured in Martin Scorsese’s 1988 film “The Last Temptation of Christ.” On the cross, Jesus is again tempted by Satan to abandon his cross to pursue a life of comfort as an ordinary man. Yet, Jesus withstands his “last temptation” to fulfill God’s mission of love. May the same be true of us during this season of Lent, and all the seasons of our lives.

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

—Hebrews 4:15-16

## Saturday, March 15

*Psalm 27; Psalm 118:26-29; Matthew 23:37-39*

### “Bridge Over Troubled Water”

When you're weary	Oh, when darkness comes
Feeling small	And pain is all around
When tears are in your eyes	Like a bridge over troubled water
I will dry them all	I will lay me down
I'm on your side	Like a bridge over troubled water
	I will lay me down
Oh, when times get rough	
And friends just can't be found	Sail on, silver girl
Like a bridge over troubled water	Sail on by
I will lay me down	Your time has come to shine
	All your dreams are on their way
Like a bridge over troubled water	See how they shine
I will lay me down	
When you're down and out	Oh, if you need a friend
When you're on the street	I'm sailing right behind
When evening falls so hard	Like a bridge over troubled water
I will comfort you	I will ease your mind
I'll take your part	Like a bridge over troubled water
	I will ease your mind

–Simon & Garfunkel

**Second Sunday in Lent**

**March 16**

*Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18; Psalm 27; Philippians 3:17-4:1;*

*Luke 9:28-36, (37-43a)*

## Monday, March 17

*Psalm 105:1-42; Exodus 33:1-6; Romans 4:1-12*

If you had to bet everything you have on whether there is a God or whether there isn't, which side would get your money and why?

When you look at your face in the mirror, what do you see in it that you most like and what do you see in it that you most deplore?

If you had only one last message to leave to the handful of people who are most important to you, what would it be in twenty-five words or fewer?

Of all the things you have done in your life, which is the one you would most like to undo? Which is the one that makes you happiest to remember?

Is there any person in the world or any cause that, if circumstances called for it, you would be willing to die for?

If this were the last day of your life, what would you do with it?

To hear yourself try to answer questions like these is to begin to hear something not only of who you are, but of both what you are becoming and what you are failing to become. It can be a pretty depressing business all in all, but if sackcloth and ashes are at the start of it, something like Easter may be at the end.

–Frederick Buechner

**Tuesday, March 18**

*Psalm 105:1-42; Numbers 14:10b-24; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13*

These scriptures offer accounts from different times, yet both relate instances of people rebelling against God – giving over to their sinful natures – rebelling against the God who provided, against God who restored, rebelling against God who redeemed.

I am humbled by the depths of God’s amazing love for me – an everlasting love – an unchanging love. In spite of my selfish spirit of pride, and my rebellion and turning away, His love for me remains.

His loving heart is faithful to His ancient choice – His choice to love you and to love me.

The “silver cord” that binds us in this love can never be severed for God’s love will never cease.

In giving of Himself for us, we have an immutable Savior, a precious Savior who loves us without measure, without beginning and without end.

Thanks be to God for this beautiful, Amazing Love.



## Wednesday, March 19

*Psalm 105:1-42; 2 Chronicles 20:1-22; Luke 13:22-31*

Luke 13 brings us along as Jesus journeys toward Jerusalem, and His teaching grows urgent: “Strive to enter through the narrow door” (v. 24). This door is not wide or easy, and entry requires repentance, humility, and faith. He warns many will presume they belong in God’s kingdom only to be left with weeping and gnashing of teeth. Yikes!

It seems the price for entry through the narrow door is high. Am I living a comfortable, presumptuous life? Jesus doesn’t want to know if we know of Him. He wants to know that we know Him.

Perhaps the entirety of Lent is us knocking on our own narrow doors. Are we striving daily to enter? Have we surrendered to Christ, or are we relying on our own merit? Lent is a season of repentance—a time to turn from sin and draw near to Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6).

We can take comfort that Easter shines through this warning. Through his death and resurrection, Jesus hands us a key, and by His grace, we can walk through, not by our strength, but by His. As we journey toward the cross and an empty tomb, may we cling to Christ, who transforms warning into invitation and judgment into eternal life.

