



Lent

2024

Grace Anglican Community





Journey to Jerusalem

Crucifixions were unspeakably horrible. Death was slow and excruciating.

That is why they took place outside the city walls of Jerusalem, beside a public thoroughfare. The message was clear. If you misbehave (especially if you challenge Rome), this will happen to you.

I wonder how old Jesus was when he first witnessed someone on a cross. How did he react to the brutality, the agony, the blood? What did he think as he heard passersby curse and verbally abuse the man suffering on the cross? Did Jesus linger there? Did he hurry by?

We don't know. But without a doubt the sight of a man dying on a cross must have had a deep impact on him.

Likewise, we don't know when Jesus first understood that he, too, would endure death by crucifixion. We do know, however, this awareness was a burden he carried throughout his ministry.

Did he often think about what death on a cross would be like? In those quiet moments he spent alone with his thoughts and prayers, how prominent was his pending sacrificial death? And what horror would assuming the sin of the world conger up in a sinless person?

There is so much we cannot know or understand. Eventually though, *When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.* (Luke 9:51)

Welcome to our 2024 Journey to Jerusalem. During the season of Lent, this daily devotional will prepare you for those monumental days leading up to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

As always, these devotions have been composed by a talented team of writers: Bill Barr, Emilie and Henry Covert, Sue Dowell, Rita Lanham, Linda Lundquist, Dixie Mattingly, Ekene Ogbunamiri, Michael Popp, Bill Russell, and me. I think you will be both impressed and inspired. Again, as always, our publisher, Bill Russell, deserves credit for making this possible. If you can, tell him how much you appreciate his work on your behalf.

Grace to you,





Ash Wednesday, February 14

¹ “Cry aloud; do not hold back;
lift up your voice like a trumpet;
declare to my people their transgression,
to the house of Jacob their sins.
² Yet they seek me daily
and delight to know my ways,
as if they were a nation that did
righteousness
and did not forsake the judgment of their
God;
they ask of me righteous judgments;
they delight to draw near to God.
³ ‘Why have we fasted, and you see it not?
Why have we humbled ourselves, and you
take no knowledge of it?’
Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your
own pleasure,
and oppress all your workers.
⁴ Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight
and to hit with a wicked fist.
Fasting like yours this day
will not make your voice to be heard on
high.
⁵ Is such the fast that I choose,
a day for a person to humble himself?
Is it to bow down his head like a reed,
and to spread sackcloth and ashes under
him?
Will you call this a fast,
and a day acceptable to the LORD?
⁷ Is it not to share your bread with the
hungry

Isaiah 58:1-12

and bring the homeless poor into your
house;
when you see the naked, to cover him,
and not to hide yourself from your own
flesh?
⁸ Then shall your light break forth like the
dawn,
and your healing shall spring up speedily;
your righteousness shall go before you;
the glory of the Lord shall be your rear
guard.
⁹ Then you shall call, and the Lord will
answer;
you shall cry, and he will say, ‘Here I am.’
If you take away the yoke from your midst,
the pointing of the finger, and speaking
wickedness,
¹⁰ if you pour yourself out for the hungry
and satisfy the desire of the afflicted,
then shall your light rise in the darkness
and your gloom be as the noonday.
¹¹ And the LORD will guide you continually
and satisfy your desire in scorched places
and make your bones strong;
and you shall be like a watered garden,
like a spring of water,
whose waters do not fail.
¹² And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;
you shall raise up the foundations of many
generations;
you shall be called the repairer of the
breach,
the restorer of streets to dwell in.

If you devote time to digesting fully this lengthy scolding you will reap second thoughts about entering a “traditional” Lent, a time normally given to *bowing down our heads* as *we spread the sackcloth and ashes* of whatever we give up—chocolate, wine? —*under us* so to imagine ourselves acceptable to God. But God, through his prophet, here makes clear that what he desires from his people is not our willful discomfort, acts of at best temporary humility or worse mere pretense.

Rather, God wants something else, and Isaiah spells it out clearly too. And those *bonds of wickedness* he begins with are not our neighbor’s! Rather, *we* are the ones to *loose* them, to *undo the straps of our yoke*, for *we* are *the oppressed*! We are the ones to break every yoke *we* wear that excludes the *hungry*, the *homeless*, the *naked*, and the outcasts in our own families.

That, dear ones, is the Lent God desires for us, a Lent that bears his light thru his people to this dark world we make, a Lent that heals *us* of our hard, “self-righteous” hearts, so that his righteousness may go before us while his mighty glory protects us from behind, for it evokes the same hostility from his Son’s enemies as it re-presents him to the same stubborn, wicked humanity.

And when we cry to him in fear of the contagion, he will answer.





Journey to Jerusalem

So, this Lent let's stop *the pointing of the finger* and *speaking wickedness* of the other. Let the gloom of our false Lents become *as the noonday*. Let our God *guide us continually and satisfy our desire, make our bones strong, make us into watered gardens whose waters do not fail*.

Up for it?

*Lord God, make us to be your repairers of the breach, restorers of streets to dwell in.
Amen.*





Thursday, February 15

Psalm 103:8-14

**⁸ The LORD is merciful and gracious,
slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
⁹ He will not always chide,
nor will he keep his anger forever.
¹⁰ He does not deal with us according to our sins,
nor repay us according to our iniquities.
¹¹ For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him;
¹² as far as the east is from the west,
so far does he remove our transgressions from us.
¹³ As a father shows compassion to his children,
so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him.
¹⁴ For he knows our frame;
he remembers that we are dust.**

For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

We are dust and to dust we shall return. Death is the logical conclusion in a fallen world, and Ash Wednesday guides our attention to, well, ashes. Ashes are what's left of our mortal bodies either by cremation or organic deterioration. It's the end, right?

Yet there is a paradox in the supernatural realm, for death leads to new life in Christ! Lent is a time of communion with our Lord as he nears the end of his humanity and earthly ministry. We can go deep into the intimacy of his pain and suffering leading up to the crucifixion and resurrection. During this time of reflection, we come closer to our own sin and the atonement that only Christ offers. Through his humanity, he knows us perfectly, loves us perfectly.

Facing the reality of our sin is daunting, so many look away or deny it, ignoring both God and scripture. During Lent, we share with other believers in examining our hearts and minds under the steadfast love and compassion of our Father, knowing that with true repentance we can lay our abominations in the light before him.

We trust the Lord to keep his promise to remove our transgressions and not *repay us according to our iniquities*. The words of today's Psalm lessen the sting of facing the corruption of our own humanity. We are not alone but are part of the communion of believers with whom we can share the fullness of our life in Christ without judgment or fear.

What tremendous freedom this brings!

*Thank you, Lord, that you are ever present, and we can come to you with anything and everything. It is a joy to know you are Perfect Love. Give us grace to grow into your will and follow your ways.
Amen.*





Friday, February 16

2 Corinthians 5:20-6:10

²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

¹ Working together with him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain. ² For he says,

“In a favorable time I listened to you,
and in a day of salvation I have helped you.”

Behold, now is the favorable time; behold, now is the day of salvation. ³ We put no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry; ⁴ but as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way: by great endurance, in afflictions, hardships, calamities, ⁵ beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger; ⁶ by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love; ⁷ by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left; ⁸ through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise. We are treated as impostors, and yet are true; ⁹ as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold, we live; as punished, and yet not killed; ¹⁰ as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, yet possessing everything.

We are called to be ambassadors for Christ, and now is the *favorable time* to live into that calling. We see the pain of this world through endless wars, poverty, hardship, confusion, and I could go on. The harvest is plentiful, and this world needs hope more than ever. It is our calling and responsibility to partner with God to do the work of the Kingdom and present this hope.

So, what is holding you back? Jesus didn't wait to send his disciples out until he left them. As they were learning under him, they were being sent out as they went through each village. Many rejected them. Many rejoiced with them. They failed and stumbled but succeeded as well. The results don't matter; what matters is we try, and God will do the rest.

So, what are you afraid of with God standing behind you?

Seriously, what is holding you back? Pray into it. Ask God for confidence and support. And try it out as you are learning like the disciples did.

*God, give me the confidence to be an ambassador for Christ. Lord, lead my steps as I go and illuminate what's in my path. Help me to share your hope.
Amen.*





Saturday, February 17

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

- ¹ **"Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven.**
- ² **Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**
- ⁵ **And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ⁶ But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**
- ¹⁶ **And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. ¹⁷ But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, ¹⁸ that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.**
- ¹⁹ **Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.**

Hypocrites

Did you notice that Jesus used the word "hypocrites" three times in these verses? Whenever Jesus repeated himself like that, he was making an important point. We need to pay attention.

Perhaps a definition is in order. The word hypocrite is taken from the world of Greek theater, where sometimes actors would wear masks. The one wearing the mask was known as a hypocrite.

When Jesus used that word, he was describing people who were pretending to be something they were not. In this case, he was referring to people who helped the needy, prayed, and fasted to draw attention to themselves and to receive praise. They were showing off.

Jesus strongly warns, *"you must not be like the hypocrites."* (Matthew 6:5)

Lesson one: Nobody likes a showoff, especially God.

Secret

Did you notice that Jesus used the word "secret" four times. Again, this repetition is significant.

Initially, one might think that Jesus was saying that our relationship with God is private, just between God and me. Elsewhere though, Jesus said *Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.* (Matthew 5:16). Clearly, some things are intended to be private (like helping the poor, prayer and fasting) and some are not.

