



DEVOTIONAL READINGS  
FOR  
DAILY REFLECTION

LENT 2019

Many years ago, as I was trying to learn about how middle school teachers taught and how middle school students learned, I set a schedule for myself to observe at least one teacher each day for at least five minutes...five minutes! Very soon, I learned how difficult that five minutes was to find in my own busy schedule administering a building with 1000 adolescents and all the challenges they brought every day. Now, for the past few years, I have devoted some of my time to writing daily readings that take no more than five minutes to read. Just as happened back then, I, too, find it very difficult to find five minutes in a day to relax, take a deep breath, turn down the sound of life that absorbs me, and think about my God and my relationship with Him. I hope that you can find a few minutes to read and reflect. Even more, I hope that this might lead you to deepen your relationship with God. In this season of Lent when we focus on the coming crucifixion, death, and resurrection, there may be nothing more rewarding than having spent those five minutes.

Harold Frye, Ed.D.

Lent 2019

## **March 5, Shrove Tuesday**

Likely, you know the origin of Shrove Tuesday, the Mardi Gras or Carnival season prior to Lent. It's a time for celebration but also a time to focus on preparing for the coming fast that marks the Lenten period. Whether you celebrate with pancakes or sweet breads or other delicacies, be ready for drawing closer to Jesus and the trials that await Him. The prayer below comes from an Episcopal clergyman in Munich who reminds us that the time is near for deeper inspection of our own lives so that we may better know our God.

### Prayer for Shrove Tuesday

"God of feasting, we give you thanks for the richness of life. As Jesus turned water into wine at Cana, we think of your desire for all your people to celebrate life. Bless us as we celebrate the joy of being your people. Send your Spirit to dance and sing with us. As we enter the Season of Lent, may it, too, be a celebration of life: of an inward journey of contemplation and wondering, of learning and exploring. And in all of this, may we grow closer to Jesus, to one another, and to you. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen."  
(Rev. Steven R. Smith, Church of the Ascension, Munich, Germany)

**March 6, Ash Wednesday , 1<sup>st</sup> Day of Lent**

**Matthew 6:21 “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

When I have time to watch TV, I enjoy the program “American Pickers.” I know the script is contrived and much of what is presented has been arranged, but I am somewhat fascinated that there are people who collect what most of us consider to be junk. The even more enjoyable and surprising parts of these episodes are the values placed on items that are rusty, crusty, and moth eaten (v. 19). If the lead players in this program were true to life, then it would be clear that their hearts are where their treasures lie. Frankly, I want my heart to be with my Lord and not in a heap of bicycle parts.

What is your treasure? Is it God’s love for you?

**You are my treasure, my Lord and Savior. Amen.**

## **March 7, 2nd Day of Lent**

**Joel 2:2 "It is near, a day of darkness and no light."**

Much is made of eclipses. The total blocking of the Sun happens only a few times in our lives. Treks and caravans of followers travel distances to gain the best view of the few moments when the shadow of the Earth or the Moon casts itself across the Sun's path so that day becomes as night. The last occurrence came at a time when I was waiting for Carol's doctor appointment. The event was so popular that the parking lot outside the medical building filled with staff members who came out to witness the eclipse. While I was there, I could only think, "Gee, I wonder who is tending to the needs of the patients!"

Days of darkness and no light are, thankfully, unusual. So, too, was the crucifixion of Jesus, a time when darkness fell on the land. In our Lenten journey, we know what lies ahead and we pray. Prayers of thanks are offered that God sent the Light extinguished for only a brief time before it became eternal.

**I know that the darkness has purpose as it is followed by Your Light. Thanks be to You, My Lord. Amen.**

## **March 8, 3rd Day of Lent**

**Isaiah 58:7 “Isn’t it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family?”**

Charles Dickens’ classic *A Christmas Story* portrays the conflict that comes from a clash between the categorically rich and the categorically poor. No one, of course, sympathizes with Scrooge as he continues to use others to build his empire, even though he already has more than he could ever need. He wants more and gets it at the expense of the poor and working class. Absent of a miraculous change that, most times, comes only in fiction, does Scrooge’s outlook on life change. As progressive columnist and Pulitzer winner Chris Hedges notes, “Wealth not only perpetuates itself but is used to monopolize new opportunities for wealth creation. Social mobility for the poor and the working class is largely a myth.” Individuals and families who are well-to-do can be found in church pews, but are certainly not a part of this caste of the richest in our society. A few like Bill Gates and Warren Buffett may dedicate large sums of wealth to help the poor, but for the most part, at least without public acclaim for their philanthropy, the truly rich aren’t seen serving at food kitchens.