**Thursday, March 20**

*Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 3:19-30; Revelation 2:8-11*

Change and Renewal

Isaiah 55:1-9

Biblical scholars believe that Chapter 55 was addressed to the Hebrew exiles who were returning to Israel following the Babylonian captivity. The horrors of captivity cannot be denied, but out of despair and cultural trauma grew a renewed, more resilient faith. Since the focal point of Hebrew religion had been the temple, its destruction by the Babylonians created an almost insurmountable theological challenge. The Hebrews survived by replacing the ritualistic focus of the temple with the rise of local scribes, who recorded and interpreted scripture; with the increased authority of local rabbis, who modeled and espoused how best to live as a Jew; and with the synagogue becoming the place for study and focus on the scriptures. Despite the newfound freedoms and excitement of returning to their homeland, there were surely many habits formed during the years of exile that had to be curbed. The prophet exhorts the people to refocus the concepts and experiences of abundant life learned in Babylonia toward reclaiming the higher ways and thinking of God. Change in organization and a new understanding of God's covenant relationship was the order of the day – "seek the Lord while he may be found."

**Friday, March 21**

*Psalm 63:1-8; Daniel 12:1-4; Revelation 3:1-6*

Think of your heart and mind as a painter's palette and every new day has a fresh, blank page. Your brain tells you that you are the artist and have the ability to paint your thoughts and deeds as your personal message on an empty canvas.

We make bold brush strokes of light paint on our blank page. As the day progresses, we have aches or pains; an unexpected situation, our palette gets a big splash of red. Then we have hills and valleys; our canvas gets more paint: dark blue, green, black, grey, with only a little bit of yellow.

If we hand our brush to God, soon, we will be amazed that the dark colors have lightened, the yellows of the sunlight stream in through the now fluffy, white clouds; the grey skies have turned a beautiful blue and your heart is smiling. Your brain (attitude) is now calm, peaceful and clear.

Dear Lord, please help us to see each day as an empty canvas. Take our hand, guide our thoughts and deeds. You, God alone, are the Artist, we are the brush and paint waiting for you, Our Heavenly Father, to guide our every stroke. Please, Lord God, help me make each day beautiful. Amen.

## Saturday, March 22

*Psalm 63:1-8; Isaiah 5:1-7; Luke 6:43-45*

Psalm 63 is a song of David. He is in the Judean desert fleeing King Saul. While in a time and place of great fear and stress, he praises and worships God:

O God, you are my God, I seek you,  
My soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you;  
as in a dry and weary land where there is no water;  
So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary,  
Beholding your power and glory.  
Because your steadfast love is better than life,  
My lips will praise you.  
So I will bless you as long as I live,  
I will lift up my hands and call on your name.

While we may not be fleeing danger, there are times in our lives when we experience fears, disappointments, and worries. Walter Brueggemann said that “Psalm 63 is a Psalm of trust and reorientation to our life in God. It is about longing to worship God while in a difficult situation.” Psalm 63 reminds us that in times of stress and fear we can turn to God, and, as David says, “I will lift up my hands and call on your name.”

**Third Sunday in Lent**  
**March 23**

*Isaiah 55:1-9; Psalm 63:1-8; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9*

**Monday, March 24**

*Psalm 39; Jeremiah 11:1-17; Romans 2:1-11*

“Lord, let me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting my life is.”

–Psalm 39:4

“Life’s too short to wake up with regrets. So love the people who treat you right, forgive the ones who don’t and believe that everything happens for a reason. If you get a chance, take it. If it changes your life, let it. Nobody said it would be easy, they just promised it would be worth it.”

–Dr. Seuss

“There is One God, One Lord, One Faith, One Hope, One Gospel, and ultimately, finally, when we die, we are all going to know what the One Truth that mattered really was. In the meantime, we form opinions, hope convictions, embrace doctrines, and have ideas – all of which grow out of some deep, fundamental central standard that rings truest to us at the center of our soul. When we face life’s murky dilemmas and hard choices, when we have to decide which way to go on ethical questions and social issues for which there is no clear path, it is time to be guided by our central standard. Jesus knew what his was – to love God with all that is in you and love others as much as you love yourself – and he lived by it. And died by it. And, likewise, we should do the same.”

–Chuck Poole, *The Flute Beneath the Gold*

“We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.”

–T. S. Eliot

O God, lead us toward inner peace and rest; and be in our hearts and minds to enlarge them and keep them ever-growing; and, O God, as we go into the day’s life, guide us and help us to walk unafraid until tomorrow comes.