Lesson two: God sees and hears everything we say and do.

Reward

The key word in this passage, "reward," is used seven times. It contrasts two kinds of compensation: worldly and eternal. Hypocrites perform for the praise of others. Acclaim is their reward. By way of contrast, Jesus encourages his followers to *lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven* (Matthew 6:20) by seeking to please God, not other people. We aren't told that those treasures will be. But it will be fun to find out.

Lesson three: Seek treasures in heaven (they last longer).





*Heavenly Father, give us wisdom to think and act with eternity in mind.
Amen.*





First Sunday, February 18

Genesis 9:8-17

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, ⁹ “Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your offspring after you, ¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the livestock, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark; it is for every beast of the earth. ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.” ¹² And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: ¹³ I have set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh. And the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶ When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷ God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

I wonder how long it took Noah and his family to not be fearful of rain. They had just been through a horrific storm—lasting 40 days—and the waters flooded the earth for 150 days. All in all, Noah and his family spent just over a year on the ark. That’s a long time.

God delivered them from the flood’s devastation, and they worshiped him. God then established His covenant that never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth. Do you think Noah then demolished the ark, thinking, “Well, we’re not ever going to need this again”?

Every time it rained, were Noah and his family huddled together eagerly awaiting the sky to clear and earnestly seeking to see God’s rainbow? Perhaps initially they did. However, God proved Himself faithful to them, and likely, over time, as they gained faith in God’s promise, perhaps the novelty of seeing the rainbow wore off. It became “commonplace” to them.

In our everyday lives we can become complacent with the things and the ways of God. We know Jesus died on the cross for us and through Him we have eternal life—thanks be to God! —but we become comfortable with the forgiveness of our sin and need to be reminded of God’s faithful, loving, sacrificial, grace-filled, merciful promise in Jesus. Lent is a time to look at the cross and remember, with humility and thanksgiving, God’s everlasting covenant with us.

O God of Covenant, faithful to fulfill Your promises, awaken my heart and mind this Lenten season to Your mercy and grace displayed on the cross. Forgive my sin, especially when I take Your salvation for granted, and lead me to everlasting life.
Amen.





Monday, February 19

Psalm 25:1-5

¹ To you, O LORD, I lift up my soul.

² O my God, in you I trust;

let me not be put to shame;

let not my enemies exult over me.

³ Indeed, none who wait for you shall be put to shame;

they shall be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

⁴ Make me to know your ways, O LORD;

teach me your paths.

⁵ Lead me in your truth and teach me,

for you are the God of my salvation;

for you I wait all the day long.

I ran across a song by Suzy Hamblen titled “Teach me, Lord, to Wait.” I wondered if we ever think about learning how to wait. We don’t like to wait. It is not something that we think about every day, but we wait in lines, in traffic, for holidays, etc. We also wait for circumstances and conflicts to be resolved.

Psalm 37:7 says, *Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!*

While we wait, we can trust that God is in control and rest in the knowledge that *we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.* (Romans 8:28)

Are we willing to wait for God’s guidance and direction? When we must wait, we learn a little more about trust, patience, and obedience. God knows the end of the story. So, do we wait with a trusting and submissive heart, willing to learn and be obedient?

Gracious and holy Father, please give me intellect to understand you, reason to discern you, diligence to seek you, wisdom to find you, a spirit to know you, a heart to meditate upon you, ears to hear you, eyes to see you, a tongue to proclaim you, a way of life pleasing to you, patience to wait for you and perseverance to look for you. Grant me a perfect end, your holy presence, a blessed resurrection, and life everlasting.

Amen.

(Benedict of Nursia)





Tuesday, February 20

Psalm 25:6-10

- ⁶ Remember your mercy, O LORD, and your steadfast love,
for they have been from of old.**
- ⁷ Remember not the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
according to your steadfast love remember me,
for the sake of your goodness, O LORD!**
- ⁸ Good and upright is the LORD;
therefore he instructs sinners in the way.**
- ⁹ He leads the humble in what is right,
and teaches the humble his way.**
- ¹⁰ All the paths of the LORD are steadfast love and faithfulness,
for those who keep his covenant and his testimonies.**

King David, on the moment of his greatest failing, did not hide from God's sight like Adam and Eve did. He chose to lift himself to the Lord and implored Him to remember His mercy and steadfast love. God didn't need a reminder. This is more for David, and I can relate.

I need a reminder that though my sins are many, God's Mercy and Grace are much more. Evidence of His Mercy is made manifest through His words, and I have also experienced them in my life. It was His Grace that found me in the first place. On my own accord, I would still be groveling through the dirt of sin like a pig.

But like a loving father, He welcomed me into His outstretched hands, washed off my sins with the blood of His son, adopted me into His household and made me a co-heir with His son. I am now an heir to salvation. My debts are paid off and I am living in the freedom of His love. My sins and transgressions are forgotten, as if they never happened. That's the Grace of the Lord.

Our world is a fallen one, so there is an ongoing struggle to always remember that God's Grace and Love triumphs our unworthiness. When we totally submit to God, His Holy Spirit indwells in us to instruct, teach, and rebuke us. The Holy Spirit will lead and guide us into the truth of God until we become fruit-producers. Finally, we will confess that the paths of our Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness as we are all witnesses of His great mercy and goodness.

*You sent your only son to pay the penalty for my sins so I can access your Mercy seat with confidence. May I
live in abundance of your Love and Grace in Jesus name.
Amen.*





Wednesday, February 21

Psalm 25:11-15

¹¹ For your name's sake, O LORD,
pardon my guilt, for it is great.
¹² Who is the man who fears the LORD?
Him will he instruct in the way that he should choose.
¹³ His soul shall abide in well-being,
and his offspring shall inherit the land.
¹⁴ The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him,
and he makes known to them his covenant.
¹⁵ My eyes are ever toward the LORD,
for he will pluck my feet out of the net.

Psalm 25 is a prayer of David's for deliverance, guidance, and forgiveness, and it stretches over four days of our Journey to Jerusalem. Not surprisingly, he began his lament (Monday) fretting about his enemies, which, like Jesus, he often made. Unlike Jesus, but very much like us, David willfully made enemies, and by today he asks God to be forgiven for doing so. Note: David recognizes how great his guilt is.

Shifting gears, David eases into the assurance he has of his forgiveness, for he was a man who trusted in the LORD to forgive. He gained his trust as we all gain trust in another—through experience. Jesus, of course, was a man who trusted in the LORD, but he also *is* the LORD who forgives.

David, now free from his guilt, then sees the offer the LORD's forgiveness always reveals, an offer to guide him *in the way that he should choose*, a way of well-being, a way to *inherit* things of permanence, and a *friendship* like no other.

But here David falters in his understanding of God, and it is Jesus who provides us better instruction in the way. David founded his friendship with God on *fear*: to be God's friend as David understood it, we must fear him.

On that Sunday morning towards which we journey together, Jesus revealed a better understanding of God than David could have imagined, than *anyone* could have imagined, to be fair. It was *love* that Jesus brought to them all, a love that declared we have nothing to fear from the true God who forgives our betrayal and violence towards him who is innocent.

*Our eyes are ever toward you, Lord Jesus, for you have plucked our feet out of the net you used to catch us to you.
Amen.*





Thursday, February 22

Psalm 25:16-22

**¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me,
for I am lonely and afflicted.**

**¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged;
bring me out of my distresses.**

**¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my trouble,
and forgive all my sins.**

**¹⁹ Consider how many are my foes,
and with what violent hatred they hate me.**

**²⁰ Oh, guard my soul, and deliver me!
Let me not be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.**

**²¹ May integrity and uprightness preserve me,
for I wait for you.**

**²² Redeem Israel, O God,
out of all his troubles.**

Consider how many are my foes, and with what violent hatred they hate me.

These same words, or the desperation they express, could have come from Jesus to the Father as he struggled in the garden at Gethsemane. During Lent, we direct our will to join with Jesus in his suffering. Lent is not about us—it's about Jesus, and our presence, not our words, is required. It is a call to abandon what we think and feel to join the mind of Christ in his suffering.

For words are simply out of their depth in this instant. Raniero Cantalamessa considers 'Gethsemane reveals "the interior aspect of Jesus' passion: the death of the heart, which precedes and gives meaning to the death of the body. ... Gethsemane signals the deepest depression in the passing of Jesus from this world to the Father."

Truly, Jesus experienced the weight of the world that is "To be pressed down with grief like an olive under a millstone." Even worse, he expressed growing feelings of distance from the Father, the presence He had known for eternity.

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death. (Hebrews 5) Through his suffering, his obedience was made perfect in his father's will.

David's plea to God reminds us that his suffering mirrors all human suffering in times of trouble, distress and affliction. But those who know the Lord can throw their despondency at the foot of the Cross in comforting, full obedience: *Thy will be done.*

*"Consecrate me to thy service, Lord,
by the power of grace divine;
Let my soul look up with a steadfast hope,
and my will be lost in Thine"*





Friday, February 23

1 Peter 3:18-22

¹⁸ For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which he went and proclaimed to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. ²¹ Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.

I always find it funny that in the Old and New Testaments, water has a completely opposite symbolism. In the Old, it mostly represented wrath, destruction, and chaos. Ironically, fire represented more of renewal and rebirth.

