

Lenten Devotional Daily Guide

A dark green silhouette of a building with a cross on top, set against a background of yellow and orange rays. The year '2024' is written in yellow inside the dome of the building.

2024



Baylor University

GEORGE W. TRUETT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



Lenten Daily Devotionals

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

During the six-week period leading to Easter, Christians around the world observe the season of Lent. Lent is a forty-day journey dedicated to an intense, renewed focus on discipleship to Jesus. We turn toward the cross. We consider what it means to take up our cross. We contemplate what it meant for Christ to take up his. We are called to repentance. We are encouraged to fast. We learn to long for resurrection. On Easter Sunday, we celebrate a risen Savior.

Our highest aim is to seek Christ.

Joan Chittister wrote, “Lent is not a ritual. It is a time given to think seriously about who Jesus is for us, to renew our faith from the inside out” (*The Liturgical Year*, p. 111). To be renewed, we focus our energies—heart, soul, mind, and strength—upon God’s love toward us. 1 John 4:19 states, “We love because he first loved us.” In his incarnation, death, and resurrection, Christ has revealed to us that God is wholly devoted to us. Our response is to become fully devoted to him.

In this devotional guide, you are invited to seek God alongside the students, staff, and faculty of Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary. Each day’s devotional entry links to a Scripture passage, includes an excerpt from that passage, contains a short meditation, and leads the reader in a brief prayer. Our goal each day is to read God’s Word, seek God’s will, and do God’s work. Our prayer is that God, by grace, would lead us to increase in faith, hope, and love, that we might faithfully proclaim and embody the Gospel.

There is never a bad time to follow Jesus more closely, draw nearer to the Father, and keep more in step with the Holy Spirit. This guide invites you to join us on the Lenten journey. Let’s take it together.

May we follow Christ.

May we go wherever he leads. May we do whatever he instructs. May we be used for his ultimate purposes.

May we glorify him, in everything.

Rev. Ben Simpson

Associate Director of Spiritual Formation
Truett Seminary



W E D N E S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 1 4

Joel 2:1-2, 12-17

THE PRESENT CALL TO REPENTANCE

"Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from punishment."

Apocalypse now!

That is what is happening in Joel 2. In Joel 1, the prophet described the immediate past: a locust plague devastated the land. Now, he shifts to an immediate future: the coming army will be worse. Unstoppable. The land is like Eden – until this army marches across it, leaving it a wasteland (2:3).

Just when this prophecy seems too much, "Who can endure it?!" (2:11), the prophet finally releases his audience from this whiplash experience of traveling from the past to the future and returns to the present: "...even now, declares the LORD, return to me with all your heart" (2:12).

Here is the hope: the impending doom is not inevitable, but conditional.

The present call to repentance can change the future of our world. Lent is a season of daily repentance.

If we were to begin every morning on our knees, recounting each of the Ten Commandments and how we have either broken them (sins of commission) or fallen short in fulfilling them (sins of omission), several changes would occur in our soul. First, we would be reminded just how short we still fall of God's standard. A second is that we would recognize how gracious God is in loving us despite our shortcomings: God is "gracious and compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in loving-kindness" (2:13). Another is that we would become much more gracious and loving to those people in our life who fall short. That is to say, we learn to forgive our debtors, just as our debts have been forgiven.

This kind of Lenten daily prayer does not exactly feel good, but then again Lent is not about feeling good. It is about reorienting our lives to the new future promised us. Not an apocalypse in the popular sense, but the apocalyptic vision of how God is reshaping the world even "before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes" (3:30-31; cf., Acts 2:20-21).

God, we repent of our trespasses and sins. Help us receive the forgiveness that has been offered to us in and through Christ Jesus. Reorient our lives today to the new future promised to us. Amen.

David Wilhite, PhD
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Truett Seminary



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15

Psalm 51:1-17

NEW BEGINNINGS

"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me."

As we move into our second day of Lent, we turn our attention to Psalm 51, when David pours his heart out to God. This psalm is connected to the time when David opened his eyes to the sinful actions he committed with Bathsheba and Uriah. We see David's cry of repentance to God. He confesses that he has sinned against God from the time of his birth. He is begging God to cleanse him from his sins.

David not only asks God to remove his sins, but he also asks God to change his heart completely. In verse 10 he says, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me." The Hebrew word for "create" is the same word used in Genesis 1 when God formed the universe. This is powerful. David is asking God to create a brand-new heart in him. He is asking for a fresh start. David knows that he cannot create a new heart on his own. Only God, the Creator of the universe, can do this.

This passage challenges us. Like David, we have sinned against God. We are all in need of a Savior. The good news is that through Jesus Christ, we can be renewed and forgiven. We repent in response to God's grace, and we are cleansed. 1 John 1:9 says: "If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Praise the Lord! If our joy begins to dwindle, we pray the words of David from verse 12: "Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and sustain me in a willing spirit."

During this Lenten season, let us thank God for who he is. While we are unworthy of salvation, he chooses to forgive, love, and be gracious to us when we turn to him. Let us take a moment and ask God to reveal any sins in our lives and let him restore us completely so we can have a new beginning. May we challenge others to do the same during this holy season.

Lord, David asked you to create a clean heart within him. Will you do this for me today? Reveal the sins that I have committed against you. I repent of my sins, and I ask that you help me experience the joy of the salvation that is mine in Christ. Thank you for your unconditional love and thank you for saving me! Amen.

Trevor Hart

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16

2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

RECONCILED TO GOD AND ONE ANOTHER, NOW!

"Look, now is the acceptable time; look, now is the day of salvation!"

What does our Christianity look like? Does it look like a table where a chair is pulled out for all who show up, or does it look like a game where the players marked as best are selected to participate while others watch from the sidelines?

What does your Christianity look like? Is it open to the public like a yard sale held at your beloved home, or is it closed off like a special event with a limited list of invitees?

In today's Scripture passage, Paul claims that the time is now for salvation and tells the Corinthians that neither he nor they will be a hindrance to others. Paul knew their ministries would be polluted if they operated as barriers between others and God, especially since they had already shown themselves acceptable through their handling of adversity and suffering.

We too should not desire to be barriers to those looking for salvation in the now. Why would we want to? People may wrongfully assume that we lack everything, but we lack nothing. God, and a relationship with him, are all that we could need or want – it is everything.

God wants others to experience that fulfillment and it is only right that we want people to take part in this beautiful family. Besides, we would not be a part of this family if it were not for Jesus, who made us righteous through the shedding of his blood. It was not us who made this possible, it was and is Jesus.

God and friend, I desire for you to not only be a friend to me but to others as well. I know the time is now for people to come to you and receive salvation. I ask that you help me pull out a chair for others as you have pulled out one for me. Amen.

Jessalyn Brown
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Lexington, Kentucky



S A T U R D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 17

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-20

GOD, GUIDE ME WITH YOUR LOVE

"...but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..."

What does Jesus mean when he says to give to the needy? Is he saying give to the needy because if we do so he will bless us, or that if we do so then the people will recognize us?

I do not think this is the case. There are people out there that have far less than what we have, and there are people out there who have far more than what we have. Jesus says that the people who give to show others have received their reward. However, they are missing out on the true treasure, which God will give to us.

Do we fast so that other Christians would recognize us as good Christians? Jesus says that when we fast, we should wash our faces and stay clean so that others may not know, but God will know and reward us. But why do we give to the needy and fast? We do this for God. We do not do this because God will reward us. Getting the reward is part of the promise. But I do not think that is why we give to the needy and why we fast. I say that we do these practices because we love God.

God is the one who gave us the heart to give to the needy and help others. God is the one who motivates us to fast and pray so that he can reward us. Everything comes from God and returns to God. This is the relationship I want to have with God: where he knows my heart and my intention so that he can help me understand God's love. Having this kind of relationship with God is the greatest reward that can ever be received by us.

Lord Jesus, help me understand your heart and guide me with your love. Amen.



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 18

Mark 1:9-15

MEETING GOD IN SHAMBLES AND SERENITY

*"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near;
repent, and believe in the good news."*

Growing up in the 1960's as a Southern Baptist, we never talked about Lent. The only time I heard the word was when some of my friends at school would say they gave up chocolate for Lent, which was always confusing to me. But later I realized that we did observe Lent in our Baptist way as a time of preparing our hearts for the observance of the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ. And I was surprised to find out that my father, a Baptist minister, used to fast as a spiritual practice during this time. I am glad to know this now because it says a lot about the seriousness of following Christ's example of fasting in the wilderness as he was preparing for his earthly ministry to bring the Kingdom of God to man.

Before Christ was called to fast in the wilderness, he was baptized by John the Baptist. Mark 1:9-11 says, "And just as he was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him. And a voice came from heaven, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased.'" (NRSV) John the Baptist was a wild and wooly man who ate locusts and was driven like a mad man to prepare the way for the Lord. And after John pulled Jesus out of the water, the heavens were torn apart, and the Lord showed that he was the creator of beauty and Lord over chaos. And that is the place where God and man meet each other.

The Holy Spirit drove Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan and to be attended by both wild animals and the angels. Again, he was surrounded by the untamed and the sublime. God is the creator of wildness and serenity and brings the Kingdom of God to man.

One March evening on a Wednesday, I was driving home after a choir rehearsal to prepare for the Good Friday service. We were practicing the hymn written by Isaac Watts, When I Survey the Wondrous Cross. How many times had I sung that song? So many that I cannot count, but on this evening driving in my car, I kept singing the words of the last verse,

*"Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."*

It struck me that we come to God with all of ourselves, including the good, the bad, and the ugly. He accepts everything that we are and transforms us into creatures that can be accepted by God through the blood of Jesus. I wept as I sang those words as the vastness of God's love swept over me. The Holy Spirit told me to share this love with someone I knew who later that evening accepted Jesus as her Lord.

God, I pray that I will not be afraid to approach Jesus with all my mayhem and chaos and will ask for his perfect love to reign in my life. Amen.

Nancy Floyd
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Truett Seminary



MONDAY, FEBRUARY 19

Genesis 9:8-11

THE PERFECT PROMISE-KEEPER

"As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you..."