**Tuesday, March 25**

*Psalm 39; Ezekiel 17:1-10; Romans 2:12-16*

It's one of my favorite phrases related to rainwater harvesting: induced meandering. The premise is simple: Whenever you can encourage rainwater run off to slow down, to take a more circuitous route, to wind its way down a hill rather than rush full speed toward the gutter, storm drain or gully below, you increase the likelihood for induced meandering—and the likelihood that this runoff can become a resource rather than a nuisance.

Implemented thoughtfully, this induced meandering can provide irrigation to soil, plants and trees long after the rains have passed. The benefits are both immediate and long-term.

Lent offers us an opportunity to slow down, to meander rather than to rush, to allow life to sink in a bit, to find ways to go deeper and not always stay on the surface. A time to observe, to pay attention, and then to act—and in so doing provide the space to move from rush to replenish. When we take this practice seriously, we plant its blessings so that they benefit not only us in our lives for this season, but also extend to the world around us.

–Erin Dunigan, “The Induced Meandering of the Lenten Season,” from Krista Tippett’s ON BEING ([onbeing.org](http://onbeing.org))

## Wednesday, March 26

*Psalm 39; Numbers 13:17-27; Luke 13:18-21*

What're we to do for forty days and forty nights?

Sit and suffer in silence?

Maybe.

There are, I'm sure, a myriad of reasons why we would choose to interrupt our lives for these six weeks to pray more fervently, fast from food and festivities, and give alms more thoughtfully.

I cannot tell you The Reason.

But I can imagine.

In this time between winter and spring, as the days lengthen, perhaps we're in our gestation period, like the mustard seed buried deep in the loamy soil. We rest quietly through the last dark days of winter, waiting for spring. When the light comes, we've had the chance to send roots deep, to ground us. We're prepared to grow tall, to reach our branches far and wide. To offer shade and solace and sustenance to those who need it most.

And if we do it together, sitting still in silence, preparing to grow, then when the sun arrives, our branches will weave together to shelter the weary and weathered.

Perhaps Lent is the time we need to rest in the dark and empty ourselves out so we will be ready to fill ourselves with light and spread our arms wide.



**Thursday, March 27**

*Psalm 32; Joshua 4:1-13; 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:5*

The late Tony Campolo wrote a book entitled, *It's Friday, but Sunday's Comin'* in which he balances the tension between struggling with pain while maintaining hope. The title itself serves as inspiration for our lives as people of faith.

The truth is that all of us will face challenging times in our lives—the scary diagnosis, a broken relationship, financial woes, etc. According to Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, however, these are “momentary afflictions.” Admittedly, it is hard to see beyond the present when difficulties arise, even when we are promised these difficulties are only temporary. Yet, through it all, we are encouraged not to lose heart.

Here in the middle of Lent, we are fast approaching Holy Week in which we remember Jesus' own suffering and death. While we know Sunday's glorious resurrection will come, we cannot get to Easter without going through Good Friday. The same is true for our struggles in life. We cannot avoid the tough times, but we are promised that something glorious is ahead.

Do not lose heart, dear friends. It's Friday, but Sunday's Coming!

## Friday, March 28

*Psalm 32; Joshua 4:14-24; 2 Corinthians 5:6-15*

Lent's forty-day length is based on the days of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness. Why would Jesus surrender himself to forty days of fasting before facing the challenges awaiting him? As a divine, no earthly trial would be too great for him. But he was also human. Perhaps we can understand his struggle with the horrors he would be facing. We can identify with the fear and concern in his human psyche. Did he feel the need to confess the uncertainty he may have experienced as Satan challenged the path God had laid out for him? We don't know. But we do know the need to confess our own spiritual uncertainties and ask for forgiveness, seeking to become more Christlike. Thanks to God's steadfast love, we will be forgiven and can grow stronger. The practice of the Lenten season not only commemorates Jesus' sacrifice and resurrection, but also serves as a lesson in how to face the unthinkable in our own lives. We pray for God's assistance at such times while also seeking the strength and comfort we need to face the challenges we too must go through.

## Saturday, March 29

*Psalm 32; Exodus 32:7-14; Luke 15:1-10*

As we cross the halfway point of our 40-day Lenten journey, we reflect on the past: the paschal lamb whose blood was shed to mark freedom and begin a 40-year journey to the promised land.

We reflect on Jesus, baptized in the Jordan River, tested in the desert for 40 days, and sent to be our Shepherd.