Then you go to the New Testament, and water is associated more with life and rebirth than anything else. Just look at today's passage; note the contrast of the flood with Baptism. Peter specifically shifts the tone with *now saves you* when referring to its source of water.

Now honestly, to me, this is something of beauty. God can change things meant for destruction and chaos and turn them into something that does the opposite. God is a God of irony, specifically his humor in my own eyes. Lent is a season that is morbid and dark, yet it is the season of the calendar that changes us for the better. What better irony than this?

So, in what part of your own life has God brought irony from the world's perspective to something beautiful and life-changing from his? I think of the failing of my dream career, something I wanted to do since I was a kid, to now doing something that brings me more joy than I can ever imagine. I wouldn't change it for anything in the world.

This is what God does. Sometimes we need to look upside down or change the eyes we have to see.

*God, you bring renewal where we are dry. You bring to life what feels barren and hopeless. Lord give us eyes to see how you transform and what needs to be transformed in our own lives. Help us to see the beauty of your irony Lord. Give me new eyes.
Amen.*





Saturday, February 24

Mark 1:9-13

⁹ In those days Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan. ¹⁰ And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. ¹¹ And a voice came from heaven, You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased."

¹² The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. ¹³ And he was in the wilderness forty days, being tempted by Satan. And he was with the wild animals, and the angels were ministering to him.

Have you ever been so much in the presence of God that time stood still? You felt so much peace and love that you just wanted to linger in the moment. I hope so. It is a beautiful experience.

One wonders if Jesus experienced something like that when he was baptized in the Jordan River. One wonders if he wanted nothing more than to bask in the serene presence of the Father. Regardless, he didn't have that opportunity because *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.* (v 12.)

Do those words seem odd? The Spirit **drove** Jesus from the security and peace of the Jordan to the hostile, barren wilderness. What was it that compelled Jesus? We don't know what it was. But we do know who it was.

But why?

There is a common misconception among Christians that, if we are faithful followers of Jesus, life will go well for us. Sometimes that is true. But not always. Sometimes we, like Jesus, are driven into the wilderness.

But why?

Shhh! Here's a secret. Or at least something not often mentioned. We grow more as Christians during times of adversity than we do during times of prosperity. Jesus was driven into the wilderness for his benefit. Even in extreme weakness, he proved that he was stronger than Satan. Now that is victorious Christian living!

And that is what times of trial and testing do for us. They reveal our strengths and weaknesses. We are better for it.

James encourages us not to despise or fear the wilderness with these words,

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. (James 1:2-4)

*Lord, whatever it takes, make us more like you.
Amen.*





Second Sunday, February 25

Genesis 22:1-8

¹ After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, “Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”
² He said, “Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.” ³ So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac. And he cut the wood for the burnt offering and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. ⁴ On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place from afar. ⁵ Then Abraham said to his young men, “Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you.” ⁶ And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and laid it on Isaac his son. And he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. ⁷ And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” ⁸ Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.

God blessed Abraham with flocks and herds so great that he and his nephew Lot had to separate because the land could not support them both (Genesis 13). When God called Abraham to take his son Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering, did Abraham take any sheep or goats or bulls from his flocks and herds as a back-up plan? No. He *saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac.*

Abraham had faith that God would *provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering*; he did not try to orchestrate that provision but trusted solely in the Lord.

Even on that last leg of the journey, Abraham again had an opportunity to initiate a back-up plan: he could have taken his donkey with him on the off chance that the donkey would suffice for a substitute burnt offering.

But, no, he did not. He took with him only Isaac, his son, the wood of the burnt offering, the fire, and the knife. He responded in faithful obedience to the Lord. He was willing to give his only son, whom he loved, as an offering to the Lord.

Yes, Abraham deserves to appear in the Faith Hall of Fame in Hebrews chapter 11, and yet, his faithful obedience pales in comparison to the faithful obedience of Jesus Christ on His journey to the cross. *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross* (Philippians 2:8).

God provided for Himself the sacrificial lamb for the sin of the world.

*Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small.
 Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all.
 Amen.*





Monday, February 26

Genesis 22:9-14

⁹ When they came to the place of which God had told him, Abraham built the altar there and laid the wood in order and bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰ Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to slaughter his son. ¹¹ But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." ¹² He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." ¹³ And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns. And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called the name of that place, "The LORD will provide"; as it is said to this day, "On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided."

Considering God's promise to Abraham that he would make a great nation through Isaac, wouldn't you think Abraham would have said, "Whoa, God, I don't think you really mean for me to sacrifice Isaac. What do you really want from me?" But Abraham had faith, believing that God would fulfill his promise even if it required Abraham to do something he really did not want to do.

In the Hebrews 11 passage quoted below, we see that Abraham did not question God at all. He believed that God was able! God would either resurrect Isaac from the dead or provide a substitute for the burnt offering or something else just as miraculous.

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." (Hebrews 11:17-19)

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1)

We also can practice faith in God for all the trials and tribulations of life. Trusting that he is in control and will fulfill his promises to us according to his character in mighty and beautiful ways.

*Almighty God, whose servant Abraham faithfully obeyed your call and rejoiced to see the day of your Son:
Multiply the number of your children by the grace of the Lamb who was slain; that your Church may also
rejoice to see your promise to our father Abraham fulfilled, through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.*





Tuesday, February 27

Psalm 16:1-4

¹ Preserve me, O God, for in you I take refuge.

² I say to the LORD, "You are my LORD;
I have no good apart from you."

³ As for the saints in the land, they are the excellent ones,
in whom is all my delight.

⁴ The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply;
their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out
or take their names on my lips.

I like the way the great Billy Graham described God's preservation: "God's angels often protect his servants from potential enemies." I imagine God's preservation as a parent charging in front of a bullet to deflect it from the child. If our earthly fathers have the sense to protect and shield, how much more will our God of MUCH MORE protect us?

David here in time of difficulty chose to trust in God's preservation. He considered it his place of refuge. We are not strangers to God's promises of preservation as we know by memory such great verses as Isaiah 54:17 *No weapon that is fashioned against you shall succeed....* But when the rubber hits the road, when our expectations and reality oppose each other, do we really trust that God got our back?

I dread news and other social media feeds. The constant bombardment with horrors of wars, terrorism, and human wickedness to one another depresses me to the point of wondering if there is anything worth fighting for. I take comfort in the fact that nothing happening here today is a surprise to God, and it should not be for us either. Jesus told us that all these are beginning of sorrows, as end of the age is almost here.

I don't know where your leanings are, but as for me, I believe that God's ultimate preservation is my hope. Though this earthen vessel of mine experiences pain, trials, and tribulations, I am being transformed into His image, and on that great day, I will join in the feast of the lamb. This is my hope!

I pray we can confidently tell our sufferings, "My Lord that I serve is able to deliver me from this fiery furnace, and even if He chooses not to, I still trust in His preservation."
Amen.





Wednesday, February 28

Psalm 16:5-8

**⁵ The LORD is my chosen portion and my cup;
you hold my lot.**

**⁶ The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;
indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance.**

**⁷ I bless the LORD who gives me counsel;
in the night also my heart instructs me.**

**⁸ I have set the LORD always before me;
because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.**

If you find it hard to trust others, you are not alone. All of us know the pain of betrayal, and many of us have experienced the derision of mockery that is often at bad faith's right hand. A few of us know the hostility even our dearest can unleash on us without warning, without cause and with serious intent to harm. Fewer still have found that intent is murderous.

Such lessons regarding trust in others settle very deep within us. We can hold them as a last defense against death itself, even after discovering our own fecklessness, thus planting both feet firmly in mid-air.

Today, David offers us a surer footing, a far better lesson on trusting. He has found One who can be trusted, One who cannot betray trust. And in this One, David is fully "invested." This One holds David's lot, *all of it*.

Note its "dividends," its blessings. His future is secure, *pleasant, beautiful*. He receives its *counsel*, even in the night, betrayal's dark, engulfing shadow. Always at David's right hand, he is not *shaken* by uncertainty or its fear. He has found a sure trust, an unchanging certainty.

Note also David's posture towards this One: David has *chosen*, David *blesses*, he receives *instruction*. David *sets* this One *always before* him—always, not just when it seems appropriate.

Dare we strive to mimic David? Better yet, dare we not?

Lord God, help us to settle deep within our hearts the sure trust that you, only you, can fully inhabit. Counsel us to see the trust we misplace in the idols we choose instead of you and help us to set them aside.
Amen.





Thursday, February 29

Psalm 16:9-11

**⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices;
my flesh also dwells secure.**

**¹⁰ For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol,
or let your holy one see corruption.**

**¹¹ You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.**

David's words extol confidence in the promises of the Lord. David expresses his joy in the Lord for his revelation about himself and the nation of Israel. David not only has the proof of God's love, power, and majesty in his own life, but sees what God has in store for his people.

Therefore, my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh dwells secure. David speaks from his experience with God, that is, how God has blessed him by bestowing great love and attention to David's heartfelt pleas for forgiveness, victory over his enemies, and safety for his people. God knows that David is devoted to Him and has special favor in the eyes of the Lord.

My flesh also dwells secure for you will not abandon me to Sheol (OT Hell) or let your holy one see corruption (decay of the flesh). David is secure that this will not be his fate though considered inescapable by many of his contemporaries. This foreshadows David's trust in the meaning of the Resurrection.