So what is the message at Lent? Give to the poor. Serve those whose needs are great. Share your bread with the hungry.

**You make me rich in my heart, my God. Amen.**

## **March 9, 4th Day of Lent**

**2 Corinthians 6:9-10 “We were seen as punished but not killed, as going through pain but always happy, as poor but making many rich, and as having nothing but owning everything.”**

Is it possible that we can have one more disaster? Earthquakes in Haiti, Mexico, and Indonesia. Floods in Texas. Hurricanes in the Carolinas and Florida. The news reports fill the airwaves with photos of entire communities wiped off the Earth. Death, disaster, and ruin befall thousands upon thousands. In the midst of it all, cameras zero in on survivors who, through their tears, celebrate that they are alive. All that they own is gone, yet they rejoice.

Paul reminds us as he did to the church at Corinth that in those times of total catastrophe, we possess all things in Christ. It's an enigma, a paradox, an irony that those whose lives seem shattered can see hope. Our true treasure is in heaven. Just as we follow Jesus' path to the cross, salvation comes from Him who sacrificed for us.

**Praise God! Amen.**

## **March 11, 5<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 51:1 "Have mercy on me, God, according to Your faithful love! Wipe away my wrongdoings according to Your great compassion."**

Youthful indiscretions. The innocence of inexperience. As an 8<sup>th</sup> grader, I walked the short few blocks from school to home. During basketball season (short me, the manager), I walked with a few others from the team. To this day, I recall how I was overcome by guilt and, upon arriving at home, lied to my mother saying that the boys with whom I was walking were smoking. They were, but so was I. How naïve I was that Mom couldn't smell smoke on my clothing and, worse yet, on my breath. To this day, I am ashamed that I was untruthful and didn't have a chance to confess to her.

David's indiscretion with Bathsheba was at a different level than my youthful smoking. His choices as king to turn to violence, perhaps, more than was necessary, became his path to achieve his goals. David's pleading to God to not take His holy spirit away from him became his song.

What sins do each of us ask for forgiveness? This Lenten season is the time to confess.

**I turn to You, oh God, my Father. Amen.**

## **March 12, 6<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Romans 10:11 "All who have faith in Him won't be put to shame."**

Not a special or eager fan of funeral services, I try to attend if only to give support to the grieving family. A recent service for an 88 year old man held in a chapel at a large church, there wasn't a large crowd, perhaps, only 40 friends. I didn't know him personally, but knew his son and wanted to show my support. Sadly, the deceased had lost his granddaughter just months before and the same chapel was filled to overflowing, mostly with young adults. In both services, the minister spoke about faithful lives and, from all I knew of the family, there was much evidence that the grandfather had lived his life in faith and modeled that for his entire family. Isaiah 28:16 says "Therefore, the Lord God says: Look! I'm laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a valuable cornerstone, a sure foundation: the one who trusts won't tremble."

Having faith in Jesus, the Christ, leads to salvation.

**Help me keep my faith in You. Amen.**

## **March 13, 7<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Luke 4:13 “After finishing every temptation, the devil departed from Him until the next opportunity.”**

During my year in Saigon, I had three roommates who were on different rotations. The one with whom I shared a room the longest was married to a young woman back home in Boston. Given our 8 hour shifts at the airbase, there was lots of down time for rest, relaxation, and recreation. On many occasions, I would be waiting for him to return with the Jeep so that I could travel to our duty station. When those exchanges came at midnight, he would often go out on the streets of Saigon to a bar. He was quite open about other extracurricular activities in which he would engage with “ladies of the night” who hung around these establishments. When I returned to our room the next morning, my roommate many times was just getting there after being out all night. I tried not to judge him, but knew he fell victim to the temptations placed before him. He expressed sorrow at his weakness and his unfaithfulness to his wife...until the next opportunity presented itself. Although my roommate never said it, I could hear in his words that cliché “The devil made me do it.”