Colin Neill writes:

The Good Shepherd. He seeks out the lost, pursues the missing, and comes to our aid. He will find us and carry us home on his shoulders, the same shoulders that carried the cross up to Calvary. Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd who came into this world to save sinners, and in his arms, he gathers us all back into the fold, into the house of God where there will be immense joy and cause for celebration because repentance isn't just turning away from sin; it is being found by the one who obtained victory over it. It is being claimed by the One who is eternal and embraced by the One who rules over all.

And so Christ says to us, "Welcome home, son. Welcome home, daughter. You were once lost, but now you are found." Amen.

–Colin Neill, North American Lutheran  
Seminary, MDiv 2020

**Fourth Sunday in Lent**  
**March 30**

*Joshua 5:9-12; Psalm 32; 2 Corinthians 5:16-21; Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32*

## Monday, March 31

*Psalm 53; Leviticus 23:26-41; Revelation 19:1-8*

Seven times. The Lord tells Moses that the Israelites are to rest and do no work seven times in our Leviticus passage. It's a message we hear at least as often today as well, enough that it rolls right past us as we hurry on along. God was giving the people of Israel an annual cycle of holidays to follow, creating a rhythm of resting and rejoicing to be woven into their daily lives and work. This schedule created time for reflection and worship, time that perhaps they wouldn't have carved out otherwise. Some of this was done alone or at home, some was together—rejoicing, loudly, in the goodness of God at the temple. God knows we need both quiet and community. And that sometimes we won't take the time for either until forced to. Thich Nhat Hanh reminds us, "Whenever animals in the forest are wounded, they rest. They know it's the best way for their body to heal. The wisdom of stopping and healing is still alive in animals, but we human beings have lost the capacity to rest." Lent lends us the opportunity to rest, to reflect, to heal, and finally to rejoice together in the goodness of God.

## Tuesday, April 1

*Psalm 53; Leviticus 25:1-19; Revelation 19:9-10*

Four weeks in; two weeks to go.

Apologies to songwriters Bobby Scott and Bob Russell, but the Lenten road can seem long with many winding turns.

Reflecting on our life and repenting of our shortcomings is not always brief, pain free, or a joyful exercise. Yet, we continue to make an effort. Sometimes, we just substitute dietary restrictions (giving up chocolate and/or wine) and other times we substitute lifestyle changes as our way of reflecting and repenting.

But through it all, we pray. We always pray.

We pray daily. We pray for ourselves. We pray for specific people. We pray for the world. We pray for our church. We pray for forgiveness. We pray. And,

It is in our prayers we lose our fear.

It is in our prayers we find humility.

It is in our prayers we discover joy.

It is in our prayers that we find our healing.

It is in our prayers that we find that we are God's people.

And it is in our prayers that when we go to God, we are reconciled.

## Wednesday, April 2

*Psalm 53; 2 Kings 4:1-7; Luke 9:10-17*

What good can one imperfect person do? Reading Psalm 53, we might conclude none. Especially if we consider sinning synonymous with denying God. And, at its core, isn't it?

2 Kings 4:1-7

Here, we find a widow grieving the loss of her husband and facing the possibility that her sons will be sold into slavery to pay off debts. Having faith God will provide, she asks Elisha for help. Elisha instructs her to reach out to her community to borrow empty jars. Her sons gather the jars, God multiplies the oil, and Elisha tells her to sell it to pay debts and sustain her family.

The woman is grieving. The woman has faith. The woman asks for help. The woman and her sons take action. The community offers what they can. God multiplies it.

Luke 9:10-17

This time it is Jesus who is grieving. He retreats to solitude, but the crowds find him. He teaches and heals them. The disciples suggest sending the crowds away to eat. But Jesus has faith in God's provisions.

Jesus is grieving. Jesus has faith. Jesus and the disciples take action. The community offers what they can. God multiplies it.

In closing, we ask again, what good can one imperfect person do? I can grieve or reflect. I can have faith in God. I can ask for help. I can offer what I can. And I can give it to God.

## Thursday, April 3

*Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:1-7; Philippians 2:19-24*

Sowing in Tears, Shouting in Joy

Psalm 126

Tears and joy come unordered, often unexpected, but always a part of what we call life. How we wish we could find a way to stay in the wonderful times and avoid the weary times.

The dark days of Lent can bring times of tears because life has made us weary and because we have brought weariness upon ourselves.