David is shown the "path of life," which is the promise of full redemption for all mankind. Death is defeated. Over 1,000 years later, Peter considers this passage prophetic. (Acts 2:25-32)

When we have full confidence in God, we understand David's joy, sense of security, and hope for the future. This is a model of how we can aspire to relate to Jesus.

And why wouldn't we? God knows us better than we know ourselves. How very blessed we are that He knows us and loves us, likes us, and wants to be in relation with us. How shall we respond?

*Lord, you are my hope in times of joy and sorrow.
I will seek you all the days of my life knowing that your
Goodness and mercy rains on your undeserving servant,
Who in weakness, sorrow and continual need comes
Before you with full confidence of your welcoming presence.
Amen.*





Friday, March 1

Romans 8:31-39

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? ³⁶ As it is written,

**“For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.”**

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Before beginning the reflection, take a couple minutes to re-read the last two verses slowly to let them soak in:

There is *nothing* in existence that can separate us from God's love for us.

There is *no one* in existence who can separate us from God's love for us.

While it may be much easier to say these statements than to really absorb them, they remain true in every way.

However, many of us have probably heard something to the contrary at some point in our lives, whether it was from someone in the church, someone outside of the church, or perhaps even from ourselves. Some of us may have heard it all the time, and some may still hear it in the present. In those moments when we think that something or someone will or has indeed come between God's love for us and ourselves, remember that even our doubts cannot separate us from God's love for us.

Spend some time in listening prayer, bringing to God these doubts if you hold them. Bring up those times that you were told you were separated from His love either by some individual or a collection of individuals who had an influence on you, and ask Him to speak into that.

*Heavenly Father, we thank you for the unconditional love you have poured out on us. We thank you that Your love is so great that you gave your only Son as a sacrifice for us. Help us to know in times of hardship, tribulation, persecution, or distress that nothing can separate us from You.
Amen.*





Saturday, March 2

Mark 8:31-38

³¹ And he began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man."

³⁴ And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it. ³⁶ For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? ³⁷ For what can a man give in return for his soul? ³⁸ For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."

A soul can be lost. Thus says our Lord Jesus Christ.

No one wants to think about such things. It is much more pleasant to meditate about the love and mercy of God. One might even wonder, could a loving, merciful God really sentence someone to hell? Yes, according to Jesus.

But remember, God has gone to great lengths to save sinners. Pre-eminently, God became one of us and died on a cross in our place. Moreover, the day when Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead is being delayed. *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* (1 Peter 3:9)

Clearly, God loves sinners and wants everyone to be saved. Ultimately though, each person is responsible for their own life and their own soul.

Jesus didn't mince words when it comes to eternal life. He said *If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.* (vv, 34-35)

The cross was an instrument of death. For Jesus, it was literal. For us, it is figurative. To take up our cross and follow Jesus is to abandon our old way of life (die to self) and embrace a new way of life (the Jesus way).

Peter resisted the way of the cross. So too might we. It isn't easy. It might hurt. There will be losses.

But those who heed the words of Jesus will one day come to understand something else Jesus said: *I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.* (John 10:10)

*Lord Jesus, give me courage to take up my cross and follow you.
Amen.*





Third Sunday, March 3

Exodus 20:1-11

¹ And God spoke all these words, saying,

² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³ “You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Which of the first four of the Ten Commandments is the most difficult for you to keep? *You shall have no other gods before me?* Or, *You shall not make for yourself a carved image?* Or, *You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain?* Or, *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy?*

Several years ago, the Lord impressed upon me to *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy*. He was calling me to a time of rest where I would spend time with Him so He could refresh and restore me.

I was working full-time, and then some. I had my family, household chores, honey-do’s, errands, church activities, hobbies—who had time to rest? But I took the Lord at His word and trusted Him that resting on the Sabbath (I chose Sundays) would honor Him and bless me.

What a blessing it has been!! Yes, it took some work, first to rearrange my schedule to get things done during the week or on Saturday, and second, to actually **rest**—and feel comfortable doing so—on the Sabbath. I have learned how to *Be still and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10). God has carved out what Sabbath rest looks like for me—and He will do the same for you if you are willing.

Why not use the remaining Sundays in Lent to practice remembering the Sabbath? Honor God with a time of rest that He has prepared just for you.

God of Rest, may this day bring Sabbath rest to my heart. Help me join with You in delighting in this good world You have made. I choose to put aside demands and deadlines and seek Your affirmation and love, and allow You to fill my soul with joy.
Amen.





Monday, March 4

Exodus 20:12-21

¹² “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

¹³ “You shall not murder.

¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ “You shall not steal.

¹⁶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor's.”

¹⁸ Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off ¹⁹ and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.” ²⁰ Moses said to the people, “Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.” ²¹ The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

What a strange and interesting statement?! “Don’t fear, for I am testing you that you may not sin.” But haven’t we all failed the test because we still sin? The six commandments given in this portion are about how we relate and care for other people, and I ask, how well have you done in this area?

Luke 10:27 says, *And he (Jesus) answered, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.* And how well have you done with these two commandments?

Even though we still sin, our desire and intention are to grow to be more like Jesus and have him at the center of our lives. We will never be perfect in obeying all the commandments, maybe in action, but not in our hearts and souls. However, Jesus fulfilled the law and saved us through faith, so we are no longer bound to fulfill these commandments perfectly.

Almighty God, you alone gave us the breath of life, and you alone can keep alive in us the holy desire you impart. We beseech you, for your compassion's sake, to sanctify all our thoughts and endeavors, that we may neither begin an action without a pure intention nor continue it without your blessing and grant that, having the eyes of our mind enlightened to behold things invisible and unseen, we may in heart be inspired by your wisdom, in work be upheld by your strength, and in the end be accepted as your faithful servants;

through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Amen.

(BCP Occasional Prayer #83)





Tuesday, March 5

Psalm 19:7-11

**⁷The law of the LORD is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of the LORD is sure,
making wise the simple;
⁸the precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the LORD is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
⁹the fear of the LORD is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of the LORD are true,
and righteous altogether.
¹⁰More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.
¹¹Moreover, by them is your servant warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.**

King David here is praising the God of creation, marveling at the wonders of His hands, reminding us that all of creation is a perfect proof of a sovereign God.

This same God who transcends all wants a relationship with us. Not just superficial fellowship but genuine intimacy with us. It starts from knowing Him, understanding His heart and everything about Him. To make this possible, our God revealed His character and attributes through His laws. When we meditate on His words, we are amazed by His perfection expressed through His righteousness, great mercies, enduring love, and justice. Our souls are enriched with the great testimonies and accounts of His deeds through the saints before us, which He lovingly preserved for us over thousands of years.

His revelation of Himself leads to fear of Him. Not scary fear, but affectionate reverence that would cause us to bend humbly in His presence. As we surrender to His wisdom, we celebrate and rejoice in His rule over our lives. We are strengthened with Hope of His presence though we walk through the valley of shadow of death, He is alongside us. As we stumble, He is there to pull us forward and upright. And all we need is to have faith, to believe and trust in the atoning sacrifice of His only son that purges away our imperfections and provides access to this great God.

That access to our Lord, our greatest reward, is more desired, much finer, and sweeter than gold.

*Father, you crave a genuine relationship with me, a mere sinner. I come to you humbly to confess my sins so
I can walk in love with you and enjoy that intimacy. Give me the Grace to hold on to You always and never
let go.
Amen.*





Wednesday, March 6

Psalm 19:12-14

¹² Who can discern his errors?
Declare me innocent from hidden faults.
¹³ **Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins;**
let them not have dominion over me!
Then I shall be blameless,
and innocent of great transgression.
¹⁴ **Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart**
be acceptable in your sight,
O LORD, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 19 offers exquisite praise to God for his creation and its Law. David began his meditation by observing the expanse of the heavens, its overwhelming beauty, its perfect composition, a harmony David *hears* as it engulfs him speaking its knowledge and declaring its Creator.

Next, he turned to the perfection of God's Law, the means through which all of creation coheres to yield the harmony that surrounds him, that lifts him up to his posture of worship. From there David saw how God's Law knits *his* life into this great expanse of created beauty and order, a Law that seeks to "warn" him, a Law that offers him (and us) great reward through its acceptance.

Today, he completes his praise by examining himself as a constituent of this vast creation and his own cooperation with this Law that tethers it all together to fashion its inherent goodness, that binds him (and us) to the Creator's likeness and thus his household, ... and his praise falters.

His senses have not failed him: he sees, hears, tastes, smells, and feels the greatness of God that led to this moment of recognition. But he cannot sense himself nearly so well. His sense of himself, of his *full self* stumbles, falls.

This Lent let's all refuse David's choice of a remedy for this obtuseness we share with him. With the great presence of God the Holy Spirit, the One who knit the creation's coherence, the giver of life itself, let us ask not for mere declaration of innocence but rather for clearsighted recognition of its absence *in us* and not some handy other thing, person, circumstance or ... "whatever."

Lord God of creation and being, give us new life to replace the allure of hosting our own holy household with its death so to share fully in your sight, O our rock and our redeemer.
Amen.





Thursday, March 7

Romans 7:12-20

¹² So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.
¹³ Did that which is good, then, bring death to me? By no means! It was sin, producing death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure. ¹⁴ For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵ For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶ Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷ So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸ For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

Paul is addressing a group of both Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome, where there was conflict over the Mosaic law and Christ as the fulfillment of the law. *So the law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.* Sin being the nature of mortal man, Paul reasons we cannot fulfill the law for it is spiritual and from God, thus exposing sin by contrast, showing that natural, sinful man is no match for God's righteousness.