Today's Scripture shows God fulfilling a promise – a promise made to Noah in Genesis 6:17–18: "For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life...But I will establish my covenant with you..." In today's scripture, God fulfills that promise by establishing a covenant, another promise, now to all of humankind.

When God makes a promise, he always fulfills it. God promised Noah that he would establish his covenant with him in spite of the destruction that was wrought by the flood, and he did so. God promised humankind that he would never again destroy all flesh by a flood, and never again has he done so. There are hundreds of promises that God makes to us in his Word, and we can have complete confidence in him to fulfill every one because he has been faithful to his many promises in the past.

Perhaps there is a promise that God has made to you, in Scripture or personally, that you have not yet seen fulfilled. Often it is easy to lose hope as we wait expectantly for God's fulfillment of his promises. Yet today's Scripture reminds us that we should not lose hope – just as God was faithful to Noah and humankind, he will continue to be faithful to us in everything. I invite you to renew your trust in God and his promises today, especially those that you have not yet seen fulfilled.

God, it is often hard to trust you during periods of expectant waiting, but I confess that you are a perfect promise-keeper. Let faith rise in me as I wait upon you to fulfill your promises. I love you, and I trust you. Amen.

Paul Zetterberg
Master of Divinity Student
Spring, Texas



T U E S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 0

Genesis 9:12-17

CLEANSE US, O GOD

*"I have set my bow in the clouds,
and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth."*

Genesis 6-8 details a tumultuous flood destroying the earth. The flood consumed all of creation, except for a remnant. Soon after, God shares a promise with this remnant as he offers a heartfelt promise to Noah, saying he will protect the earth from ever seeing this kind of divine destruction again. The sign of this covenant that we cling to is the rainbow, as it signals peace, assurance, and God's preservation of the earth.

The rainbow represents hope, shining beautifully as light refracts into several radiant colors dancing across the sky. These colors witness to God's willingness to bring care, safety, and restoration to that which he creates. Rainbows – often seen after rain, showers, or storms – remind and comfort God's people of how God promised to care for creation by never flooding the whole earth again. The rainbow is a sign of God's preservation of humanity. Similarly, Lent is a sign of God's salvation, reminding us of what God has done through Christ.

During Lent, the waters of the flood connect to the cleansing waters of baptism, mentioned in 1 Peter 3:20-22. Though it may initially seem far off, the Noahic Covenant represented by the rainbow points beyond the flood in Genesis to the abundance of grace offered through Jesus, the living water and the source of salvation, signified in the cleansing waters of baptism.

In the season of Lent, a time when we may find ourselves in need of refreshment, God reminds us that with the Living Water, we never thirst again. Take some time today to reflect. Ask yourself: Where have you seen the radiant light of Christ in your life recently? Are there places where you have found rest for your soul by witnessing God's glory? Have you turned to the living water Jesus offers to nurture, heal, cleanse, and restore your soul in this weary season of Lent?

God, thank you for the kaleidoscope of living color that reminds us that you have the power to take tumultuous waters, transform them through your Son, and use them to cleanse our souls. May we be comforted by this and remember this today. Amen.

Ryan McCord
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Round Rock, Texas



W E D N E S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 1

1 Peter 3:18

BROUGHT TO GOD, BROUGHT OUT OF SIN

"For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God."

What do Christ's sufferings mean for us? For Peter and his audience, they were a source of comfort amidst persecution – a sign that the presence of God does not exclude suffering but embraces it and redeems it. Additionally, Christ's sufferings also mean the forgiveness of sins. Jesus suffered, the righteous for the unrighteous, "in order to bring us to God." This implies that we were once not near to God. We were citizens of foreign kingdoms and travelers on different paths. Yet through the sufferings of Christ, we have been brought home.

Jesus has done everything necessary for our salvation. The lost sheep has been recovered and the lost coin found. Yet the cross also brings with it divine imperatives. If we have been brought out of foreign lands, how can we continue to follow the customs of those lands? If we have been brought home to God, how can we continue to walk in darkness?

The forty days leading up to Easter give us an opportunity to consider all the ways that we fall short of the glory of God. We are invited to consider all our doings that are incongruous with our standing with God. We are given the opportunity to confess our sins and repent, to turn away from all our lifeless deeds and turn towards the abundant life that God desires for us. And in our fight against sin, we are not alone. For just as Christ was made alive in the Spirit, we too have the opportunity to share in the power of the Resurrection through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, part of our prayer of confession and repentance should include asking for the grace and guidance of the Holy Spirit. For if the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is living in us, then that same Spirit will raise us up to walk in newness of life.

Lord, I confess to you that I have sinned against you in thought, and word, and deed. My heart has wandered from your fold, and I have gone astray. Do not cast me from your presence, nor take your Holy Spirit from me, but give me the grace and comfort of your Holy Spirit and increase in me the fruits of the same. Amen.

Clay Dominy
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Waco, Texas



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22

1 Peter 3:19-22

RAISED WITH CHRIST

"...through the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."

Hollywood has mastered the war movie moment. When there is about twenty minutes left and all looks lost, the leader of whichever side they have convinced us to root for delivers the speech the troops need. It reminds them why they are fighting. It recharges their hearts and minds. As the camera pans the faces of the troops, we see the transformation: they have come to life again.

When I think about what it must have been like to be one of the eight people on Noah's ark, I wonder about their bedraggled moments. Were they in need of a rah-rah reminder of what they believed in? Or was the ark proof enough that they were chosen, loved, and washed clean – like the Earth outside – by their God.

So often I find myself asking for a reminder. "It is one of those days...just give me a sign you are still here." There is nothing wrong with the prayer, but it reveals a grasping for comforts like Hollywood gives – an emotional lift and reassurance that soon (maybe as soon as 20 minutes!) everything will be OK. What a chance it is, especially during these Lenten days, to settle into the discomfort of not knowing what will happen next in the world or to us. To say, "It is one of those days, and I am chosen, loved, and washed clean by the death and resurrection of our Savior." Then, to feel ourselves brought back to life, yet again, through him. No lights or cameras, only the Creator, in eternal action for our good.

Father, may we be reminded of your patience as you wait for us to keep up with the ever-changing, always-renewing power of your love. Help us to look past temporary comforts, as we set our sights on Jesus, whose resurrection offers peace and passage into eternity with you. Amen.

Anna Mitchael

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FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 23

Psalm 25:1-3

FINDING PEACE IN THE MOMENT

"To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul."

If you have ever traveled through Chicago O'Hare Airport, you know this is not the place commonly associated with the word "peace." One night, as I anxiously attempted to get to my connecting flight and head home, everyone was nervous because of the weather. The thunder was rumbling outside as the people were grumbling inside. While I did not witness peace that night with the masses, there was one exception. As I was standing in line, I heard someone humming a song. As I turned to look, I saw a young woman seated against the wall. Under a blanket she held in her arms an infant, small enough that the baby could not have been more than a few months old. That infant was nursing. This baby was at peace.

It was then that the irony of the moment struck me. All of these sophisticated travelers were anxious and in a frenzy, and the one person who was at peace was this little baby. Why? Because that baby had the peace of its mother. Of course, you take that child away from its mother, and it will surely lose its peace, and the same goes for us and God. God will give you his peace, and it is our job to remain in his arms. To receive his warmth and nourishment and to be blanketed with his protection.

David shows what peace in the moment looks like in Psalm 25:1-2 (NIV), "In you, Lord my God, I put my trust. I trust in you; do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me. No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause."

Prince of Peace, we come before you with hearts burdened and restless. Grant us the inner peace that surpasses all understanding. Amen.

Kevin Brown
Master of Divinity Student
Granbury, Texas



S A T U R D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 4

Psalm 25:4-10

TEACH ME YOUR PATHS

"Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths."

As a first-year missionary to Southeast Asia, I remember feeling quite alone one evening as I walked home. The friendships I once had were fading because of distance, and the correspondences that were once weekly were becoming more infrequent. Along the walk, I remember hearing kids playing and speaking in a language I had yet to fully understand. I remember asking God the very familiar question, "What am I doing here, God?" Gently I felt God whisper the truth that I have heard him say to me on so many occasions, "I walk these roads with you." And that was enough. In that moment I felt the deep comfort of the God who knows our paths and leads us along the way.

In Psalm 25, God reminds us that he walks with us; he leads us down paths and teaches us his way. The psalmist cries out to God for direction. He is remembering again that God leads those who follow him. In verse 10, the psalmist reminds himself—and us—that "all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep his covenant..." We walk with a God who chooses to walk with us. The psalmist reminds us that on the road we find ourselves on God has gone before us and marked the way. He is the God who often says to those who follow him, "I will be with you."

What path are you walking today? Do you feel him on the road with you gently leading? He is the God who "leads sinners in the way." Today, join the psalmist and use his words as your own as you cry out to be led along the path he has marked out for your life. He promises his presence!

Lord, lead me along the way and teach me your path, for I trust in you, alone! Amen.

Shawn Dunn
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Waco, Texas



SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 25

Mark 8:31-38

THE SON OF MAN MUST SUFFER

"And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him."

Jesus repeatedly asserts he will suffer, be rejected, die, and rise again (Mark 8:31-32; 9:31-32; 10:32-34). Mark's account tells us much of what lies ahead for the Savior and further reveals the depth of fear, confusion, and lack of understanding among the disciples. The horror and shame of capital punishment by stoning or crucifixion, or death in the throes of an insurrection conflict, surely weighed heavily in the thoughts and conversations of those traversing the region of Caesarea Philippi.

Peter, we may presume out of concern over the haunting prediction of Christ's suffering and eminent death, directly and insubordinately confronts him and expresses disapproval over that which has been foretold (8:32). The disciples generally did not understand the Lord's teaching and were afraid to seek clarification (9:32). James and John, having received the shocking details of the Messiah's final suffering, death, and resurrection, brashly request positions of power incompatible with the Gospel and further assert their apparent readiness to run headlong into political martyrdom (10:32-40). Those most intimately connected with the Lord near the end of his earthly ministry appear no closer to understanding him than they did at the beginning.