Life is not fair. Some of that which crushes us we will never understand. When our feelings fall short, we must trust the One in whom we place our faith to sustain us.

Tears may come as we reflect upon that in our lives which is not pleasing to God. Confession is hard, but only the truth blesses. The blessing of confession is that “[i]f we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive us our sin and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9).

The Psalmist writes, one day we “shall come home with shouts of joy.” In the meantime, we can rejoice in the Lord always because God is with us, for us, and ever surrounding us with grace and love.



## Friday, April 4

*Psalm 126; Isaiah 43:8-15; Philippians 2:25-3:1*

We are still on the Purple Path with two weeks to go before Easter. I really just want to anticipate Easter and the return of Alleluias and sing songs that are joyful and think about resurrection and new life. But the Purple Path remains our calling. Though I find Lent difficult, I acknowledge that it is instructive to walk this hard road, to rely on nothing but hope, and to think about Jesus weeping over Jerusalem, teaching every day at the temple and returning to the Mount of Olives each night. I think of the despair and sadness he must have felt knowing surely that betrayal was at hand by these people that he loved in this place that he loved. I expect that Jesus talked to God a great deal in those days, and I expect that Lent is a good reminder for us to do the same. Slow down (yes we can!), contemplate what holds when every comfort is gone, read scripture more carefully, pray with heart and mind, fully present to God.

To Lend ourselves to Lent is perhaps not as easy or as comfortable as Advent or the joyfulness of Easter morning, but it can be a season for restoration and a new understanding of what it means to rely on God.

Barbara Brown Taylor says Lent can be “Forty days to remember what it is like to live by the Grace of God alone and not by what we can supply for ourselves.”

Amen.

## Saturday, April 5

*Psalm 126; Exodus 12:21-27; John 11:45-57*

Recently we followed the news of tragic fires in Los Angeles neighborhoods; we mourned with hundreds who ran with their children from their burning homes and carried what they could in one hand. With only ash remaining where their houses once were, they mourned. They worried about where they would live and what might lie ahead.

Such despair reminds us of the people of God mentioned in Psalm 126. Years before, when they were captured, they left their homes in tears, and, for years, returning home felt like a dream to them. But, once restored to their land, they laughed, praised God, and asked God also to restore the rest of the exiles.

This psalm echoes our emotions during Lent. Remembering the suffering of Jesus, our hearts are heavy. But we also remember that our hope will be restored at the resurrection, and once again we will rejoice in our knowledge that God is with us.

We pray that those who have lost so much, near and far, find a way to start again, that their hope is restored, and that their joy returns.

The psalmist concludes with hope:

May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.  
Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

**Fifth Sunday in Lent**  
**April 6**

*Isaiab 43:16-21; Psalm 126; Philippians 3:4b-14; John 12:1-8*

## Monday, April 7

*Psalm 20; Exodus 40:1-15; Hebrews 10:19-25*

In Exodus 40, God directs Moses, in detail, how he is to set up the tabernacle. Placing the Ark of the Covenant behind a curtain, setting up a table with lamps, one altar with incense and another for burnt offerings, where to place screens and a basin of water.

The tasks at hand were simple and direct, yet created the earthly dwelling of God—a place they could see and touch and enter into. Moses was directed to construct this place and anoint the articles and people with oil—establishing rituals and making meaning in the small, careful tasks of setting up this holy space.

Lord, here we are.

Grinding the coffee beans,  
finding the lost shoe,  
and brushing down the cowlick.  
Sharing small kindnesses,  
folding laundry,  
then sweeping up the crumbs of the day.

May we notice your presence in this season's bright sadness.

Blessed are the details.

Blessed are the rituals.

Blessed are the small, holy tasks of our day. Amen.

## Tuesday, April 8

*Psalm 20; Judges 9:7-15; 1 John 2:18-28*

Break open the day.

You are not  
meant to remain encased  
in a frail  
shell of perceived  
safety -

secure, but aloof  
removed  
from the goings on.

No.

You are called to  
Emerge  
wobbly and trembling  
into the *What Is* of every blessed  
day  
and offer  
*What If...* and *This, too, can be....*

You are formed  
by One whose Sound forms all else  
*and loves each expression down to  
iotas.*

You are shaped to grow beyond  
comfort or stasis  
and love as you were fashioned, as  
well -

with generous abandon,  
with wonder, with ardor, steadfast  
with full-hearted clarity and  
love-song crooning.