God is holy, as are his commands, words, pronouncements, and actions. Being mortal, we are born into sin and cannot, will not even through our greatest effort, be able to overcome our sinfulness. And the closer we come to the mind and spirit of Christ, the more overwhelming our inability becomes.

Still, God hates sin, and we must too. We have all heard, "Love the sinner, hate the sin." Though trite, it agrees with "love your neighbor as yourself." We are both sinner being loved and sinner loving our neighbor.

Elsewhere in the Bible, we read of those who have entered the presence of the living God. Our terror of undeniable sin exposed in the presence of an omniscient, yet loving Savior brings us to our knees, exposing also our need for mercy and grace.

Through the cross, all sin is forgiven for who truly repent and accept him as Savior. Then we can experience God's love through prayer, praise, and worship. Like Paul, our sinfulness persists, a reminder of our total reliance on God's mercy and his promise of redemption.

So, not our will but his.

*Heavenly Father, we praise you for your steadfast love and care for us.
 Keep us in your will and bring us to everlasting life with you in eternity.
 Amen.*





Friday, March 8

Romans 7:21-25

²¹ So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. ²² For I delight in the law of God, in my inner being, ²³ but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. ²⁴ Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind, but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.

The war that Paul is talking about is very real. It kind of feels like a game with two teams. One team you know will win and has a coach that never loses. Versus a team who has a ruthless fan base and a coach that likes to tear his opponents apart and has nothing to lose. I hope you can see the battle in this metaphor, God vs the devil, the ways of God vs the way of the world, Spirit vs flesh. I could keep going.

The devil likes to analyze our flesh and know what makes us tick. He wants to take us down, so we don't make the finish line, basically to injure us to continue the metaphor.

Yet, God's team has the greatest defenders of all time in Jesus and the Holy Spirit and, of course, the greatest coach, The Father. They want to defend and protect you as you move forward in their ways.

I know this metaphor isn't perfect, but sometimes it helps to see things from a different point of view. One that is for you and the other against. *Evil lies close at hand*, as Paul put it; but the Lord is closer. Lean into the defense, support, and encouragement of the Lord who will help you past the flesh. Accept your teammates' help.

*God, as I struggle with the things of this life, help me to rely on You, Lord. Protect me from evil and push me towards Your good.
Help me, O Lord.
Amen.*





Saturday, March 9

John 2:13-22

¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, "Take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade."

¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." ²⁰ The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?" ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

The sociologist Christian Smith has characterized the religious worldview of many young Americans as "moralistic therapeutic deism." Smith contends that, for American youth, religious life is no longer centered upon the worship of a transcendent God. Rather than understanding the purpose of the religious life as glorifying and enjoying God forever, many Americans understand religion as a transaction in which a grandfather-like deity rewards decent conduct with the worldly pleasures of a happy-go-lucky life.

The worship of God is corrupted by this therapeutic view of religion. In John 2, Jesus observed just such a perversion of worship during a Passover visit to the Jerusalem Temple. The House of the Father was being used as "a house of trade" (v. 16) by merchants. The Temple that was originally designed to welcome the presence of Yahweh was being actively misused for self-serving purposes.

Jesus responded to this corruption by performing a sign: he drove out from the Temple grounds all those who had abused the sacred space of Yahweh's worship. And in a prophetic expression of his future death and resurrection, he recentered the locus of worship on himself as the mediator between humanity and the Father.

There is a perpetual temptation to marginalize God and water-down worship in the human institutions of religion. The sinful nature of humanity seeks to change the object of worship from the holy God to the fulfillment of disordered human desires. Worship is always in danger of becoming a religious means to a therapeutic end.

*Father God, you know that we so often turn to worship idols. Like the Israelites in the wilderness or the money-changers in the Temple, we forsake Your Presence and seek comfort in profane things. Be for us the object of our affections and empower us to worship You in spirit and in truth.
Amen.*





Fourth Sunday, March 10

2 Chronicles 36:14-16

¹⁴ All the officers of the priests and the people likewise were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations. And they polluted the house of the LORD that he had made holy in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ The LORD, the God of their fathers, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against his people, until there was no remedy.

Until there was no remedy. Read those words aloud, and let them echo through the ages: *Until there was no remedy.*

The situation sounds very grim. The people—the **chosen** people of God—turned far away from Him and chose not to return and repent. This represented the end of the Davidic line of rulers over the people of Judah and led to the fall of Jerusalem. The people were either killed or taken into captivity in Babylon. Only the poorest of the poor remained in Jerusalem. A very sad and desperate state. Disheartening, really.

Until you remember: *For nothing will be impossible with God* (Luke 1:31).

God has provided the remedy for us. *God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8). *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved* (Romans 10:9). *For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved* (Romans 10:13).

There are people who put off committing their life to Christ, thinking, “there is always time for that,” or “I’ll do that later.” The problem with that way of thinking is that as the person drifts down the path of darkness, it takes them further and further away from God. While God’s grace **is** sufficient for them regardless of how far they have fallen, they may reach a point where **they** believe there is **no remedy** or they no longer **desire** the remedy.

Who do you know that needs to be saved? Share God’s faithful remedy with them before it is too late.

*God Almighty, I reaffirm my faith in Jesus Christ and give You praise for the gift of salvation.
Amen.*





Monday, March 11

2 Chronicles 36:17-21

¹⁷ Therefore he brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or aged. He gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸ And all the vessels of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. ¹⁹ And they burned the house of God and broke down the wall of Jerusalem and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its precious vessels. ²⁰ He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

My preacher growing up often said, “What’s that Therefore there for?” It was a reminder to look at the context.

Today’s Therefore is teaming with history and context. Recently, I read 2 Chronicles with my sons as part of the youth reading program. Over and over again, with almost formulaic repetition, Israel and Judah’s history is recounted for us. The formula went like this: “*Such and such king became king of Israel when he was X years old, and he reigned Y years. He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.*” The formula of Israel and Judah’s disobedience was so predictable, that my sons started to recite the words as I read them.

For hundreds of years, Israel and Judah broke their covenant with God repeatedly: they worshipped idols, they sacrificed their children, they built up high places. In short, the “set apart” people of God became exactly like all the other nations.

In Leviticus, there are consequences prescribed for breaking the covenant, and the tragedies described in today’s passage are manifestations of those covenant-breaking consequences: God gives his covenant people into the hands of the Babylonians, allowing them to be killed, allowing them to be exiled, and allowing the house of God to be burned.

Sounds kind of harsh to our modern ears, right? And yet the full value of God’s mercy is best seen when contrasted to an understanding of the consequences that we rightfully deserve.

Part of the youth reading program is a series of questions. During our time in 1&2 Chronicles, when I asked them “What does this teach us about Jesus?” their answer was always: “Jesus is the better King who did what was right in the sight of the LORD.”

*Father God, we praise you for sending your Son, the perfect King, who reigns in righteousness and inaugurated a better covenant.
Amen.*





Tuesday, March 12

2 Chron 36:22-23

²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: ²³ “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.’”

The story of the covenant people of God is a cycle of disobedience, God’s judgement, and redemption. For more than 800 years, from the exit from Egypt to the final fall of Jerusalem, this cycle continued. God continually warned His people, gently courting them to return to Him and forsake their idolatry.

Jeremaiah, the weeping prophet, spent over 5 decades appealing to his people to turn away from sin and return to their covenant relationship with Yahweh and avoid God’s judgement. They didn’t heed his warnings. When the Babylonians invaded, he warned them not to resist, he was dismissed, made a laughingstock and even thrown into a pit. What a tough ministry!

Though our God is loving, He is also just. This justice required punishment of Israel and Judah, and hence their eventual captivity as a penalty for sin. However, the same God that punishes also renews and restores. He already had a redemption plan according to Jeremiah 29:10 *This is what the LORD says: “When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.”*

Prophet Isaiah prophesied this restoration through a pagan king about 150 years before the birth of the king. Our God is never without a plan, He knows the end from the beginning and is the master orchestrator of our lives. An eternal plan of salvation through His son is now extended to all nations; ²⁶ *And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷ And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.* (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

I stand by this promise, do you?

*May I never take my savior's long suffering for granted. I want to know you and truly know you more and even more, this season and forever.
Amen.*





Wednesday, March 13

Psalm 122:1-5

¹ I was glad when they said to me,
“Let us go to the house of the LORD!”

² Our feet have been standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem!

³ Jerusalem—built as a city
that is bound firmly together,

⁴ to which the tribes go up,
the tribes of the LORD,
as was decreed for Israel,

to give thanks to the name of the LORD.

⁵ There thrones for judgment were set,
the thrones of the house of David.

Our sense of place precedes presence, content, being itself. Our earliest memories are set within places as we recall them. Memory seems to set itself geographically first, pegging itself to a place like a flag on a digital phone map. As I age, I find to my dismay forgetting the reason why I came into a room, a place. To my surprise, I find I can regain the reason by returning to the room, the place, from which I had come. It is as if I left the reason behind me, as if it was reluctant to go with me for its own reasons and content to remain pegged there until I returned to take it up again, in its original place, waiting for me so to speak.

Jerusalem is such a place, a place where reasons wait to be taken up again when entered. Hence the priority the Israelites placed on pilgrimages to Jerusalem’s gates, to stand within them, for their collective memory of who they are and why they are—*their being*—resides there, waiting for them.