The women, men, and children who interacted with Jesus in the first century lived in the immediacy of his ministry, yet often misunderstood that which was revealed to them. We who live on this side of the empty tomb have the benefit of a full narrative of Scripture, yet still struggle to comprehend what the Lord would have us know and do. Praise be to God for the assurance that while we now "...see in a mirror dimly...we will see face to face" (I Corinthians 13:12). May this Lenten season find us waiting and yearning for the unfolding and understanding of all that God through his Holy Spirit continues to accomplish.

Lord, where there is lack of understanding we pray for insight; where there is uncertainty we pray for clarity; and where there is fear we pray for peace. Amen.



M O N D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 6

Mark 9:2-9

INTANGIBLE LOVE

"... from the cloud there came a voice, "This is my Son, the Beloved; listen to him!"

When we begin our life with Christ, the love and passion we feel to have more knowledge about him and the desire to share it with the whole world is uncontrollable. Just as when we fall in love with someone for the first time, reason loses the spotlight. You let yourself go. But when tough situations and difficulties come, we begin to see the same love and passion with a much broader vision. Human beings are like that, we let ourselves be carried away by the beauty of a good first impression, but when reality presents itself, we doubt and want to go away. Then, weakness can overtake us.

Something similar happened with Peter, James, and John. They were among the first disciples chosen by Jesus. None doubted when Jesus called them. They were always faithful to the Master. However, over time, despite the miracles and all the incredible things that Jesus did, this was not enough to keep the disciples from failing. In Mark 9:2-9 we read about the Transfiguration. Even God spoke saying that Jesus was his Son and that they should follow him and listen to him. One of them, Peter, denied him, and when he was arrested, all the disciples scattered.

Sometimes we wait for God to show himself in our lives with an impressive miracle, or we challenge God by demanding a sample of his power without realizing that the greatest miracle and gift that God did was to set us free from the slavery of sin and give us eternal life. We fail. But God never fails. His love is not measurable or tangible. It goes far beyond any form of human expression. His love is divine. With that divine love, he loves us.

Lord, help me understand that you love me, that you chose me despite my mistakes and that you will never leave me. Amen.

José Campos

Master of Arts in Christian Ministry Student
Puyo, Ecuador



T U E S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 7

Psalm 22:21-31

GOD HEARS OUR CRIES

"You who fear the Lord, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel! For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help."

The Christmas season is filled with family, presents, laughter, and lights. Growing up it was a time when everything seemed right in the world and warm fuzzies filled my stomach. The joy of the Christmas season does not always tell the full story, however.

Many of us faced unspeakable grief this Christmas season and are holding it closely now during Lent. If not our own grief, we witness the suffering of our neighbors down the road and around the world. Sorrow, pain, and loss enter our lives, and we ask God why he feels so far away.

Psalm 22 begins with the phrase, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" These are the words uttered by Jesus on the cross in a moment of complete pain and despair (Matt 27:46). Jesus, our Savior, knows what it is like to experience sorrow, pain, and loss. He knows what it is like for God our Father to feel far away.

This is not where the story of Jesus ends, or how the psalm ends. The suffering is not bypassed or dismissed, for God does not despise or scorn the suffering of the afflicted (Ps 22:24). Jesus died and came back to life three days later, defeating death and sin. The psalmist, in the middle of suffering, remembers God's righteousness, mercy, and provision. We can remember what God has done even when God feels far away, even when our lives are filled with sorrow and pain. We have a secure hope that God will remain who he is for us and for those after us. God hears our cries and does not turn away from us.

God my Father, be near to me today. I praise you for you have not hidden your face from me, but you have heard my cry for help. Amen.

Hannah Woods

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W E D N E S D A Y , F E B R U A R Y 2 8

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

GOD HOLDS OUR FUTURE

"And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous."

I can imagine the young, newlywed Abram and Sarai preparing for their future together. Perhaps they considered names for potential children: "No, not Serug, he'd remind me too much of his great grandpa. What about Reu? I like the way that sounds." Later, I can imagine them drawing up plans for the land they would have inherited, first in Ur, then in Haran. Where would they graze the livestock? Where were the best places to pitch their tents? Which plots of land might they be able to sell? Still later, I imagine nights of handwringing as they did their best to plan for relative comfort and safety in their childless old age. Who would care for them? And, when the time came, who would give them a proper burial?

I can imagine Abram and Sarai's future-mindedness because I regularly slip into a similar mode. In this season as a student, I catch myself regularly drifting into thoughts, preparations, and even anxieties regarding my future and all its unknowns. What comes next? Where will we live? What will I do for work? Am I doing enough now to prepare for the future? As it was for Abram and Sarai, the future is uncertain.

In our passage today, I find comfort and clarity in its portrayal of God, his followers, and the future. Any of Abram and Sarai's previous plans have been upended, and instead they are given a promise. God makes with Abraham "an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you" (Gen 17:7, NRSV). Their uncertain futures are held in the certainty of God's covenant. This covenant provides redemption for Abram and Sarai's past, relationship with him in the present, and hope for their future and their children's futures forever. Further, in God's promise, Abram becomes Abraham and Sarai becomes Sarah. Their status and identities are changed. To explain this shift, God says, "I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations" (Gen 17:5). Interestingly, God does not say I plan to make you, or I will make you, but I have made you. For God, there is already a fulfillment of his promise even as Abraham and Sarah await its ultimate fulfillment. And the emphasis is much more on what God has done than what Abraham or Sarah can or will do. God holds the past, present, and future, and his promise is sure.

In this season of Lent, like Abraham and Sarah, we await the fulfillment of God's promise. We take this time in our Christian year for repentance and preparation: to join Christ in the wilderness as we await his glorification. But, also like Abraham and Sarah, we see that God's promises are already fulfilled and being fulfilled. The King of kings has come from their line, offering blessing to all peoples. And, in Christ, we too have already undergone a change in identity and status. So, in Lent, we remember specifically the work that God in Christ has already accomplished for us and our salvation. As with Abraham and Sarah, God has done the work, we have received the blessing. By the blood of his new covenant, he has provided redemption for our past, relationship in our present, and hope for our future. So, in this season, we prepare, above all, our hearts for Christ. Only in him are we free to consider our lives and futures, not as things to conform to our plans or control to our advantage, but as offerings lifted to God. We rest assured in the one who holds our future.

God, I have been redeemed in and through Christ Jesus. You have claimed me. I offer my life to you. I trust you. Lead me into your good future. Amen.

Jacob Palmer

Master of Divinity Student

Waco, Texas



THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29

Romans 4:13-15

ABRAHAM AND HIS PEEPS

"For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith."

What came first: chocolate bunnies or jellybeans?¹ How about Peeps or Cadbury eggs?²

And how about Moses or Abraham? The covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis was a result of Abraham's faith. God promised to provide, protect, and prepare a way for Abraham to be part of a grand lineage and family. Abraham's part was to give up...money? Land? Resources?

Not quite. He had to give up his comfort and doubts. He was to follow in faith. When the law came years later through Moses, that promise was not destroyed or changed. The promise, God's promise, was given new clothes. Centuries later, a man would be buried in a tomb and covered in burial cloths. Three days later, he would not be wearing the same cloths, stained and torn, but would be the risen Savior, the fulfillment of the promise.

We celebrate a powerful, risen King because of God's faithfulness to keep his promises, not because of our stellar service record. We are children of the promise to Abraham despite our history of failing to keep the law. God is faithful to us. Praise God for this!

Consider the other promises the Lord has made. Numbers 11:23 states, "...Is the Lord's power limited? Now you shall see whether my word will come true for you or not." As we continue through this Lenten season, for every weird candy you find at the grocery store, reflect on a promise of God. May you see that as the world and the craziness that it brings continues, God remains faithful, and may this stir you to grow in your own faithfulness to him.

God, even though I have done nothing to deserve it, thank you for your faithfulness in keeping your promises. Help me to continue to see your faithfulness even in my daily life. Amen.

Rebecca Ramirez
Master of Divinity Student
Austin, Texas

1: Jellybeans win this one, but not by much. Chocolate bunnies: 1890. "Why Are Chocolate Easter Bunnies a Thing?" *Allrecipes*.

Jellybeans: 1861 "Origin of the Jellybean or, Why Are They Called Beans?" *Origin of the Jellybean or, Why Are They Called Beans?*

2. Little eggs win here, also a close call. Cadbury eggs: 1923. "About | Hershey's". Peeps: 1953. "Fun Facts | Just Born."



FRIDAY, MARCH 1

Romans 4:16-17

ALL CHILDREN OF GOD

*"For this reason the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace,
so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants,
not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham..."*

Journey with me into the first century world and imagine yourself as a Jewish Christian.

As Paul's letter begins to be read to all Christians in Rome, you make eye contact across the room with your Gentile friend you were arguing with about circumcision and sabbath just days earlier. Rolling your eyes, you think, "Paul will prove those Gentiles so wrong."

However, the more you hear, the more you start to uncross your arms, realizing that you might be in the wrong as you remember that Abraham was saved before his circumcision. You then hear, "Abraham, who is the father of all of us." Despite the letter continuing to be read, everything stops, and the world goes quiet as you reflect that Gentiles are now the children of Abraham. Looking back to the same friend, you think, "I've wasted my time arguing with my brother. We are all God's chosen people. No deed can save us. We are saved by grace through faith." Once the letter is finished being read, you dash over to your friend, hug, and ask for forgiveness.

The watching world is looking at Christians in disbelief as we continually argue with each other. May we navigate disagreements differently, not emphasizing that we belong to this or that denomination, are conservative or liberal, but instead, we are unified, children of God, in and through Christ. May we, the children of Abraham, not quarrel about the minuscule details of different convictions but champion each other as we pursue a godly life for Christ. May we be at peace with one another as we serve the God of peace together.

How can you seek peace and reconciliation today?

God, may the unification of the family that is the global Church begin with me. Amen.

Anabella Martinez

Master of Divinity Student
Dallas, Texas



S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 2

Romans 4:18-25

FAITH COUNTED AS RIGHTEOUSNESS

"...his faith 'was reckoned to him as righteousness.' Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also."