You, dear Soul, dear Body, dear  
Mind,  
are beckoned *each blessed day*  
to Emerge  
with Voice (bold or shaking)  
speaking Truth and Welcome,  
with Sight bearing witness and  
honoring *Life-fullness*,  
with Action that heals and advocates  
and nurtures,  
with Discernment: clarifying,  
centering,  
with Empathy refusing rejection,  
disconnection,  
with Hope that Abides and will not  
abate -  
Persistent. Pervading.

The shell is too small to remain, too  
frail to sustain.

Break open the day, wee Beloved  
One.

Emerge to the work ahead, the Love  
*becoming.*

-Holly C. Benzenhafer  
1-29-2025

## Wednesday, April 9

*Psalm 20; Habakkuk 3:2-15; Luke 18:31-34*

### God's Majesty – Man's Frailty

In the short book of Habakkuk, we find a conversation with the minor prophet and God. Habakkuk complains to God, then God answers. In Chapter 3, Habakkuk offers a prayer praising God's majesty and faithfulness. Verse 4 reads, "His splendor was like the sunrise, rays flashed from His hand."

Walking outside helps me clear my head. Walking at dawn as the first light begins to consume the darkness is miraculous. Every morning the night gradually turns into day. This is an everyday miracle, available to all. Even if you are not an early riser, Habakkuk's prayer reminds us that we don't have to go far to bask in God's splendor; we are all surrounded by it. All we need to do is look or go outside and be enveloped in the daylight of the sun. Even amid lands destroyed by floods, fire, tornadoes, or hurricanes, the sun always rises. The sunrise is a forever reminder of my need for God. It frames God's majesty with my frailty and dependence on God. In its splendor, radiance, and majesty, the rising sun (and rising Son) gives us hope.

## Thursday, April 10

*Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 53:10-12; Hebrews 2:1-9*

Well, there it is. Once again we are simply instructed to listen very intentionally and pay the most careful attention lest we drift away from Christ's teachings and miss out on a great blessing. God shows us by signs, wonders, and various miracles. Are we quiet enough, humble enough, and careful enough to hear and see? What better gift than the season of Lent to help us on this journey. There will be the boisterous, joyful, corporate rejoicing on Easter Sunday. Until then, there is quiet and solitude, enabling us to listen carefully and discern thoughtfully.

O Lord and Master of my life,

A spirit of idleness, curiosity, ambition, and idle talking; give me not.

But a spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love bestow upon me,

Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord King: grant me to see mine own failings, and not to condemn others;

for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages.

Amen.

–Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem the Syrian

## Friday, April 11

*Psalm 31:9-16; Isaiah 54:9-10; Hebrews 2:10-18*

“But I trust in you, O Lord;  
I say, ‘You are my God.’  
My times are in your hand:  
Deliver me from the hand of my enemies and persecutors.  
Let your face shine upon your servant;  
Save me in your steadfast love.”

–Psalm 31: 14-16

“For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord, who has compassion on you.”

–Isaiah 54:10

David and Isaiah both give us the word “steadfast” as a reminder of the constant, abiding, faithful, unflinching, and unwavering presence of God available to us. At the time that David wrote the thirty-first Psalm, he was most likely fleeing Saul. Often we find ourselves running from something that feels as a threat that is all too regularly of our own making. Remembering to rest in that steadfast presence is the first step we must take to the claiming of that covenant of peace.

### “An Examen of Consciousness”

Spirit of the living God, you have been with me today,  
And I thank you.  
There was sunrise and sunset, and I am grateful for both,  
Family and friends are gifts of your grace.  
The creativity to envision new possibilities and  
the strength to bring them into reality are signs  
of your action in my life.  
Thank you, Lord God, for being with me today. Amen.

–Richard Foster



## Saturday, April 12

*Psalm 31:9-16; Leviticus 23:1-8; Luke 22:1-13*

*The Message* Translation

U2's Bono and *The Message's* Eugene Peterson mused that the Psalms of the Bible have raw, brutal honesty missing in our own prayers. The Psalms are not just "being nice before God" but rather "sung with human emotion" for God's ears and heart to hear.

Read today's Psalm in that way!