Hence David’s joy to *go to the house of the LORD!*

Yet memory is not the equivalent of being just as Jerusalem is not Israel. There remains a stark difference—place is not “is.” Place is simply a place.

Lent is a pilgrimage too, but not to a place. Lent is a journey to a moment, a moment of time, a new day that was and is to come. And for those who yearn truly for it, a moment that is now, *always now*. In that moment toward which our Lent journeys waits an invitation, an invitation to enter a momentless existence, a moment Jesus once described as worshipping *in spirit and truth*, a moment where there is no role for memory, a moment in which there is no need for place, a moment in which the Father seeks us to enter, to *be* with him.

*I was glad when they said to me “Let us go to the house of the LORD!”
Amen.*





Thursday, March 14

Psalm 122:6-9

**⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
 “May they be secure who love you!
⁷ Peace be within your walls
 and security within your towers!”
⁸ For my brothers and companions’ sake
 I will say, “Peace be within you!”
⁹ For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
 I will seek your good.**

Canon Richard LeSuer presides over the Anglican Seminary in Jerusalem and provides a timely message in this reflective season. In his newsletter, he underscores that hope sometimes emerges from the darkest of circumstances, for even there the light of Christ germinates an alternative stance:

“Many centuries ago, at a time of political instability, St. Augustine wrote what is now a famous letter to a friend up the coast of North Africa. That friend was watching the tattered remains of a Roman empire come ashore after the sacking of their city.

“In his letter St. Augustine reminded his friend that there are always two cities. There is the earthly city that is always disintegrating even as it is being built, but there is also the heavenly city, the city of God. His advice to the younger friend was, the way to stay human and sane and alive to your time, is to remember that as you work and struggle in the earthly city, even as it is being shaken, and seek and serve the one who died and rose Jesus Christ, you are at the same time, mysteriously, serving in building the city of God. If you can remember that, and hold to that hope, then you can live in a crazy history.”

May the startling light of Christ illuminate all that darkens and ensnares our earthly city and bring true peace, justice and hope, landmarks pointing pilgrims to the Celestial Jerusalem.

Prayer for peace in Jerusalem:

*O God of peace, you have established Jerusalem as the Lord's House and a place of peace, and you have called on all who live there to love you and prosper. Instill in her inhabitants—Jews, Christians, and Muslims—a hunger for justice and dignity, and a resolve to end the distrust that culminates in violence.
 Amen.*





Friday, March 15

Ephesians 2:1-10

¹ And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— ⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast. ¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

All of this is a gift from God. What is so beautiful about a gift is that it comes with a choice. You can choose to open it, return it, throw it away, give it to someone else, etc. God's generosity is at the center of it all. He gives a gift that we are not worthy of nor deserving of, and most throw it in the trash like expired lunch meat. We are destined as children of wrath and enjoy sin a little too much.

We often do not respond in gratitude to the grace we have been given. Like a child on Christmas, we often don't think about the cost of the gift. We focus on whether it is of benefit to ourselves, whether it has a place on the shelf or a place in the trash.

The cost of God's gift was high. Pain, suffering, death, isolation, hatred, and sorrow were the cost. A price I personally do not feel worthy of, mostly because I think I deserve those things for myself. With knowing the price how do we respond? I think a thank you note is a big enough gesture.

*Thank you, Lord. Your generosity is too much. Lord help me to respond in kind to you and to your people,
my brothers and sisters.
Amen.*





Saturday, March 16

John 6:1-15

¹ After this Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. ² And a large crowd was following him, because they saw the signs that he was doing on the sick. ³ Jesus went up on the mountain, and there he sat down with his disciples. ⁴ Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. ⁵ Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" ⁶ He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. ⁷ Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread would not be enough for each of them to get a little." ⁸ One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, ⁹ "There is a boy here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are they for so many?" ¹⁰ Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, about five thousand in number. ¹¹ Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated. So also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹² And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments, that nothing may be lost." ¹³ So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves left by those who had eaten. ¹⁴ When the people saw the sign that he had done, they said, "This is indeed the Prophet who is to come into the world!"

¹⁵ Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.

The care of the poor and the feeding of the hungry are part and parcel of the work of the Kingdom of God. These ministries are to be hallmarks of the Christian community, for it is among the hungry that the spirit of Jesus may be found. In feeding the hungry, we find the One who fed the five thousand.

And yet, Jesus tells us that the poor are always with us.

According to one metric, approximately 828 million people, or about 10% of the global population, regularly go hungry. And so, whatever the specific circumstances may be, every individual is inevitably in need of divine mercy and provision. And it is in such situations that opportunities arise for the demonstration of God's goodness and power.

In John 6, Jesus encounters a crowd of thousands of listeners who become hungry for sustenance. Here he performs a sign by using five barley loaves and two fish as a means of serving the entirety of the enormous crowd. Because of Jesus, their physical hunger is satisfied.

And as John's gospel proclaims, it is in Jesus that the deepest human need of all, the need for salvation, is fully and finally met. Just as the Father sent manna from heaven to feed the Israelites in the wilderness, so He has sent His Son to fulfill the souls of humanity once-for-all. *And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger ... (John 6:35).*

Father God, our souls and bodies hunger for sustenance. We ask that You empower us to participate in the merciful work of helping to provide for the needs of others. May we encounter Your Presence among the hungry and may our souls be fed with the bread of eternal life.
Amen.





Fifth Sunday, March 17

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹“Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³²not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. ³³For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

At the last supper, when Jesus took the cup and said, *This cup that is poured out for you is the **new covenant** in my blood* (Luke 22:20), there was no ambiguity in Jesus’ statement. He was fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah, inaugurating the new covenant of God. Jesus was embarking on the will of the Father to fulfill His words, *For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.* (Jeremiah 31:34) He would suffer so that we might *have life and have it abundantly* (John 10:10).

Jesus said, *If you love me, you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you* (John 14:15-17). That’s how God was bringing in the new covenant: through the sacrifice of His Son and the indwelling of His Holy Spirit.

God’s covenant with us is personal: Jesus died on the cross for our sin. The curtain is torn; we now have full access to our Father. The new covenant is not a bunch of rules—rules that we can’t seem to keep—but is internal: God has given us His Holy Spirit to empower us and transform us, writing His covenant of justice, peace, and love on our hearts. Our new covenant is initiated **and** fulfilled by our Father.

*Almighty and Everlasting God, thank You for the sacrifice of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit to bring
Your promise of a new covenant alive in our day. You are amazing, God!
Amen.*





Monday, March 18

Psalm 51:1-6

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

**¹ Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
² Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

³ For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
⁴ Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you may be justified in your words
and blameless in your judgment.
⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity,
and in sin did my mother conceive me.
⁶ Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.**

In this penitential Psalm, David uses language evocative of Exodus 34, where God met with Moses, declares his name, and defined some of his most important characteristics.

"The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (v 6-7).

Why does David evoke language from this critical text? It is as if David is telling God "I can't approach you based on my own merits, because clearly, I have none. Instead, I'm going to remind you of how you described yourself 'merciful and gracious...abounding in steadfast love...forgiving sin.' God, please be true to how you've described yourself. God, please fulfill your promises."

It is akin to a little child saying, "you promised!" to their parents. When any loving parent hears that, they'll do anything in their power to keep their promises, to retain the trust of their child. And God is the BEST Father. He invites us to take him up on his promises. He longs for us to do exactly as David does here: admit our need for him and ask for him to lavish us with his steadfast love and abundant mercy.

Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you no secrets are hid: Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy Name; through Christ our Lord.

Amen.

(Collect for Purity)





Tuesday, March 19

Psalm 51:7-13

- ⁷ Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.**
**⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have broken rejoice.**
**⁹ Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.**
**¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a right spirit within me.**
**¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.**
**¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.**
**¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.**

People of the Bible were sinners like us. Just as King David sinned grievously, others like Samson did too. Samson spent significant time running from his calling, disobeying all the rules of a Nazarite, consorting with and marrying foreign women. On his death, his prayer was “Please, God, strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes”. I detect selfishness of some sort and not a lot of repentance.

Truly reflecting on one’s sins and being repentant do not come easily to us as we remain rooted in our sins, and we take God’s long suffering for granted. The Holy Spirit used king David’s humility, his contrite heart, and brokenness to teach us the right attitude towards sin. We have earlier seen his plea for forgiveness and the depth of his confessions. Our passage today is focused on moral cleanness.

David desired more than mere forgiveness; he wanted all traces of his trespasses cleansed. Like a leper, he was conscious of his defilement. He was in desperate need of purification that is likened to a priest’s ceremonial purging with hyssop.

Thanks to God that we are benefactors of a more perfect system. Through the blood of the perfect sacrifice, our sins are truly cleansed, and we stand justified, just as if we never sinned. As we continue working in faith through obedience and spiritual maturity, we become sanctified. When our Lord returns, we will stand glorified in His presence with direct and unhindered access to His divine and most Holy presence.

*Jesus atoned for my sin that I may stand justified. May I never take this perfect gift for granted. I want to walk in perfect pace with you all the days of my life.
Amen.*





Wednesday, March 20

Psalm 51:14-19

**¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation,
and my tongue will sing aloud of your
righteousness.
¹⁵ O LORD, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.
¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I
would give it;
you will not be pleased with a burnt
offering.**

**¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you
will not despise.
¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;
¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt
offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.**

Today, David draws near to genuine conversion, a “born again” experience that will require more time and work on God’s part to introduce. But David comes very close.