**Give me strength to resist and be faithful to You. Amen.**

**March 14, 8<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Deuteronomy 26:13 “Then celebrate all the good things the Lord your God has done for you and your family.”**

Our pastors at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church wrote about being grateful by quoting author Diana Butler Bass. “If we recognize mutuality, we experience gratitude as central to civic life.” Upon reading these words, I was reminded of researcher George Land’s description of the three stages of human development: Accretion, in which like babies and toddlers, we depend on others to care for us; Replication, in which we strive to be like others...think of teenagers; and Mutualism, in which we are able to lead others toward change.

Moses expressed God’s expectations for his followers in their new land, telling them that their survival depended upon bringing about change by working together. They should express gratitude to God and celebrate in mutuality for all He had provided them following their slavery in Egypt.

As we approach the darkness of Christ’s crucifixion and His resurrection, join together with your family and, where possible, with your larger church family to celebrate all the good things that God has done for you.

**Only You, my God, have given me hope. Amen.**

**March 15, 9<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 91:2 "You are my God—the one I trust!"**

In the early '90s, we began to hear about Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the dreams of creative applications. Little did we think that AI would bring about the uses of robots beyond the factory line. Shoshana Zuboff wrote in her book, *In the Age of the Smart Machine: The future of work and power (1988)*, describing how processes in factories that required direct contact with the product was changing so that humans were removed from direct contact. Now, thirty years later, the development of autonomous vehicles promises to move drivers of automobiles from direct contact with driving to positions of observer. Trusting that a machine will make safe decisions becomes a foremost priority may take time.

Do we trust God? We've not built Him. We've not programmed Him. We've not filled Him with wires and chips and switches that will safeguard our lives. But we trust Him to be THE one in whom we place our confidence.

**Guide me to trust in You completely. Amen.**

**March 16, 10<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 91:13 "You'll march on top of lions and vipers; you'll trample young lions and serpents underfoot."**

Who can forget scenes from one of Indiana Jones' adventures, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, that finds Indy and his ex-girlfriend trapped in an underground vault filled with thousands of snakes including venomous cobras. Only in the fiction of movies do they manage to save themselves and not be harmed, walking through this mass of moving peril only to face trial after trial as the plot progresses.

Nothing portrays God's protection better than this metaphor. Belief in God gives victory over evil. With His power, we can not only escape evil but become victorious over it. David the writer says we will "march" and "trample." No greater power over evil can we have if we only place our trust in Him.

**You are my refuge and my strength. I thank you, my Father. Amen.**

**March 18, 11<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Genesis 15:5 “Look up at the sky and count the stars if you think you can count them. This is how many children you will have.”**

TV commercials for DNA testing have prompted an industry focused on connecting us with our past. Our family has some recorded knowledge of those who came before us four, five, or six generations ago. Thanks to the science of genetics, we now broaden links across a much wider spectrum of individuals to whom we are connected. A “match” comes through for my ancestral group as often as weekly and lets me know that descendants of those who migrated westward in Europe some 20,000 years ago managed to survive and continue the line. Little did they know just as little do I know what lies ahead. The number of individuals who will someday trace their ancestry through me might number in the thousands. Just as Abram (later called Abraham) was promised by God that he would father a great nation, so too do each of us who parent the next generation increase the possibility that our lineage will continue into the future. That’s God’s promise.

**Bless us, our God, with generations that are faithful to You. Amen.**

**March 19, 12<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Genesis 15:17 “After the sun had set and darkness had deepened, a smoking vessel with a fiery flame passed between the split-open animals.”**

God commanded that Abram offer a sacrifice on the altar consisting of a specific kind and number of animals. As in the passage above, a smoldering receptacle that radiated its warm light appeared and mysteriously passed among the offerings. Even today, smoke signifies purification and light represents the knowledge that God’s covenant with mankind remains strong. A smoking lamp is used in many religious services to connote the presence of the Almighty. Abram, just as God’s people throughout the ages, receive His word that He will be faithful to them. In return, God asks only that we be faithful to Him.