“Be KIND to me God--  
I'm in DEEP, DEEP trouble AGAIN.  
I have CRIED my eyes out;  
I feel HOLLOW inside.  
my life LEAKS away, GROAN by GROAN;  
my years fade out in SIGHS.  
My troubles have WORN ME OUT,  
turned my bones to POWDER.  
To my enemies I'm a MONSTER;  
I'm RIDICULED by the neighbors.  
My friends are HORRIFIED;  
they CROSS THE STREET to avoid me.  
They want to BLOT ME FROM MEMORY,  
FORGET ME like a corpse in a grave,  
DISCARD me like a broken dish in the trash.  
The street-talk gossip has me INSANE!  
Behind locked doors they PLOT  
how to RUIN me for good.  
DESPERATE, I throw myself on you:  
You are my God!  
Hour by hour I place my days in your hand,  
SAFE from the hands OUT TO GET ME.  
Warm me, YOUR SERVANT, with a smile;  
  
SAVE ME BECAUSE YOU LOVE ME.”

## **Palm Sunday**

**April 13**

*Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Luke 19:28-40; Isaiah 50:4-9a;*

*Psalm 31:9-16; Philippians 2:5-11; Luke 23:1-49*

## Monday of Holy Week

April 14

*Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11*

With striking imagery, the iconic reminders of God's constant care and remembrance recur in these scriptures that continually remind us of God's plan for us, His people. Therefore we are encouraged to sing a new song to the Lord. God has now ventured a new covenant, a new prescription for living. The new song is one of hope. While our sinful lives have wrought failures, God brings us hope for new living.

In our home are framed reminders of an ancient mode of worship which requires interpretation in today's world. These are called "illuminated manuscripts" from the 6th century. Years ago, Marilyn's sister found these at a yard sale in Florida. I have learned that these were from early chant collections in European cathedrals. Priests chanted while gathered in the middle of the chapel floor in a small circle, singing from a collection called a Breviary. The manuscripts were inscribed by hand on both sides of a sheepskin page and retained in a bound collection of chants kept for each of the church services.

The priests regarded these illuminations as works of art. To those of us who were graduate students in medieval music classes, these were unique because each manuscript had its own integrity and value.

For us, God's worshipers, these documents have their own intrinsic value, just as our lives and souls have value to God. A great deal of artistic skill went into each manuscript, and each of us possess unique value from God, the Master Creator.

Let us live as unique vessels created by God.

May it be so.

**Tuesday of Holy Week**  
**April 15**

*Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36*

And so the time comes to let you go again  
like Mary at her weeping station  
like Peter in his running shameful cry  
like Mary Magdalene's sad watchful eye  
like the soldier's gasping epiphany  
like Joseph gently laying your body down and releasing you  
into the tomb the darkness the empty unknown.

We would rather hang on to you friend  
and let Simon take the cross as you slip out of line  
catch a taxicab out of town  
and escape into your suburban green lawn hideaway  
where we drop by for a Sunday cookout and a [drink].  
The mosquitoes would hover around us like angels  
    singing "holy, holy, holy"  
    and smell our breath and sweat  
and bite you and draw a blood drop  
and we look at each other and we know now  
as we hang our weeping heads  
that nothing ever gets done in clinging comfort.

And so the time comes to let you go again  
and let God do the divine metamorphosis  
of every weeping, shameful, sad, gasping, gentle release  
into the tomb of darkness where you meet us in emptiness  
where when we let you go we let ourselves go also  
as we fall into the earthy black of surrender  
and wait, wait, wait for your next creation out of nothing  
your unexpected goodness bleeding through  
your resurrection of everything we released to you  
even ourselves in our fear of you and your mysterious ways.

-Michael Coffee, "Passiontide"

## Wednesday of Holy Week

April 16

*Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32*

“Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”

–Hebrews 12: 2

Lent is a time of penitence. Lent and particularly Holy Week can also be times that deepen our spirits. As we have moved from the ashes of Lent’s beginning toward the days ahead, we hope that our faith-like embers might be rekindled. Michelangelo’s poem expresses such hope. May this Holy Week be a renewal of our spirits.

Only through fire can the smith pull and stretch  
Metal into the shape of his design.

Only through fire can the artist reach  
Pure gold which only flames refine.

Nor can the phoenix rare itself remake  
Unless it first be burnt. . . . .

The fire of which I speak has brought salvation

I find in it new powers and restoration

Although I seemed already with the dead,

Since by fire nature reaches up to heaven

I may, through it, be reconciled, forgiven,

For it must surely bear me overhead.