When I was a child, I sang the song "Father Abraham" alongside other children at Sunday School. As I grew older, the lyrics became confusing to me when we declared ourselves as descendants of Abraham. Evidently, I am not (and am still not) genetically related to Abraham. I wanted to be part of "God's chosen people" and for this promise to include me too. How could this be possible?

In Christ Jesus, God has made it so.

At the very scene that God promised Abraham would be the father of many nations, Abraham too considered whether God's promise pertained to him. The realities of Abraham's broken old body and Sarah's barrenness deemed Abraham's inclusion in God's plan impossible. This did not change Abraham's eligibility to see God "do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:21). Rather than focusing on the unlikelihood of becoming a father, Abraham did something that paved the way for Christians. With Abraham's entire being, he became "fully convinced" (Rom. 4:21) to have faith in God's promise. By doing so, his faith was counted as righteousness. Paul, who was narrating the life of Abraham, did not end the story there. He said, "Now the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also" (Rom. 4:23-24). For Christians, faith in Christ is counted as righteousness.

Because of Abraham's faith, he was called the "father of the faith" (Rom. 4:16; Gal. 3:6-9). I did not know as a child that I was fighting for something I already had, which was a faith counted as righteousness. Faith in Christ is enough. I am a participant of the faith in Christ, and so are you.

Father, thank you for your son, Jesus, who died and was raised to life so that we would be participants of the faith. Amen.

Megan S. Mitre

Master of Divinity/Master of Business and Administration Student
Edcouch, Texas



SUNDAY, MARCH 3

John 2:13-22

MARKETPLACES IN SACRED SPACES!

"He told those who were selling the doves, 'Take these things out of here!

Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!'"

My first pilgrimage to the Holy Land was in 2011. I can remember the excitement of feeling eagerness to walk where Jesus walked and to visit sites that I held sacred. These were sites that I had only read about and imagined, like Nazareth, the Sea of Galilee, Magdala, Cana, The Mount of Olives, the Garden of Gethsemane, and the location of Jerusalem's temple.

One place that I was particularly eager to visit was the Jordan River, where Jesus, himself, was baptized by John the Baptist. The buildup for my visit was preceded by the nearly thirteen-hour flight from Atlanta, Georgia, to Ben Gurion Airport in Israel. After clearing customs, the delegation with which I was traveling, a devout group of Christian pastors and leaders, began the journey.

The sheer number of people in Israel, and the number of people gathered at each site, took me a little aback. However, it was not until we made our way to the baptismal location of the Jordan River that I felt a sense of dismay. Dismay – primarily over the transformation of this biblical site into a commercialized marketplace for tourists. For me, the meaningful sacredness which this site held, formed through Bible reading and devotion, was tarnished.

I can imagine how Jesus felt in John 2:13-22, when he made his way to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover of the Jews. Instead of gathering to worship with other devout believers, Jesus saw that the house of God had been transformed into a house of trade (i.e., a marketplace). The scene results in Jesus' ire, where many witness his righteous annoyance. As Jesus responds, by turning over the tables of the money changers and driving them and the livestock out, he is advocating for the purity and holiness of the house of God and a purity and holiness in the hearts of those who occupy the places of God.

Let our hearts be pure and holy, places wherein God is invited to dwell therein. Let us not be culpable of turning our sacred spaces, our actions, or even our speech into breeding grounds of carnality or the profane.

Lord, we invite you to visit our thoughts and the depths of our hearts. Clear out the thoughts and actions that my tarnish your holiness in our lives. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen!

Jamal-Dominique Hopkins, PhD

Associate Professor of Christian Scriptures;
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M O N D A Y , M A R C H 4

Psalm 19:1-6

PROCLAIMING THE GLORY OF GOD

*"The heavens are telling the glory of God...day to day pours forth speech,
and night to night declares knowledge."*

As Christians, the Lenten season is a time to celebrate Christ's resurrection from death. It is also a time to mourn our sin that placed him on the cross. As we read Psalm 19, we are reminded of a similar dichotomy of celebration and reflection. The psalmist invites us to proclaim God's glory in a celebratory fashion as he witnesses God's creation. When he writes of God's glory being told by the heavens, he is describing the beauty as seen from earth. The psalmist sees the evidence of God in the "day pouring forth speech and the night declaring knowledge." It is through the sky, sun, and clouds of the day that revelation is spewed, and it is through the moon and stars of the night that knowledge is revealed. God's creation should leave us in awe daily as we witness its extrinsic vastness and intrinsic detail.

We are gifted with an image of relentless glorification of God through the proclamation of his handiwork. The reflection portion of this passage comes when we humbly recognize that we can often become so consumed with the distractions of the day that we lay our heads down at night only to find that we did not proclaim the glory of God. His creation which consumes us can easily become lost in the fullness of the day. Our attitude this Lenten season should consist of celebration and also humble reflection. We should be challenged to listen closely to the speech and knowledge that God's creation grants us, and at the end of the day be able to recount where we saw the Lord in creation. May this also serve as a reminder to us that God's timing is perfect as he displays the "strength of the sun as it courses through the sky with strength and joy."

His glory cannot be hidden, just like the sun.

Lord, your glory radiates through all you have created. Grant me eyes to see your work in all things and give me the heart to worship you as the heavens do. May you revive my soul through the perfection of your law. Amen.

Ellie Hodge
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Waco, Texas



T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 5

Psalm 19:7-14

OUR ROCK AND REDEEMER

"Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you,

O Lord, my rock and my redeemer."

As a small child, my niece carried her stuffed lion around everywhere she went. Lion, as it was affectionately called, was her security blanket, best friend, and cuddle buddy. Now that she is twelve, she no longer takes Lion on her daily excursions, but he does reside atop her bedpost—a watchful eye in the dark of night.

We all look for a source of security in our lives, whether that be a stuffed lion, our job, or even our home. But these things all lack what we truly need. The stuffed lion cannot protect us from the thief in the night. Our jobs are not guaranteed and can change at any moment. And our homes, while steady shelters, are not as secure as we would like to believe.

But David shows us in Psalm 19:7-14 that we can place our faith somewhere solid: God our Father. When you look at the words David uses to describe the Lord, we see exactly what our hearts desire. Perfect and sure (v. 7). Right and clear (v. 8). Pure, true, and righteous (v. 9).

God does what the material things cannot. He is a protector, provider, and shelter for all who seek him. He revives our souls in times of stress. He is a source of joy in the darkest of times. He enlightens and endures. He is more precious than gold. Sweeter than honey. He is our rock and our redeemer. He is perfect in every way.

Lord, may you continue to remind me of your graciousness as a perfect, righteous, and firm foundation.

Justin Walker

Master of Arts in Christian Ministry Student
Peaster, Texas



W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 6

1 Corinthians 1:18-21

WALK DAILY WITH GOD

*"For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,
but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."*

In 1 Corinthians 1:18-21, Paul is writing to the church in Corinth. He encourages them not to focus on their own intelligence or the intelligence of their community. Instead, he stresses the importance of focusing on the power of God and Christ's love for us.

This cannot be learned through pure logic or reasoning. The message of Christ's death on a cross sounded ridiculous to nonbelievers, those who are "perishing." Salvation, or walking daily with the Lord, comes to us when the Holy Spirit works within us, and we have faith in Christ and trust in God's love for us.

During the season of Lent, trying to "check all the boxes" and sharing with others what we are fasting from during this season can be tempting. Instead, I invite you to enter a spiritual process of self-examination that focuses on the "power of God."

Use your heart, not simply your head. What can you add to your routine during this season of Lent that focuses on Christ and his love for you? Are you spending more time in the Word? Are you spending more time in prayer? What other kinds of things will strengthen your walk with God? What do you sense God inviting you to do as your next step in faith so that you might more fully know the power of God? Take action.

Dear God, thank you for your constant presence in our lives. Please help us to be open to you as we journey through Lent. Help our self-examination to be fruitful and help us to focus on your love for us each day. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

Jennifer Hall
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Round Rock, Texas



THURSDAY, MARCH 7

1 Corinthians 1:22-25

THE DIVINE REVERSAL

*"For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom,
and God's weakness is stronger than human strength."*

We often label almost all things "#trending." Many of us try to keep up with these trends at some point. Those who stand apart from these trends are often seen as outsiders. In a world captivated by fleeting "#trends," followers of Christ are called to embrace the eternal truths of the Gospel that transcends worldly acclaim.

For Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:22-25, the crucifixion was a divine paradox that served as a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, yet it reveals the true power and wisdom of God to believers. This profound event subverted Jewish hopes for a conquering king and confounded Greek ideals of rational dignity. In the eyes of both, the act of worshipping a crucified savior was scandalous, but through this apparent weakness and folly, God revealed a wisdom and strength that defies conventional understanding.

In his divine reversal, Jesus Christ, our King and Savior, embraced humanity by bearing the cross, subverting the world's definitions of victory and honor. Christ challenged the beliefs of Jews and Greeks alike through his choice of humility and crucifixion.

When the verse references "God's foolishness and weakness," Paul aims to highlight the limitations of human wisdom, as the Jews and Greeks believed dying on the cross was an act of foolishness and weakness. Only those who wholeheartedly embrace Christ can grasp his sacrifice, which embodies divine wisdom and strength far surpassing human comprehension. Paul's words pierce through the veil of human arrogance. True strength is found in God's apparent "foolishness" and "weakness." What is seen as God's foolishness and weakness is, in fact, wiser and stronger than any human understanding or capability.

This passage urges us to forsake the illusions of temporal power and discern the true essence of divine strength and insight manifested on the cross. In this season of Lent, may the cross of Christ challenge our human notions of power and wisdom and embrace the faith that appears foolish to the world.

Lord, grant us the grace to perceive the unfathomable depth of wisdom and strength embodied in the cross and encourage us to proclaim our faith in the face of the world's skepticism. May our strength and wisdom be found in the paradox of Christ crucified, the power and wisdom of God, as we seek a deeper communion with you. Amen.