**Praise be to our God, the Almighty. Amen.**

## **March 20, 13<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 27:5 "He will set me up high, safe on a rock."**

Hikes to Lookout Point were common during summer camp at Camp Theodore Naish near Bonner Springs, Kansas. From that outcropping of limestone, we could see the broad valley below, stretching east to west, seemingly to our young minds almost forever. Across the Kaw River lay fields unblemished by humans. Magnificent was a word hardly strong enough to describe how our hearts felt. As time passed, there were other views from similar vantage points: The Great Smoky Mountains covered in a blue haze along the Appalachian Trail; the valley carved out by the Arkansas River flowing southward seen from Mt. Harvard in Colorado; the morning sun rising above the lowlands from the Tooth of Time in northwest New Mexico. Those times were always experienced with others. But we didn't speak. In silence and reverence, we were filled with God's presence. We had entered God's temple.

God's temple is, most often, not like that today. The church is filled with activities as we carry out our responsibilities of feeding and clothing the needy, of meetings to plan for finances, personnel, and worship. Burnout and stress often result. Far from an oasis that refreshes the heart and mind, we lose sight of times of contemplation.

At the very least during Lent, seek times of refreshment under the wings of our Lord.

**Let me enter Your temple of peace and harmony. Amen.**

**March 21, 14<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 27:14 “Hope in the Lord! Be strong! Let your heart take courage! Hope in the Lord!”**

When I read this passage, my mind can't help but travel back to events in the last several months and years. I replay catastrophes at Columbine, Virginia Tech, Sandy Hook, Ft. Hood, Orlando, San Bernardino, Roseburg, Chattanooga, Charleston, Parkland, Las Vegas, Pittsburgh, and on and on and on. Then there are the weather catastrophes: Katrina, Harvey, Florence, Irma, Maria, Michael. I've watched news coverage that showed people in the midst of calamity and total loss of property saying, “we've lost everything, but we haven't given up hope.”

What is it in the human spirit that gives us strength to carry on? “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5)

**I will trust in You. Amen.**

## **March 22, 15<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Philippians 3:17 “Brothers and sisters, become imitators of me and watch those who live this way—you can use us as models.”**

In the mid-1980s, standards of dress were not as relaxed as they have now become. During my tenure as a middle school principal, a young man was sent to the office by his teacher for wearing an ear ring. He became somewhat defiant when challenged about it, so a call was made to his parents. The next day, his father appeared at the school...wearing an ear ring. The case was closed and the boy was sent on to class. It was clear that both had piercings and the father wasn't just going along to defend his son. He was his son's model.

Paul urged followers at Philippi to conduct themselves in wholesome, ethical ways. Even though many Christians in that time also followed Jewish law, Paul knew as others before him that these new Christians would do and live as others around them. He recognized that “One who walks with wise men grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm” (Proverbs 13:20).

As we progress further in the Lenten season, consider those around you who serve as your models.

**My Lord, let me be like you. Amen.**

**March 23, 16<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Luke 13:32 “...and on the third day I will complete my work.”**

Jesus encounters some of the Pharisees who warn him that Herod plans to kill him. In defiance, Jesus responds that He has work to do and will not stop healing and performing miracles. However, He informs them that His work will be finished on the third day. Was this a reference to His resurrection? Is there any comparison to “days” and what Jesus was about? We may not know for certain, but we do know that Jesus was driven to complete His mission. If His work was about healing and miracles, those were finished before the first and second and third days. His mission was to bring salvation to the World, not through His death, but through His resurrection. We understand so little of what that mission was really about. All we can do is look at it in awe and wonder. He brought about amazing grace to all who believe in Him, not by His death, but by His resurrection.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NG0vH4WYChQ>

**Thank you every moment of my life for Your amazing grace. Amen.**

**March 25, 17<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Luke 9:28 “About eight days after Jesus said these things, He took Peter, John, and James, and went up on a mountain to pray.”**

Many of us are awestruck by mountains. When traveling west toward Colorado, the first person to see the Rockies always exclaimed the sighting. Several scouting trips involved climbing mountains: the Collegiate Peaks in central Colorado, the Appalachians in the East, the Tetons of Wyoming. We seem to be always gazing up to the heavens, trying to reach the peak. Once there or even part way up, we stop a few minutes to rest and gaze out at the broad expanse of the valley below. What is it about mountains that gives us a mental lift?