It begins as always with a deep, painful recognition of just how corrupt we really are. In desperation we see that we are what’s wrong with it all, not that other one or those other ones, not that turn of events for them or against us, not that other thing we have but do not want, or long to have but cannot get.

No, David sees clearly—he’s *“bloodguilty.”* So, he seeks a deal with God: “If You do this, I will do that,” a Wimpy deal from way back in Popeye days, “I will gladly pay you on Tuesday for a hamburger today.”

As he flatters and wrangles with God, he stumbles onto something deeply profound for an Israelite, indeed for anyone living in the Ancient Near East of his time: God is not interested in *sacrifice*. Or, rather, God is not interested in the sacrifices we easily make—animals, chocolate, wine (for Lent), something other than what must die.

Rather, God is interested only in the sacrifice of our Selves, the selves who draw their being from the envy of others, e.g., the King of Israel who gains his title, his wife through murder, the one who dies with the most toys or best house by using God-given skills to hoard up the manna that turns their families to rot.

Close to the real deal, David flinches, turns back. Rejecting the insight, he turns to build up the walls around his Jerusalem Self and put God back into a sanctuary he won’t inhabit.

Let this be a clear warning: the deep, painful insights of a true, transformative Lent can be declined, forfeiting the miraculous power of that Sunday morning toward which we journey.

*Lord Jesus, open our eyes, no matter how painful the sight.
Amen!*





Thursday, March 21

Hebrews 5:1-10

¹ For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. ² He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. ³ Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. ⁴ And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

⁵ So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;

⁶ as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence. ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. ⁹ And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, ¹⁰ being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

High priests were chosen and called *by God, just as Aaron was*. While an honor, the role is that of an obedient servant, a bearer of sacrifice for the sins of the people. Melchizedek, king-priest from the days of Abraham prior to the Hebrew priesthood, was a harbinger of Christ, our great high priest. The major difference is that while Jesus was fully human, He was also without sin, unlike Aaron and Melchizedek.

In Gethsemane, Jesus showed us his humanity, praying earnestly to God to take *this cup* from Him. The only Son of God, he felt and feared a separation from God. Because of this suffering, he fully gets us and our feelings of desperation, abandonment, fear, loss, sorrow.

Being imperfect, we often face our sin and the misery it causes God, ourselves, and others. When others empathize with our suffering, it is often due to their having experienced something similar in their own lives.

But what kind of love could bring God to lower himself to us, to share such feelings and fears? Who can fathom such love?

Through perfect obedience to the Father, Jesus went to the Cross, suffered, and died, the ultimate, perfect sacrifice for our sin. Thus, we are redeemed, and through his resurrection can receive the promise and the reality of eternal life with God, who fully knows us, loves us, and welcomes us into his arms.

To God, be the glory! Amen!

Almighty and everlasting God, you govern all things in heaven and on earth: Mercifully hear the prayers of your people, and in our time grant us your peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God forever and ever.
Amen.





Friday, March 22

John 12:20-26

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the feast were some Greeks. ²¹ So these came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and asked him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went and told Andrew; Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ And Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

In today’s reading, Jesus’s message of dying to self and following him can feel like a huge task to undertake. In the former, we must not only be willing to but also let go of what the world values to keep eternal life (through Jesus, of course). But let’s break the latter part down a bit more.

The word “follow” comes from the Greek word *akoloutheō*, which means much more than just “to tag along.” It comes with a richer meaning: “to be an attendant, accompany, go with.” If we are to be a people that serves Jesus in the capacity he is pointing to in this passage, we must follow him in the context of that deeper definition.

We are not to just occasionally or temporarily walk the same physical path as Jesus like the crowds would do during his ministry. We are to *accompany* him. To *attend* to him. To *serve* him. Living out *akoloutheō* to the fullest requires commitment and active participation. And in doing so we serve him, and where he is, there we will be as his servant, and the Father will honor that.

What are some actions you can apply to your daily life to let go of the world’s values and follow Jesus?

Father God, we thank You for Jesus, Your Son, our Savior. We thank you for this gift of eternal life and for bearing fruit in Your name. Please help us to not just see Jesus, but fully commit to serve and follow our Lord Jesus Christ, so that we may live out eternity with You.
Amen.





Saturday, March 23

John 12:27-33

²⁷ “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? But for this purpose I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven: “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that stood there and heard it said that it had thundered. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” ³⁰ Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” ³³ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.

The historical reality of Jesus’s execution on the cross has been a scandal to many who are confronted with the narrative of his life. As Saint Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 1:23, the gospel of Christ crucified is *a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles*.

In the context of Second Temple Judaism, the notion that the messianic Son of Man would suffer and die ran counter to prevailing expectations. While Jesus was describing the divine necessity of his impending death to a crowd in Jerusalem, his listeners expressed their messianic expectations by claiming that they *heard from the Law that the Christ remains forever* (John 12:34a). They asked him *How can you say that the Son of Man must be lifted up?* (v. 34b).

And yet, Jesus had already answered their question in his earlier proclamation that *I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself* (v. 32). Jesus pointed to the strange truth of his coming crucifixion: that it is through his suffering and death, when he is lifted up on the cross at Calvary, that the purpose of his messiahship is accomplished.

His elevation upon the cross is, paradoxically, his enthronement as king of creation, for *now will the ruler of this world be cast out* (v. 31). The worldly powers are overcome, and so is the reign of sin. The crucifixion of the Son of Man accomplishes the salvation of mankind, in which Our Lord *will draw all people* to himself.

Father God, we thank you for upending our expectations and for never ceasing to surprise us with the depth of your love. Increase our gratitude for the sacrifice of your Son and embolden us to proclaim the victory you have accomplished through his death and resurrection. Let our lives be lived in service to your ever-coming kingdom.
Amen.





Palm Sunday, March 24

Isaiah 52:13-15

**¹³ Behold, my servant shall act wisely;
he shall be high and lifted up,
and shall be exalted.**

**¹⁴ As many were astonished at you—
his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance,
and his form beyond that of the children of mankind—**

**¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations.
Kings shall shut their mouths because of him,
for that which has not been told them they see,
and that which they have not heard they understand.**

This is Palm Sunday, the day we remember and “re-enact,” to some degree, Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem. The crowds praised Jesus: *the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”* (Matthew 21:9).

Then, just five days later, the crowd assembled before Pontius Pilate after Jesus was arrested, and cried, “Crucify him” (Mark 15:13). Pilate had Jesus scourged before he delivered Him to be crucified. It was in this scourging that Isaiah’s prophecy, *his appearance was so marred, beyond human semblance, and his form beyond that of the children of mankind*, was fulfilled.

Jesus knew it was going to happen. He knew the horrific death that was before Him. What do you think Jesus, in His humanness, feared the most? The mocking, the scourging, the crucifixion, the weight of the sin of the world, or the wrath of God? Read that list again, slowly, pausing between each, allowing the brutality of the circumstances of His death to sink in: the mocking... the scourging... the crucifixion... the weight of the sin of the world... the wrath of God. It’s hard to read, much less think about.

Jesus, *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). Isaiah’s prophecy is fulfilled: Jesus is high and lifted up; exalted!

Jesus, my Savior: at the cross I bow my knee, where Your blood was shed for me. There’s no greater love than this. Thank You, Jesus, for Your sacrifice. I bless Your holy Name for all Your goodness and loving kindness.

*Hosanna to the King of kings!
Amen!*





Monday in Holy Week, March 25

Isaiah 53:1-6

¹ Who has believed what he has heard from
us?

And to whom has the arm of the LORD been
revealed?

² For he grew up before him like a young
plant,

and like a root out of dry ground;
he had no form or majesty that we should

look at him,
and no beauty that we should desire him.

³ He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows and acquainted
with grief;

and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him
not.

⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted.

⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions;
he was crushed for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that brought
us peace,

and with his wounds we are healed.

⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
we have turned—every one—to his own
way;

and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.

It is difficult to read about how Jesus was *pierced for our transgressions*; ... *crushed for our iniquities*. It brings to mind all the ugly realities of the consequences of our sin and what Jesus had to go through on our behalf. I don't know about you, but I don't like to dwell on such ugly realities. And yet this is the very thing that *brought us peace* with God.

Martin Luther called this "The Great Exchange;" we give Jesus our sin, Jesus gives us his righteousness. This concept is at the very root of the gospel. The Great Exchange was beautifully summarized in 2 Corinthians 5:21: *For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*. Oh, the lavish love of the Father to send his only Son, to pay the ultimate price, to save us sinners!

Isaiah 53:6 compares us to sheep, going astray. It reminds me of verse 3 of the old hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing."

*O to grace how great a debtor
daily I'm constrained to be!
Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
prone to leave the God I love;
here's my heart; O take and seal it;
seal it for thy courts above.*

May that be our prayer, Grace Anglican Community. May we be so changed by the grace that Jesus showed us in The Great Exchange, that it would bind our wandering hearts to the loving Father that sent him.