Thanmi Maram
Master of Arts in Christian Ministry
Manipur, India



FRIDAY, MARCH 8

Exodus 20:1-11

RENEW IN US A SABBATH SPIRIT

*"For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them,
but rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it."*

Lent is both a time of rest and a time of work. We fast, we pray, we repent, and we refrain from activities that distract us from a deeper relationship with God. The Sabbath, too, is a time of active resting. It is in our stillness that we are actively obedient. In our brokenness, we may view the Sabbath as a reward for our own hard work rather than a time to praise God for his. But we are called to rest, not because we are tired, but because God commands it.

We have largely forgotten the natural rhythms of work and rest and the turning of the seasons. We even interfere with time, falling back and springing forward, determined to embrace an illusion of control over the natural patterns of God's creation. These idolatrous tendencies have the potential to taint our Sabbath observance and drive a wedge between us and our Creator.

The Sabbath is not about self-care; rather, the Sabbath is creation care. When we submit to God's command to keep the Sabbath holy, we allow not only ourselves to rest, but also all the creatures and processes that order our lives. In so doing, we rediscover God's intended rhythms and patterns and begin to lead more balanced lives.

This Lenten season, may we rest actively, repenting of the ways we have failed in our covenant, keeping and creation care. May we rest obediently, consciously choosing to honor God with our stillness and our reflection. May we rest completely, sparing ourselves from unnecessary toil while also sparing our fellow creatures who would toil on our behalf.

Lord of all Creation, renew within us the spirit of your Sabbath. Help us to actively rest in obedience rather than passively rest in the idolatry of self-indulgence. Grant us the wisdom to turn our eyes to you as you reset our spiritual rhythm to match your best plans for us. Amen.

Sharon Smith

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Grandview, Texas



S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 9

Exodus 20:12-20

KEEP OUR MOTIVES LOVING AND PURE

"Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid, for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin.'"

Growing up in church, my picture of the Ten Commandments was always one of Moses walking down Mount Sinai with the tablets and smashing them when he got to the bottom. But as we see in Exodus 20, this is not how the Israelites first received them. God speaks directly to them. The result is fear, begging for Moses to speak to them instead of God. As they stand directly in front of God, their only reaction is fear. God does not talk to them like Moses does. God does not interact with them like Moses does. But Moses does not love them like God does.

God's presence to them is overwhelming. There is thunder, lightning, smoke, and trumpets. And the words and commands he gives them are overwhelming, too. In verses 12-17, he lists his commandments for interacting with our fellow man. It can be easy to get caught up in what God is telling us not to do and feel as though he is restricting us, not allowing us to live as we might desire. And that is true. We are called to live differently than we might want. But because he loves us, God wanted to give us this groundwork for what love looks like. No, it is not a complete picture, and his love for us is infinitely greater than what we can show others. While the Israelites may not be able to recognize that at this moment, we can.

Moses tells the Israelites that their fear of God should keep them from sinning. And even though it should not be our primary motivation, as we are to love others as he loves us, it is effective. As we focus on him throughout this Lenten season, we should reflect upon our motivations and love others out of love, not fear.

Lord, thank you for loving us as you do. Help us to love others like you do and keep our motives pure. Amen.

Andrew McClintock
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Tyler, Texas



SUNDAY, MARCH 10

John 3:14-21

PLACING OURSELVES UNDER JESUS CHRIST

"...that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Traditionally, when most people hear John 3:16, they think of it as a summary of the major message of the New Testament, namely that God sent his son, Jesus, to save the lost. As a standalone, the verse turns into an upbeat joyful proclamation with little content beyond the declaration of salvation.

The emphasis of Lent seems different. Both its length, (forty days) and its content (fasting, spiritual discipline, overcoming temptations that pull us away from God's presence and favor) find their origin in the remembrance of the forty days Jesus spent in the desert being tempted by Satan. The liturgical connection, then, to the forty days preceding Christ's resurrection, makes this a time of deepening devotion, of restoring repentance, and of committing anew to the call Christ places on his followers.

John 3:14-15 speaks directly to this. As an introduction to 3:16, it not only makes the Son the sine qua non of salvation. It demands a willful action on the part of those who are to be saved by this Son – only as they look to the One who did not fear the cross will they find deliverance. Since Jesus makes this story in Number 21 a type for salvation, the faith called for in John 3:16 cannot be reduced to mental assent. To find the "cure" for the poison that so often fills our lives, we must repent of our murmuring and objections to God's ways (Num 21:5) and seek him anew (Num 21:8, 9).

Lifting up Christ, then, results in placing ourselves under him. In the words of John the Baptist, spoken just a few verses later (John 3:30): "Christ must become greater; I must become less." Or as Jesus himself concludes: "But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God" (3:21).

Jesus, I look to you today for my salvation. I place my life under your Lordship and care. Lead me and strengthen me so that I may live as your disciple. Amen.

Preben Vang, PhD

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MONDAY, MARCH 11

Psalm 107:1-3

DELIVERED FROM DEPRAVITY

"Let the redeemed of the LORD say so, those he redeemed from trouble..."

What does it mean to be redeemed? One could say that it means to be bought and brought out of an unfavorable state or set of circumstances and into one of life and peace. By necessity, to be redeemed one must have a redeemer. Someone who has, on behalf of another, paid the price of their redemption to deliver them out of their depravity and into new life.

In Psalm 107, the psalmist calls for all of God's redeemed ones to recall his deliverance and give thanks to him not only for what he has done, but also for who he is. In context, Yahweh has redeemed the Israelites and delivered them out of exile. Those who were estranged from God due to their rebellion have been brought back into his family, according to his goodness and steadfast love. The Lord gathered those who were scattered and brought them back to himself from every corner of the earth.

The season of Lent reminds us that we too have lived in exile. We remember that we once were dead in our rebellion against God. We, once, were in a state of depravity.

Yet we too have been redeemed. We have been bought and brought out of the former ways in which we lived and have now received the fullness of life in God through the Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. It is according to the goodness and steadfast love of Christ that we have been redeemed.

Let us recall and reflect upon how Jesus has redeemed us, and, in doing so, gaze into his heart "for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever."

Let us respond to the psalmist's call and give thanks to the Lord this Lenten season.

Lord Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, we give thanks to you for what you've done and for who you are; for you are good and your steadfast love endures forever. Amen.

Trevor Jackson

Master of Divinity Student
Weatherford, Oklahoma



T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 1 2

Psalm 107:17-22

FROM DELIVERANCE TO REMEMBRANCE

*"And let them offer thanksgiving sacrifices
and tell of his deeds with songs of joy."*

In Disney's *The Lion King*, there is a dramatic scene where Mufasa, Simba's dad, appears in the clouds. Prior to this moment, Simba had run away from his home due to the guilt and shame he carried from his father's death. In his exile, Simba was led to a cloudy sky depicting an image of his father, whose thundering voice proclaimed, "You have forgotten who you are, and so forgotten me. Remember who you are." This was Simba's moment of truth, his turning point; Simba would begin his trek home to restore his people after remembering who he was.

Our Scriptural passage inspires and invites us to a specific invitation to consider prayerfully during Lent – an invitation to remember and recall our identity in Christ. It was only when Simba remembered who he was that he was restored to return to the work laid out before him. The psalmist's words in our passage depict rebellious people who have suffered on behalf of their sins. They gave in to their desires and became drawn "to the gates of death" (Ps. 107:18). One might imagine the story progressing to further punishment. However, the passage takes a surprising turn in verse 19. The hope of restoration emerges. While drawn toward darkness, the rebellious people cried out to God, and he delivered them. God identified them as his own and stepped in to rescue and restore them.

God identifies us as his redeemed people—not because of what we have done, but because of who He is, and He invites us to walk in this identity.

This invitation to walk in our identity as God's redeemed people is twofold. First, to remember that we are God's holy and redeemed and beloved people. From our remembrance, we get to rejoice and thank God through this season of Lent by living as his redeemed children.

What is God inviting you to remember about your identity as his redeemed one? What does embracing God's love for you and who he says you are right now look like?

Lord Jesus, forgive me for the times I have often forgotten your goodness. Please grant me a posture of remembrance so I may walk as your delivered and redeemed child. May I walk faithfully with you and others in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alia Henderson
Master of Divinity Student
Bandera, Texas



W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 1 3

Numbers 21:4-7

DO "IT" ANYWAY

"...So Moses prayed for the people."

While meditating on this passage, I felt there more to be gleaned from this text than the need for repentance. The Israelites were complaining about the conditions of being in the wilderness and comparing their suffering to the conditions of their previous enslavement in Egypt. They criticized the lack of food and balked at the edible provisions of God that were made available to them. After the Israelites had spoken against God and Moses, they had to deal with the implied consequences of their actions set forth by God. God sent poisonous serpents amongst the people that bit and killed many of the Israelites.

However, I think the hidden treasure of this passage lies within the ending of verse 7. The Scripture tells us that the Israelites acknowledged their sin against God and Moses and asked Moses to pray to the Lord for relief from the serpents. And Moses does.

He prays for the Israelites. Moses prays for their deliverance from the perceived punishment from God. He prays for the very people who have spoken against him for simply doing what God has instructed him to do. Moses petitions God for relief for the very people who have invoked frustration. Simply put, Moses intercedes on their behalf.

Like Moses, we may find ourselves in positions to which we must intercede on behalf of people who question God's call on our lives and our actions in obedience to God. We may also be tasked with leading the very people who speak against us. Nevertheless, we must embody the spirit of Moses and do 'it' anyway. We live in a society that is marred by religious, political, social, and economic strife. Notwithstanding, God is calling us to intercede for people who are actively seeking to attack our faith, society, communities, and personhood. Despite how we feel or what our personal desires are, we must do 'it' anyway.

Moses did for the Israelites what Jesus Christ does for us daily. He pleads to God, the Father, on our behalf even though we are unworthy of his love and covering. But even though we do not deserve his intercession, Jesus Christ does 'it' anyway. Thank God for the Intercessor.

God, we thank you for the intercessors in our lives. Grant us the grace to intercede on behalf of those who may speak against us. Amen.