Jesus knew His destiny. His closest disciples were invited to share a private time with Him. Little did they know they would experience an event even more important, more thrilling, more astounding than taking time to climb up toward heaven for some “away” time with their master. What they would see and not talk about afterward was a transfiguration of Jesus. They would witness a special moment when Jesus sat down to talk with Moses and Elijah. Just as when Moses went to the mountain and returned with a face that glowed, Jesus’ encounter with His Father would change Him.

And what should we do with our mountaintop experiences? No, it isn’t the Christmas season, but as this song says, “Go tell it on the mountain...”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvNa-V8usQQ>

**Dear Father God, You gave Your Son, Jesus to become an infant among men, women, and children then brought Him to complete His mission. Praise be! Amen.**

**March 26, 18<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Isaiah 55:1 "All of you who are thirsty, come to the water!"**

Stop for a moment and think of all the times and places in our lives in which water plays a part: We baptize with water; we seek ways to bring potable water to those who suffer without it; we distribute water to runners as they pass by; we bathe in water; we find refreshment in water on hot days; we ship bottled water to those struck by disaster; we pour water on fires threatening to burn homes; we build reservoirs from which to draw water; we fish in waters; we dive in waters...and on and on.

The time of Lent is an invitation from God to seek the satisfaction brought by participating in the work of God. We thirst for that satisfaction that is open to us all, the good and merciful as well as the wicked and unrighteous, for God abundantly pardons.

**I seek to satisfy my thirst with Your forgiving water. Amen.**

**March 27, 19th Day of Lent**

**Psalm 63:1 “God! My God! It’s you—I search for you!”**

Two experiences, years apart, stand out in my memory. The first was when I was about 6 years old and I, along with my sisters and brother, were walking along the main street of our home town, “window shopping” as we called it. I was walking ahead of the group, content to be running my fingers along the sparkling, expansive window glass, paying no attention to my family a few steps behind me. Perhaps, as in one scene of the movie series “Home Alone,” I became separated as I continued to walk straight ahead and my parents and siblings turned to go into a shop.

The second incident took place at the huge mall near our home when youngest son, parents and brothers, became separated in a most similar manner. The fear that set into our minds in both instances was the same. Kidnapped? Snatched? Abducted?

Both experiences worked out as child and family were reunited after frantic searches. In the more recent experience and fortunately, brother in-law was on the job as the mall’s operations manager.

Does God exasperate over His lost children? Do lost children realize they are lost from God? Isn’t it time to connect or reconnect with Him?

**My heavenly Father, I long to be united with You. Amen.**

**March 28, 20th Day of Lent**

**Luke 13:3 “No, I tell you, but unless you change your hearts and lives, you will die just as they did.”**

“Massive 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti about 10 miles southwest of the capital, Port-au-Prince, killing 300,000 people and leaving 2.3 million homeless without clean water or food”

“Hurricane Maria death toll may be more than 4,600 in Puerto Rico”

“After Wildfires, Housing Crisis Complicates California’s Rebuild”

“Tsunami Death Toll Tops 1,400 as Volcano Erupts on Sulawesi”

“Lion Air passenger plane crashes into sea with 189 on board”

Doom, disaster, and death. Where does all this come from? Is God punishing the non-believers? How can He be so heartless as to snuff out the lives of thousands upon thousands of innocents? Did they not have time to repent before catastrophe struck? Would they have survived if they had missed the flight or been away from home when fire swept through the neighborhood or had scrambled to high ground before waters flooded over them? Our minds search for rational answers...but none are there.

Tragedies arrest our attention. They shake us out of the complacencies that get us through ordinary life. They impress upon us the perils of our existence. But tragedies also lead many of us who observe such events at a distance to protect ourselves with rationalizations and false assurances. Or, do we build our lives on the knowledge that God's judgment is certain?