–From Sonnet 59

## Maundy Thursday

April 17

*Exodus 12:1-4, 5-10, 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19;*

*1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35*

We're not including foot washing as a part of the service tonight. You can relax. You don't have to worry that anyone will see that toe you think is ugly or that scar you got from some risky childhood stunt. Few among us really want to be that *known* in worship – our bare feet hanging out for all the world to see. Which is too bad because just hearing about the act that marks this night doesn't go far enough to communicate the depth of what Christ did. The humility of bending, touching, smelling through it all. The intimacy of holding in his hands bare foot after bare foot. I wonder if he looked deep into each person's eyes while he washed them. Maybe smiling as wide as a proud parent when he considered all the places those feet had followed behind him. Knowing the feet of his disciples had so much further yet to travel to enact God's good news all around the world. . . This is the act that defines tonight. The mark of the new command he gives to us all. The towel and basin still prominent in the room, Jesus says: "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. This is the way all will know you are mine" (John 13:34-35). Bending, touching, holding tenderly – as if the most precious treasure. This is the mark of one who bears his name. That night, that last fate-filled night, Jesus preaches a silent sermon as he bends. Touches. Washes them all – including Judas, who, according to the gospel of John, still is in the room.

–Jule M. Nyhuis, "Bread on Our Journey"

## Good Friday

April 18

*Isaiah 52:13-53:12; Psalm 22; Hebrews 10:16-25; John 18:1-19:42*

The Lenten path has finally led us here: the depths of despair. We knew the road would lead here, just as Jesus knew, but it doesn't keep us from joining Jesus and the Psalmist in crying:

“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.”

Jesus also knew, just as we do, that the next three verses are coming:

“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.”

These verses are embers, but even they cannot keep darkness at bay. Knowing morning is coming, we still must wade through the night.

## **Holy Saturday**

**April 19**

*Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8;  
John 19:38-42*

As I write these words for Holy Saturday Vigil on an early January morning, my faith is fanned by our Christian hope recognizing that Jesus was born into this world, lived among us as human, died an excruciating death so that we could be redeemed, and rose again in victorious glory on Easter morning. That is why we keep vigil. We place our hope in Jesus Christ who not only rose on the third day but saved those of us who believe from death itself. Birdy, Elizabeth, and Jo Ann ... I know they are whole and restored to fullness with God because of this promise. Keeping vigil through the sad, lonely days of mourning and grief results in the dawning of a bright new day. We must not ever lose sight of our Christian hope! We must keep vigil because for all the Holy Saturdays of grief in our lives, there will always come the dawn of Easter morning. That is the promise and hope God gives us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

If we can just wait until tomorrow, then morning will break and the choir will once again sing with joy, "Christ the Lord is risen today... Hallelujah!"

January 11, 2025  
Old Capitol Inn Graveyard Shift  
Keeping Vigil ... for Hope after all does "Spring Eternal"



The Worship and Music Committee offers *A Lenten Journey 2025* for meditation and reflection during this season of Lent. We are deeply grateful for the gifts of creative expression shared by the following members and friends:

Introduction	Marty Kelly	March 28	Max & Diann Arinder
March 5	Anne Brawley	March 29	Lee Boyd
March 6	Crisler Boone	March 31	Elizabeth Quinn
March 7	Brock Ratcliff	April 1	Jeff Wilson
March 8	Kelley Williams, Jr.	April 2	Amy Thames
March 10	Amanda Milam	April 3	David Raddin
March 11	Luke Dove	April 4	Annette Hitt
March 12	Joe Rankin	April 5	Faye Barham
March 13	Rebecca Wiggs	April 7	Audrey Dickison
March 14	Eddie Mahaffey	April 8	Holly Benzenhafer
March 15	Monica Daniels	April 9	Anna Katherine Scott
March 17	Wilson Stribling	April 10	George Williams
March 18	Pam Steadman	April 11	Cathy Davis
March 19	Kirk Sims	April 12	Neva Ecklund
March 20	Tim Coker	April 14	Richard Joiner
March 21	Jo Ann Welch	April 15	Holly Wiggs
March 22	Anne Guidry	April 16	Jeanne Cook
March 24	Shirley Foster	April 17	Amy Williams
March 25	Mark Wiggs	April 18	Marty Kelly
March 26	Julia Ashley	April 19	Gray Jackson
March 27	Rob Hill	Cover Art	Amy Williams