Arnelle Woods

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THURSDAY, MARCH 14

Numbers 21:8-9

LOOK AND LIVE

"So Moses made a serpent of bronze and put it upon a pole, and whenever a serpent bit someone, that person would look at the serpent of bronze and live."

During a time in Israel's history when deadly serpents terrorized their camp, the Lord instructed Moses, who led the people from Egypt into the wilderness, to craft a bronze serpent. Faithfully, Moses created a bronze serpent and set it on a pole as the Lord instructed. When a deadly serpent bit a person, they would look at the bronze serpent and they would live. The bronze serpent was a sign of God's healing and rescue.

Our God of deliverance, mercy, justice, and life gave the people what they needed when they turned to him. The people talked to Moses because they recognized their sins against God and one another. They asked Moses to intercede and ask God to remove the evil from their midst. God provided a sign of hope, and deliverance from death.

Even before the Son was healing and teaching in Israel, the people of God knew they needed to be healed. Jesus connected his ministry to what God had done in the wilderness. Lord Jesus pointed to the bronze serpent in John's Gospel when he said, "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up," (3:14 NRSV).

The narrative of Moses creating the bronze serpent was so powerful that the Son used it to describe his work of salvation. The bronze serpent was used by God to heal people. It also was used to awaken them. They repented. Now, they were being healed.

Awake and see how God is at work your life. Repent. Look not to a bronze serpent, but to the cross. Look to the risen Jesus. This Lenten season, let us call to the Lord and ask for the Holy Spirit to cleanse us from our sin, to come and dwell within us.

God of mercy, compassion, justice, and deliverance please forgive our transgressions and send your Spirit to dwell within us. Amen.

Maxton Keeter

Master of Divinity Student
Scotland Neck, North Carolina



FRIDAY, MARCH 15

Ephesians 2:1-5

"TAG...YOU'RE IT!"

"...even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved..." (Ephesians 2:5, NRSV)

One of my favorite games growing up as a kid was "freeze tag." I remember the bell would ring, indicating a transition from class time to outside. I remember my friends and I would explode out of our seats and gather in the grass to explain the rules and designate a person as "it". And once selected, the goal was for us to run and hide, hoping to avoid becoming "frozen" before time ran out. I considered myself a legend at this game. But my efforts of twisting, turning, crawling, and juking eventually wore thin. As the game went on, I found myself frozen, searching, and calling for someone to free me. It was as if my whole world came to a stop, and everyone else's continued.

As elementary as it sounds, I believe that sometimes our walk with Christ is like a game of freeze tag. We walk, run, twist, and turn to avoid the things that may hinder us from God. And somehow, in our human nature, we make wrong decisions that freeze us. We struggle to forgive. We give into the worldly temptations and distractions. We seek to build our kingdom and not his. We step away from the One who orders our steps (Prov. 20:24). Ultimately, our lives come to a halt, and we find ourselves stuck, dead in sin, and spiritually frozen.

In this season of Lent, it is a beautiful time to remember the One who saw us frozen, dead in sin, and remember why he tagged us. Our adoption into God's family was not because of anything that we could have done, but everything that he did (Rom. 8:17). We no longer have to wonder who will hear our desperate cries, we can now rely on and remember that God has chosen us and set us free.

Lord, help me today to walk in the freedom that you have graciously given me. Amen.

Patrick "Pat" Bray Jr.
Master of Divinity Student
Chicago, Illinois



S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 1 6

Ephesians 2:6-10

HIS LOVE FOR THE IMPERFECT

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing;

it is the gift of God..."

There is so much pressure to be perfect. Let me rephrase that: there is so much pressure to *look like* you are perfect, to be the person living their best life, or ascending to the most incredible heights. To be honest, I have always *desperately* wanted to be perfect.

But in Ephesians 2, we are reminded of a beautiful gift. It is not the most perfect person who receives God's grace. It is not the person with the greatest achievement that receives God's mercy. It is not the most beautiful person that experiences the calm and safety of God's love. It is you. It is me. The flawed. The broken. The hurting. The "not okay." The forgotten. We have received this gift in and through faith in Jesus.

God is rich in mercy, full of love, driven by sheer kindness. There is nothing that can keep him from sharing his abundant grace with you.

We desperately long to be perfect. I praise God that, because of Christ's sacrificial love for us, we are invited to receive the peace of his boundless love and mercy. God is true love. God's abundant love makes us complete. We can rest in Christ Jesus. His grace redeems us. God's love makes us whole.

God, thank you for your constant love, grace, and mercy. We do not need to be perfect to know you and for you to want to know us. We love you. Amen



SUNDAY, MARCH 17

John 12:20-33

GATHERING: A JOURNEY OF GRIEF AND GLORY

"And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself."

Lent is a time of gathering. We gather our lives and communities before God, drawn together by Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. This season of gathering is what the early Irish would describe as a "thin space" as the distance between our lives and God's existence narrows. In the thin space marked by Lent, the hope of God's entanglement with our existence draws us in.

We are gathered.

If Lent is a time of gathering, John 12 recounts the multiple gatherings that surround Jesus' journey to Jerusalem. First, Greeks begin to gather for worship, and then a new gathering emerges, sparked by stories about Jesus. Next, Philip turns to Andrew, and then the two go to tell Jesus. New connections gather. Third, Jesus gathers stories. He responds to his disciples by describing what will distinguish his followers: "If [a grain] dies, it bears much fruit" (12.24). Finally, gifts, griefs, and glory begin to gather like seashells cast on the shore. Jesus' "soul is troubled" (12.27), and he expresses the humanly desire to be delivered from suffering.

Lent is a time of gathering amid our creaturely existence.

The story then takes an unexpected turn; a voice disrupts those gathered. Amid the various forms of gathering that carry us through Lent, this disruption draws our attention to the source of glory: God. Even as some who gathered in the crowd could not comprehend it, this voice – and Jesus' voice that follows – reassures us that God's mysterious work is tied to glory. As Sam Wells notes, "the purpose of our gathering is to bear witness to God's glory."³ This is the story of Lent: God is gathering an unexpected community, one drawn together by the words and work of Jesus, inviting us to see our gifts and griefs in light of God's glory.

God who gathers, draw us together again, forging the unexpected community that can bear witness to your glory in your Church and throughout the world. Amen.

Dustin D. Benac, ThD

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Truett Seminary

3: Samuel Wells, *Incarnational Mission: Being with the World*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 15.



MONDAY, MARCH 18

Jeremiah 31:31-34

THE PROMISE OF A NEW COVENANT

*"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."*

I am sure that the words of the prophet, Jeremiah, were of great comfort to the people of Israel. They had been living in what can be described as a state of hopelessness and despair. Unfortunately, this was due to their own sinfulness and disregard for God. They had failed to live up to the Mosaic covenant, but God showed his willingness to reestablish a new covenant relationship with them. This time, he promised to put his law within them, to write it on their hearts, to continue to be their God and to forgive their sins.

As I studied and meditated over this passage, I realized that those same words from Jeremiah's message can also bring us comfort and hope in our times of trouble.

As believers in the salvific work of Jesus Christ, we are recipients of those very same promises...and even more! How exciting it is to know that God desires to have the same type of relationship with us. He has adopted us into his spiritual family, given us his Holy Spirit, and assured us that we can be forgiven for our trespasses and sins.

During this season of Lent, let us remember God is merciful and faithful to his Word, even when we fail. He is our promise keeper!

Lord, we thank you for your willingness to enter a covenant relationship with us and for being true to your Word. Amen.



T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 1 9

Hebrews 5:5-10

PRAYER AND SUBMISSION TO GOD

"In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission."

This passage gives us the most magnificent portrait of Jesus – the high priesthood of Christ, according to the order of Melchizedek who was both priest and king of Salem, a figure described scantily in Genesis 14 and Psalm 110. After presenting a description of the priesthood (Heb 5:1-4), the writer then details its application to Christ (Heb 5:5-10) who did not call or appoint himself but came following the will of the One who sent him (Heb 5:5-7).

Jesus, the great High Priest, taught two essential components of faith: First, prayer (Heb 5:7). Jesus, with loud cries and tears, prayed and offered his requests in reverent submission. Second, obedience (Heb 5:8). Christ learned obedience through his suffering, showing that hardships are both instructional and formational in our walk with God. Jesus, in seeking help by appealing to God, sets an example for his followers. We learn the value of hardship and obedience when seeking God's help through prayer.

God's declaration, "You are a priest forever, according to the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:6), is of special importance, because attaching Christ's priesthood to Melchizedek places Christ's priesthood at the beginning of the covenant before Abraham, which has eternal and universal efficacy. Typologically, in fulfilling the likeness to Melchizedek, Christ is our priest forever, which accordingly has become the guarantee of a better covenant (Heb 8:22). His divine calling and appointment, his finished work and accomplishment, give us broad rays of hope both existentially and eschatologically. Christ is the source of our eternal salvation (Heb 5:9). Following his lead is worthwhile.

Dear Father, renew our hearts and minds and quicken us to the conformity of the image of your Son, Jesus Christ, living a life of obedience and reverent submission. Amen.

Ngozoto Vero

Master of Arts in Christian Ministry Student
Dimapur, Nagaland, India



W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 2 0

Psalm 51:1-6

AUDACITY IN FAITH

"Have mercy on me, O God..."

This psalm leaps across centuries and cultures to meet us today. King David, whom we highly esteem, shows himself to be a human being just like us. He is a sinner. The line between reader and the one-read-about blurs as we find ourselves confronted with our own sinful hearts.

Many translations attribute this psalm to David, connecting it to the events of 2 Samuel 11-12. The echoes of David's self-realization in 2 Samuel 12:13, "I have sinned against the Lord" – can be heard in the opening half of Psalm 51. In Psalm 51:3-4, the courtroom scene of 2 Samuel 12 fades and one meeting takes center stage. This sinful human being sits before a merciful God. The human recognizes the soil for sin is that of their own heart.