**Give me strength, O God, to seek repentance. Amen.**

## **March 29, 21<sup>st</sup> Day of Lent**

**James 5:5 “You have lived on the earth in luxury and in self-indulgence.”**

As I was thinking about this verse, I was brought to focus on the word indulgence. I thought about how much I had been indulged by my parents and how much I indulged by own children. Soldiers often shared the chocolate they received in their field rations with children they encountered. In the tropical heat of Vietnam, we didn't have chocolate given that it would melt. Instead, we had hard candies that we tossed to children, indulging them with sweet treats that they, otherwise, would not enjoy.

The word indulgence seems not to fit well in the season of Lent, a time when self-denial and wanton pleasures are put aside, a time when we prepare for God not to indulge His children, but to bring His most precious gift to the cross. He indulged us in the giving of that gift, but now He shows just how much He loves us by taking the gift to its ultimate purpose.

The rich and powerful indulge themselves far beyond what they need. They live off the labors of others. The words of James, though, urge that we be patient, for the day of judgment is coming when the Lord will return.

**Help me, my Lord, to be patient for that time. Amen.**

**March 30, 22<sup>nd</sup> Day of Lent**

**Hebrews 10:10 “We have been made holy by God’s will through the offering of Jesus Christ’s body once and for all.”**

Anyone who has spent any amount of time with toddlers knows that these small people can be extremely stubborn. About the time our youngest left this stage of life, I had not only left behind my own leadership of elementary schools but I had left behind daily contact with any children on a daily basis. Fast forward to grandparent times, almost 25 years later. Forgotten were those incidents when a 3 year old stood before me, arms defiantly folded across his or her chest, using that most feared word – NO! Their minds were firmly set and their wills were determined.

God’s will had been set centuries before. Prophets foretold of His plan to bring forth His Son as an offering for the salvation of mankind. We wouldn’t suggest that God was stubborn, but He was certainly determined. Who would or could talk Him out of it?

**My God, I accept Your will. Amen.**

**April 1, 23<sup>rd</sup> Day of Lent**

**Luke 1:37 "For nothing is impossible with God."**

Raised in a post-WWII world, our family was, perhaps, true to the definition of middle class. Dad worked at his job while Mom worked to meet the needs of four children. Both parents instilled their own values in us much as other parents of the times did with their children. Bringing disappointment to them was, perhaps, one of the greatest sins. Looking back from today's vantage point, little did we realize that Mom's constant motivation came through her words. "You can do anything you want to do and be anything you want to be" guided us to adulthood. As a godly person, Mom's values were shaped as much by her beliefs in her Lord God. If our lives included God, there was nothing we couldn't accomplish.

**I pray that I bring God into all I do. Amen.**

**April 2, 24<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Joshua 5:9 “Today I have rolled away the shame of your slavery in Egypt.”**

When I visit churches comprised of mostly Black worshipers, I am fascinated in how wonderfully congregants dress for Sunday services. Looking back at slavery times when clothing was little more than rags, it becomes obvious that, even so many years later, there is a direct connection in turning away from those slavery times and putting on one’s finest for the Lord.

God freed His people from slavery in Egypt. He expected their praise and adoration. Should we do no less?

**I praise You. Amen.**

**April 3, 25<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 32:2 “What joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt.”**

Your movie genre preferences may not have included the 1985 comedy, “The Goonies” in which a group of young misfits run into trouble when a family of criminals attempt to retrieve treasures of long ago pirates. The movie is brimming with humorous scenes. Character Chunk is forced to confess the whereabouts to the criminals and proceeds to confess everything he has ever done in his short life. His confession is one of the funniest in the comedy film. It is obvious he has cleared himself of guilt and becomes filled with joy for having done so.

As Easter approaches, the message from Psalm 32 is that remorse will be followed by atonement followed by forgiveness from God. The ball is in our court.