*Let that grace now, like a fetter,
bind my wandering heart to thee.
Amen.*





Tuesday in Holy Week, March 26

Isaiah 53:7-12

⁷ He was oppressed, and he was afflicted,
yet he opened not his mouth;
like a lamb that is led to the slaughter,
and like a sheep that before its shearers is
silent,
so he opened not his mouth.
⁸ By oppression and judgment he was taken
away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the
living,
stricken for the transgression of my
people?
⁹ And they made his grave with the wicked
and with a rich man in his death,
although he had done no violence,
and there was no deceit in his mouth.
¹⁰ Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;

when his soul makes an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong
his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
¹¹ Out of the anguish of his soul he shall
see and be satisfied;
by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my
servant,
make many to be accounted righteous,
and he shall bear their iniquities.
¹² Therefore I will divide him a portion with
the many,
and he shall divide the spoil with the
strong,
because he poured out his soul to death
and was numbered with the transgressors;
yet he bore the sin of many,
and makes intercession for the
transgressors.

The prophecy of Isaiah is truly a remarkable book of the Bible. About 61 of its passages are mentioned 85 times by New Testament writers, even Jesus. About 22 times Isaiah is mentioned by name.

Isaiah 53 stands out among all the messianic passages in the Bible. No better picture of messiah's birth, mission, and death is painted anywhere else. Scholars call it the "The Fifth Gospel." Martin Luther believed that every Christian should memorize the passage. If we lost all the books of the Bible, this single chapter is sufficient to bring people to Jesus Christ.

Not only is it an apologetics minefield, but it also provides a complete answer to the question of how sinners can be made right with God to escape eternal hell and enter eternal heaven. It is through the Servant of YAHWEH, the servant that became a substitute and willingly received the outpouring of God's wrath and judgement in a sinner's place.

But the Israelites rejected their savior as they didn't see the need for a messianic substitutional death. They wanted a king who was righteous and sympathetic to their plight. They desired a compassionate savior that would liberate them from their earthly bondage. They were confident in their work-based righteousness and missed the need for atonement of sin from a vicarious savior.

However, when the fullness of Gentiles has come in, ... *I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy, so that, when they look on me, on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn.* (Zechariah 12:10)

Their confession and lamentation will be the words of this Chapter. And all Israel will be saved.

*May I look up to my savior while there is still time and confess Him as my Lord.
Amen.*





Wednesday in Holy Week, March 27

Psalm 22:1-11

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken
me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from
the words of my groaning?

² O my God, I cry by day, but you do not
answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises of Israel.

⁴ In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

⁵ To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to
shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the

people.

⁷ All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their
heads;

⁸ "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

⁹ Yet you are he who took me from the
womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's
breasts.

¹⁰ On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have
been my God.

¹¹ Be not far from me,
for trouble is near,
and there is none to help.

God is so upside down when it comes to us. He just won't get with the program. We have a good gig going here, and he seems out to lunch with it all. How many times do we have to ask him to help us win this lottery called life, to help us get on top of the next big deal, to unlock his kingdom and rain down its treasures on us so others will look our way and wish with all their heart they could walk in our shoes?

I mean, what kind of influencer is he, anyway? Doesn't he understand how all this works? This is all about turning heads our way, about basking in their longing looks as they gaze on all this cool stuff we've collected, about soaring in their rapt attention as we strut our stuff, drinking in their desire to be just like us!

Really, what kind of God is he? Everybody talks about how he's got it all, how he's the king—the king of kings, in fact—all powerful, and he owns it all because he made it all. Well then, why doesn't he act like it? Why doesn't he shove his weight around, scare the dickens out of us, grab all the attention, generate a zillion likes, get his name plastered all over the Internet and TV like we'd all do if we had what he has?

After all, we all want to be like him! We'd do *anything* to be like him, to have what he has, to be able to do what he can do. *We'd sell our souls to the devil to be like him!*

So, why doesn't he return the favor? Why doesn't he want to be like us?

*Father, Lord, God, have mercy. Give us new hearts, new life. We have so sorely missed the mark.
Amen.*





Maundy Thursday, March 28

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, ⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, ⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. ⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. ⁹ Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

The late Pope Benedict XVI underscores the primary significance of community and Communion:

“St. Paul’s word for this unity between the human ‘I’ and the eternal ‘Thou’ is *koinonia* (‘communion’): *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation [koinonia] in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?*” (1 Corinthians 10:16)

Against romantic notions of individualism at the altar rail, His Holiness stresses that “[T]he Eucharist is not aimed primarily at the individual. Eucharistic personalism is a drive toward union, the overcoming of the barriers between God and man, between ‘I’ and ‘Thou.’”

Thus, the Sacrament of the Altar assists the faithful with our fallen tendency to become isolated, selfish individuals. And lessening that proclivity is no less miraculous than our Lord, as Paul preached in Philippi, in emptying Himself of Divinity that he might identify with and save us as God’s Christ (v. 7f).

Almighty God, who giveth the true Bread which cometh down from heaven, even thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord: Grant, we beseech thee, that we who have received the Sacrament of his Body and Blood may abide in him, and he in us, that we may be filled with the power of his endless life; who liveth and reigneth with thee and with the Holy Ghost, one God, world without end.
Amen.





Good Friday, March 29

Mark 15:1-20

¹ And as soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. And they bound Jesus and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate.

² And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so."

³ And the chief priests accused him of many things. ⁴ And Pilate again asked him, "Have you no answer to make? See how many charges they bring against you." ⁵ But Jesus made no further answer, so that Pilate was amazed.

⁶ Now at the feast he used to release for them one prisoner for whom they asked. ⁷ And among the rebels in prison, who had committed murder in the insurrection, there was a man called Barabbas. ⁸ And the crowd came up and began to ask Pilate to do as he usually did for them. ⁹ And he answered them, saying, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" ¹⁰ For he perceived that it was out of envy that the chief priests had delivered him up. ¹¹ But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release for them Barabbas instead. ¹² And Pilate again said to them, "Then what shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" ¹³ And they cried out again, "Crucify him." ¹⁴ And Pilate said to them, "Why? What evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him." ¹⁵ So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, he delivered him to be crucified.

¹⁶ And the soldiers led him away inside the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters), and they called together the whole battalion. ¹⁷ And they clothed him in a purple cloak, and twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on him. ¹⁸ And they began to salute him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" ¹⁹ And they were striking his head with a reed and spitting on him and kneeling down in homage to him. ²⁰ And when they had mocked him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. And they led him out to crucify him.

On one of the most sobering and solemn days of the year, we reach the gruesome part of Jesus' journey to the cross.

Based on his interactions with Pilate and the crowds choosing to release Barabbas, at this point Jesus seems resigned to his fate. But just because he has accepted what's coming does not mean he is immune to the suffering. Most notably, v. 15 has a small mention of Jesus' scourging, but this was no small punishment. Roman soldiers used a whip that had 9 pieces with sharp shards of metal and bone at the end. The sharp pieces would embed themselves in flesh, only to be ripped out when the soldier yanked backwards. Many people who were scourged before crucifixion never made it to the cross.

While the scourging is one of the most infamous and gruesome parts of the story, it is important to remember that Jesus's suffering was not just about the physical beatings, the crown of thorns, etc. He had to endure the emotional and psychological betrayals of Judas and Peter, the mockery, verbal abuse, and rejection of the crowd, and then the spiritual pain of being separated from the Father.

We all have different pain tolerances, and some can cope with more than others. Some can cope with physical pain more than emotional pain, and vice versa. Interestingly, studies have shown that the brain interprets emotional pain in the same way it interprets physical pain.

But the unimaginable amount of pain Christ went through tops it all. It had to because there was no other way to save us from that same fate.

Holy God, we thank you for Jesus' sacrifice for us. Have mercy on us sinners and forgive us, for we know not what we do. We praise you, we bless you, we love you.
Amen.





Holy Saturday, March 30

Mark 15:21-39

²¹ And they compelled a passerby, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross. ²² And they brought him to the place called Golgotha (which means Place of a Skull). ²³ And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. ²⁴ And they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take. ²⁵ And it was the third hour when they crucified him. ²⁶ And the inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." ²⁷ And with him they crucified two robbers, one on his right and one on his left. ²⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, ³⁰ save yourself, and come down from the cross!" ³¹ So also the chief priests with the scribes mocked him to one another, saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. ³² Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe." Those who were crucified with him also reviled him.

³³ And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. ³⁴ And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" ³⁵ And some of the bystanders hearing it said, "Behold, he is calling Elijah." ³⁶ And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed and gave it to him to drink, saying, "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." ³⁷ And Jesus uttered a loud cry and breathed his last. ³⁸ And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. ³⁹ And when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, "Truly this man was the Son of God!"

Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world." (John 8:12)

I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. (John 12:46)

This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. (John 3:19)

When the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. (Mark 15:33)

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34) Could there have been a darker moment in all history? Think of it, Jesus the light of the world immersed in the sin of the world. So much so that he, (and indeed the whole creation) became dark. It is the ultimate paradox, the ultimate mystery.

One ought not take this moment in stride. It should make us pause in wonder and awe. Such was the case for hymnist Charles Wesley. Here is how he expressed it in the hymn, And Can it Be?

And can it be that I should gain
An int'rest in the Savior's blood?
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?

'Tis mystery all! Th'Immortal dies!
Who can explore His strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries
To sound the depths of love divine!
'Tis mercy all! let earth adore,
Let angel minds inquire no more.

Long my imprisoned spirit lay
Fast bound in sin and nature's night;
Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,





Journey to Jerusalem

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free;
I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

*Amazing love! how can it be
That Thou, my God, should die for me?
Amen.*





Lent

2024



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