Yet, faithful audacity strikes the first chord in this beautiful harmony of God's loving kindness and compassion. Psalm 51:1 reveals the trusting sinner. Boldness mingles with faith in the unfailing ability of a forgiving God. Despite their sin, the sinner confidently cries, "have mercy on me!" David understands the gravity of his sin. Simultaneously, he does not fail to recognize the importance of seeking God's forgiveness.

We too must strike this balance. It is altogether hopeless to only see our sinfulness: it is the darkness of the Crucifixion without the light of the Resurrection. It is equally reckless to grow numb toward our sinfulness: it is the rolled-away stone with no understanding of Jesus' sacrifice. In this Lenten season, let us consider that it is in darkness where light most beautifully shines. Let us approach our Jesus knowing that he is readily willing to forgive us. Audacious and trusting faith, despite sin, marks the Christian.

Father, the depths of your love are not fettered by my capacity to sin against you. Thank you for your faithfulness and the forgiveness given in the life of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Mark Patrick

Master of Divinity Student
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THURSDAY, MARCH 21

Psalm 51:7-12

DEAD SKIN

*"Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."*

My wife and I recently traveled to Istanbul, and in an earnest attempt to "pamper" ourselves, we thought we might try a famed Turkish hammam. Neither of us knew what to expect, but our presumption was that we'd be treated to a wonderful morning of much needed relaxation and rest. The reality was much worse: as I laid on a marble slab, being violently scrubbed with what felt like a Brillo pad, a more apt descriptor came to mind: "torture." It hurt, but worse than the pain was the shame and vulnerability I felt under the smiling gaze of my attendant who was furiously wiping away the dead skin and grime from my body. Occasionally he would lean into me with an affable grunt and my bones would crack. When he finished, I rushed to throw on my towel. But he would not allow it. Instead, he wrapped me proudly and gently in a soft white robe. Afterward, as our bodies had to seemingly relearn how to walk, we both agreed that we felt better than ever, like new people!

The Lord's "purging" and "crushing" may not always be pleasant, and while we may wish in our deteriorated state that God "hide his face" from our sins, the blessedness is that God refuses to do so. Like a "refining fire" and "fuller's soap" (Mal. 3:3) God's purification is meant to impart to us how valued and loved we are; restored to an image fitted for God's presence. Our Creator knows the finished work being made manifest in our lives and provides all the strength needed for our endurance. It requires nothing but willingness from us. As Paul reminds, "the one who calls you is faithful, He will do this" (1 Thess. 5:24). Can you rejoice with the psalmist in this grace?

"Almighty God, you alone can bring into order the unruly wills and affections of sinners: Grant your people grace to love what you command and desire what you promise; that, among the swift and varied changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are found; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen." - (Collect for Fifth Sunday in Lent, Book of Common Prayer, 1979)

Colby Register

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FRIDAY, MARCH 22

Psalm 119:9-12

SATURATED HEARTS: ABSORBING GOD'S WORDS FOR TRANSFORMATION

*"With my whole heart I seek you;
do not let me stray from your commandments."*

Imagine for a moment God's Word as a sponge: porous, ready to absorb, and saturated with life-giving truths. Now, envision our hearts as vessels: containers designed to hold, protect, and pour out what they contain. This imagery beautifully illustrates the relationship between God's Word and our hearts.

Just as a sponge absorbs water, God's Word is alive and active, intended to penetrate the depths of our souls. When we immerse ourselves in Scripture, allowing its truths to saturate our hearts, we are transformed. The Word becomes a protective barrier, guarding us against the impurities of the world and guiding us along the path of righteousness.

However, a vessel is only as effective as what it contains. If our hearts are filled with the richness of God's Word, we are better equipped to reflect his love, grace, and truth to others. Conversely, if our hearts are filled with worldly desires or distractions, they become susceptible to contamination.

The call to "hide God's Word in our hearts" is not merely about memorization but about internalization – allowing its principles to shape our beliefs, attitudes, and actions. As we cultivate a deeply rooted connection with Scripture, we find ourselves drawn closer to God, aligned with his will, and empowered to live lives that honor him.

Gracious and merciful God! Thank you for the transformative power of your Word. Help us to immerse ourselves in Scripture, allowing its truths to penetrate our hearts and guide our paths. May we be vessels filled with your love and grace, reflecting your light to the world. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

Yeshe Lhamo
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Trashigang, Bhutan



S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 2 3

Psalm 119:13-16

REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE

*"I will meditate on Your precepts,
And contemplate Your ways.
I will delight myself in Your statutes;
I will not forget Your word."*

What does it mean to meditate? It is more than simply to glance at or think about.

The Blue Letter Bible defines this word to mean "to muse or to study."⁴ When we are studying something, we do not examine it to forget it. Meditation and contemplation are meant to result in our remembering something when we need it the most, whether for a test or new work scenario.

We study so that our response may be changed to do better work. The same can be said when we meditate on and remember who God says we are and what we are meant to be. He tells us we are redeemed, friends, children of the Living God, created to be loved by him and to love others in response. In the Lenten season, leading up to Easter, we remember the greatest act of love that God displayed for us – the Crucifixion of Jesus, which led to the covering of all sin.

We meditate on God's way of love, that he would go that far to bring us back to himself. True meditation, contemplation, and rejoice brings about heart change. We act according to God's way of love, loving others in the same way he does.

In your time with God today and in your day-to-day interactions, take time to remember what God has done for you. Take time to remember the instructions, the character, and the ways of Jesus, that you may rejoice and live delighted in him today.

*Lord Jesus, help me to remember what you have done for me so that I may extend the same love to others.
Amen.*

Greer Rutt
Master of Divinity Student
Waco, Texas

4: Blue Letter Bible, 2023.



SUNDAY, MARCH 24

Mark 11:1-11

THE KING IS COMING

"Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Mark 11 marks the beginning of the end. Jesus has set his face toward Jerusalem, knowing full well what lies ahead of him. As he has just told his disciples for the third time, danger and death await him in the holy city (Mark 10:33-34).

And yet, riding on a colt, the Lord enters as a prepared king. He has made arrangements ahead of time and finds a colt ready and waiting. Riding it, he is saluted "in the name of the Lord" and as the one who brings the "kingdom of our ancestor David" (vv. 9-10). Cloaks cover the ground as palm branches are waved, hailing his arrival. The King is coming, but his kingdom will defy expectations.

And so begins the final week of the season of Lent. We too have set our faces toward a Jerusalem of sorts, recognizing that we are dust and ashes and that death hovers over us, threatening to unravel and destroy what we hold dear. It is a sobering note in a minor key, but a necessary one. As signs of springtime rise all around us, as flowers blossom and trees bud, we stop to remember that we too are on a journey toward death, ultimately, and, if we do indeed follow our Lord, we will see signs of death in the interim.

Even as we travel toward dust, we do so with and in the wake of the One who will and has emerged triumphant over it. We would do well to ask the Lord to give us eyes to see his unexpected kingdom all around us, and the courage to follow him in the face of danger, risk, and even death. Easter is coming. O, how we wait.

Lord Christ, give me the courage to face the darkness, knowing that even it cannot hide you, and to see a kingdom that defies our expectations. Amen.

Daniel Lee Hill, PhD

Assistant Professor of Christian Theology
Truett Seminary



MONDAY, MARCH 25

Psalm 36:5-11

BELONGING TO LOVE

"How precious is your steadfast love, O God!

All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings."

Where do I belong? I find myself asking this question during seasons of transition – and often, Lent feels like a season of transition. We sit with the love manifested in the resurrection of the living Christ embodied in Easter. But on our way to Easter, we face messy days where we need reassurance that love is steadfast and worth clinging to.

In the simultaneous reality of knowing love while still needing to be reminded of love, we face the question: "Who do I belong to?"

To experience sacred belonging, we must know who we are. As people of faith, we belong to the all-consuming love of God made possible through the painful death and triumphant resurrection of Christ.

In Psalm 36, the psalmist establishes a sense of belonging in their familiarity with God's comprehensive love – a precious love offering a home even within the most challenging moments. In this belonging to divine love, the psalmist offers praise, yes, but also communicates a longing for reassurance. In their authentic belonging, they recognize their need for realignment and strength, too. They find hope in their identity of being loved by God, while also asking for this very steadfastness to carry over in their own life as a person facing inevitable difficulty.

This tension of knowing love and needing to be assured of it amidst whatever we might face is essential to this Lenten season. As we ask ourselves whose we are, where we belong, and how we might face the day ahead of us, may we find comfort in our innate connectedness to the God who draws close and offers love so mightily and abundantly.

May I walk in the knowingness that I belong to your steadfast love, O God, and have the courage to admit when I need reassurance. Amen.

Emily Hooker

Master of Divinity Student
Dripping Springs, Texas



T U E S D A Y , M A R C H 2 6

Psalm 71:1-14

TAKE REFUGE

*"Be to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress to save me,
for you are my rock and my fortress."*

Sometimes it can be easy to forget who is the one who truly provides, protects, and guides our lives. In Western culture, it has been established that sustainability comes from what we have, either through income, our home, or other people. Psalms 71:1-14 picks up with the psalmist reminding us of who is the one who truly provides, protects, and guides our lives, stating, "In you, LORD, I have taken refuge".

The Hebrew word *tamid* (תָּמִיד, translated "continually" or "always")⁵ is used several times within this passage, specifically in verses three, six, and fourteen. Within these verses, we are reminded that we are to continually praise God for being our refuge and hope.⁵ This rings true even in the dark times that occur in our lives, where it might be very difficult to hold onto the light. As the psalmist suggests, there will be times where we will have to put our statements of faith into action, where we must take refuge in the Lord, knowing and remembering him.

For example, one of my closest friends in high school lost both of his parents, and both deaths occurred shortly after the other. After the second funeral, he came up to me and said these words that I will never forget, "Myles, it is in times like these that I look around me and see God, how he has provided for me, I must have hope in him." Christ knew the burdens that this life can bring. Continue to have hope in him in times of both joy and sorrow.

Father God, let us take refuge in your loving arms in times of joy and sorrow. Remind us of the hope we have in you, our protector and provider. Amen.

Myles Herren
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5: For more information about this term, visit <https://biblehub.com/hebrew/8548.htm>

6: Cole, S. J. (n.d.). Psalm 71: *Growing Old God's Way*. Psalm 71: Growing Old God's Way | Bible.org. <https://bible.org/seriespage/psalm-71-growing-old-god%E2%80%99s-way>, para.16.



W E D N E S D A Y , M A R C H 27

Hebrews 12:1-3

KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE PRIZE

"Let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross..."

People who say they love running do not actually love it. They love the finish line. They know that the pain of the run will culminate in something that makes the pain worth it. For some, it may be a healthy body. For others, it is the pride in seeing what they can push themselves to accomplish. If running had no finish lines, nothing to gain by doing it, then there would be no runners.

As Christians, we are in the middle of a difficult slog of a race. We have not yet received the joy of what was promised us. We have not received the "eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (1 Cor 4:17). We have not made it to the finish line. And yet, we persevere. We run, for we see the finish line before us. We see the heavenly banquet, in which all God's people will receive rich food and aged wine, where death will be forever vanquished, and suffering will be no more (Is 25:6-8). We run for the day when our sin will no longer infect the world, when nations will embrace and not destroy one another, when weapons of war will be turned into instruments of peace (Is 2:4).

Our spiritual mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, have gone before us. They cheer us on, awaiting us at the finish. Christ himself, the first finisher of the race, the one who made the finish possible for us, awaits us and strengthens us. We persevere in faith through the trials of the world because we know the finish line is nigh.

In this season of Lent, we recognize the pain of the race that we are in and our desperate need for Christ. Let us look to the past resurrection as a sure sign of the day of future glory when Christ comes again. Let us lay aside every weight and sin that distracts us from our course and let us look to the finish line. Let us look to Christ.

Lord, as we tire in our long race, let our eyes stay continually fixed on you in your glory. Amen.

Michael Butler

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THURSDAY, MARCH 28
1 Corinthians 11:23-26

CHRISTIAN AUTHENTICITY

*"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."*

In a small American Baptist church in a suburban, ethnic enclave in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, as a nine-year-old girl, I "accepted Jesus in my heart as my Lord and Savior." I was one of the many immigrant kids this church had committed to reach out to with the Gospel, not only us, the children, but also to our families. As God designed it, my entire family ultimately came to know Christ as the result of my participation in an after-school children's socialization club called the Jolly Juniors.

The teacher of our group was a godly woman who visited in the homes of the children who were participating in the Jolly Juniors. Because of her authenticity, ultimately my mother, father, and brother all came to experience trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior in a very personal way. Because of her example, Christian authenticity has always been a core value in my life.

Holy Communion (i.e., The Lord's Supper), as this church referred to it, was held monthly. Our pastor deeply impressed on us that observing Holy Communion was important as a remembrance of being in right relationship with God through our belief in Jesus and how that belief was practiced through our relationships with all people, those in and outside the church. The consistency of our words and actions in loving responses was constantly reinforced.

In referencing the Last Supper that Jesus had before his crucifixion, Paul strongly counseled the church at Corinth about participating in the Lord's Supper for the right reasons – foundationally to show the world that Jesus is Lord, that God loves us, and that we should love all people. With these in place, our Christian authenticity will be experienced by others. He admonishes us to remember the reason for The Lord's Supper.

Jesus, you are Lord. We remember your broken body and your poured out blood and praise you for your completed work of redemption. Let your love be demonstrated through your people, the church. Amen.

Gaynor Yancey, DSW

Professor; Holder of the Lake Family Endowed Chair in Congregational and Community Health
Truett Seminary



FRIDAY, MARCH 29

Hebrews 10:16-25

GOOD FRIDAY

"Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful."

Walking through Holy Week provides a yearly opportunity to see and experience, again, the story of Jesus. With fresh eyes, in our current season of life, this may become a spiritual pilgrimage. Perhaps walking alongside Peter's rejection of his friendship with Jesus resonates for us in a new way this year (John 18:15-27), or imaginatively standing with Mary, the mother of Jesus, as she sees her son mocked and beaten, only able to pray from a distance. Loneliness may surface as we linger a bit in the isolation Jesus experienced in his suffering, feeling truly forsaken (Psalm 22; Matthew 27:46).

Good Friday is often the one day of Holy Week we want to skip over. It rubs against our culture's desire for comfort, quick fixes, and our resistance to suffering and perceived failure. Good Friday invites us to journey through the difficult parts of Jesus' story and our own. What appears weak is victorious and what seems lost is gained, in the mystery of this day. The slaughtered lamb is the lion of victory (Rev. 5)! Death is not the end but a beginning.

The author of Hebrews brings together key Scriptures from Jeremiah 31:33 and Psalm 110 (Heb. 1:13; 10:11-12), inviting us to consider Jesus' priestly sacrifice as fulfillment once again. During a time of complete desolation and exile, Jeremiah spoke words of hope through new covenant language (Jer. 31:33f; Heb 10:15-18). In Hebrews 10:16-25, these things hoped for have become a reality through the cross: forgiveness, assurance of faith, unwavering hope, and a transformative love (Heb. 10:22-24). What was longed for has been accomplished. The law is now within the heart and mind. Jesus is the great high priest and sacrifice! A new living way/pilgrimage is formed through Jesus' bodily death. . .straight into the holy place (Heb. 10:20; Luke 23:45). This changes the way we perceive ourselves and our community participation (Heb. 10:24-25), to experience Jesus' great love and forgiveness offered through the cross (John 3:16-17).

On this Good Friday, may we reflect on both the horror and hope of this day, the true mystery of the cross. Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, this final priestly act, invites us to reconsider afresh the question, "what does the sacrifice of Jesus truly mean for me, for us, for the life of the world?" The book of Hebrews seems to say, "Pilgrim, through Jesus (Heb. 1:1-2), enter boldly. There is no more shame. You are loved. You are forgiven. Join the communion of saints to worship the lamb!" (Heb. 12:1).

Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for demonstrating your incredible love through your costly sacrifice on the cross during this day of reflection. As the one who knows true suffering, may we continue in our sufferings with hope in you, strengthened by your example (Philippians 2:1-18). Remind us in an ever-renewing way that we are never alone on our pilgrimage through this life and that you are always with us and also for us. Amen.

Jenny Matheny, PhD

Associate Professor of Christian Scriptures
Truett Seminary



S A T U R D A Y , M A R C H 3 0

Matthew 27:57-66

A BRIDGE CALLED SATURDAY

“So Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn in the rock. He then rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and went away. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.”

In the hours preceding the original Holy Saturday, Joseph of Arimathea did the heavy lifting, wrestling the corpse of Jesus into his newly hewn tomb. Comparatively speaking, Mary Magdalene and another Mary simply “were there, sitting opposite the tomb” (vs. 61). It must have felt so passive, so insubstantial, for these two followers of Jesus to remain stationary.

Holy Saturday 2024 finds us at a similar moment in spiritual timekeeping. Yesterday, our souls were shadowing the blood-spattered pathway toward the cross, hearing Jesus’ seven last gasps of pain and desolation and love. Tomorrow, our souls will be on tiptoe, belting out shouts of “He is risen indeed” and “Hallelujah” and running from the empty tomb with dazzled joy.

But today, we are, simply, “there,” opposite the tomb, sitting and waiting. But do not mistake this moment of inertia for insignificance. This is our moment – to sit, to watch, to wait, and to pray. This is our time to declare that Jesus’ promises of rising again are not the words of an “imposter” (vs. 63), and that no conspiratorial force on earth can make his tomb “secure” against God’s resurrection power. This is our moment to stand in the center of the bridge which spans Good Friday to Easter Sunday. We wait in the center, but not passively. We wait and watch and pray in hope and anticipation.

Holy God, teach me the discipline of hopeful waiting. Amen.

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SUNDAY, MARCH 31

Mark 16:1-8

ALARMED, AMAZED, AND AFRAID

"They said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid."

Following the narration of Jesus' crucifixion (see Mark 15:21-39), the Second Evangelist notes that a number of Jesus' women followers witnessed their Lord's agonizing death from afar. Three of them are named: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome (15:40). Mark adds that these three women, who followed and provided for Jesus when he was in Galilee (cf. Luke 8:2-3), were accompanied by other women when Jesus came up to Jerusalem for what would prove to be the final time (15:41). At the conclusion of Mark 15, the Evangelist reports that both Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where Jesus' body was laid, that is, in a rock-hewn tomb (vv. 46-47).

Subsequent to the Sabbath, Mark mentions that the three aforementioned women bought spices and on the first day of the week (i.e., Sunday), once the sun had risen, made their way to the tomb to anoint Jesus (16:1-2). Their wonder of how they would be able to get into the tomb upon arrival due to the very large stone that had been rolled against the door (note 15:46) gave way to their wonder regarding the young man dressed in a white robe whom they discovered in the tomb, not least when he started speaking to them about "Jesus of Nazareth" (16:3-6).

Ostensibly an angel, the young man instructed them along these lines: 1. Do not be alarmed; 2. The crucified Jesus who had been placed in the very tomb in which they now were had been raised and was no longer there; and 3. To go and tell the disciples and Peter that he would see them in Galilee just as he had told them (16:6-7; cf. 14:28).

The young man's message did not assuage the women's alarm. Seized by amazement and grasped by fear, Mark reports that they fled the tomb saying nothing to anyone (16:8). To be sure, the good news of Jesus' resurrection would soon become widely known. Having said that, this Easter we do well to remember how bewildering and earth-shattering the young man's message was—and is. Among other things, the three women in Mark's account of Jesus' resurrection teach us this foundational theological truth.

Lord God, we give you heartfelt thanks this Easter Sunday that "love crucified arose" and that because of Jesus' resurrection even the grave is now a place of hope for those who place their hope in Jesus. Help us today, we pray, neither to domesticate nor to diminish the miracle of the resurrection, either Jesus' in the past or ours in the future. Amen. During the six-week period leading to Easter, Christians around the world observe the season of Lent. Lent is a forty-day journey dedicated to an intense, renewed focus on discipleship to Jesus. We turn toward the cross.

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