**May I take the first steps toward Your forgiveness. Amen.**

## **April 4, 26<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**2 Corinthians 5:20 "So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us."**

Most scouts regard Philmont Scout Ranch in northeast New Mexico as the mecca of adventure. Co-located with the vast camps and trails is Philmont Training Center, where leaders learn about program development and improvement. In 2015, I was asked to put together a team of ambassadors charged with recruiting volunteers to attend courses at PTC. Displays were created to use at training events and print materials were ordered to distribute. After 3 years of effort, a team of 7 ambassadors had been recruited to carry out the work. We capitalized on a phrase used by those who had trekked Philmont's trails, "I want to go back to Philmont," saying as 2 Corinthians 5:20 "Come back to God."

**I want to come back to You! Amen.**

## **April 5, 27<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Luke 15:1-2 “Tax collectors and other notorious sinners often came to listen to Jesus teach. This made the Pharisees and teachers of religious law complain the He was associating with sinful people—even eating with them!”**

Kansas City Royals general manager Dayton Moore gives his time to the community through speaking engagements. His message is motivating to listeners. One audience that he enjoys the most are those who are incarcerated in prison. Dayton’s style takes him off the stage and away from the podium so that he can peer directly into the eyes of listeners. Where better could he spend his time?

The Apostle Paul wrote, “For I am the least of the apostles, not fit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am...” (1 Corinthians 15:9) Mid-sixteenth-century author John Bradford is credited with saying, "There but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford," in reference to a group of prisoners being led to execution.

Jesus knew His mission. What does He ask of you?

**May I be guided by You, my Christ. Amen.**

**April 6, 28<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 40:5 “Your plans for us are too numerous to list.”**

“I’m bored! I don’t have anything to do.” How many times do we hear others (or ourselves) say this? Surrounded by books to read, DIY projects to complete, friends to visit, shut-ins to cheer, children to read to, garages to clean out, yards to rake, and on and on and on, how can boredom set in? David’s Psalm goes on to exclaim, “If I tried to recite all Your wonderful deeds, I would never come to the end of them.

What does it take to access God’s lists? Prayer. Talk to Him for He will show you the way. “The Lord will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring.” (Isaiah 58:11)

**Let me discern Your plans. Amen.**

**April 8, 29<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Isaiah 43:19 "I will make a pathway through the wilderness."**

Anyone who has hiked the backcountry knows the necessity of having a well-established trail. Underbrush laden with thorns and stick-tights can slow progress or even bring it to a halt. Maintaining a trail is essential, for once cleared, nature quickly erases signs of there having been a trail before. The amazing Appalachian Trail that stretches from Maine to Georgia requires thousands of volunteers across the 14 states traversed by the AT.

God promised His people that He would save them from the Babylonians. That deliverance required travel through water and across a desert wilderness. The Israelites would have perished if God had not intervened. But God made a promise.

God's greatest promise is coming. The sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, fulfilled His plan to save mankind. Clear the way.

**Thank you, my God, for your gift to all. Amen.**

**April 9, 30<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 126:1 "...it was like we had been dreaming."**

We all have dreams, plans for the future, hopes for better times. Martin Luther King, Jr. expressed a profound and courageous dream about freedom. The people of Zion had a dream of freedom from their captors and masters. God led them to a new land centuries before He delivered His Son for the salvation of mankind's sin.

The lyrics to this simple hymn tell of the dreams we have even today:

The lame shall walk, the blind shall see.

The doors swing wide, all prisoners free.

The lowly raised, the proud brought low.

This is God's dream, let justice flow. (Rev. John Middleton)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OwytO4l8Kag>

**Dear God, let me be a part of Your dream. Amen.**

**April 10, 31<sup>st</sup> Day of Lent**

**Philippians 3:8 "These things were my assets, but I wrote them off as a loss for the sake of Christ."**

Five more days until tax deadline. For those of us that wait until the last possible moment to file our annual tax statements, the next few days are filled with anxiety and concern. What will the new tax laws do to me? Will I have to borrow to cover my shortages? Did I anticipate well enough to balance deductions during the year?

Paul was a Pharisee. He was a Hebrew. He harassed the church. In short, Paul wasn't a nice guy. After his conversion, though, he gave up all he had. He called his wealth and his property "sewer trash" (v. 8). He gave it all up for Christ. He writes to the church at Philippi of being "spiritually mature" (v. 15). He encourages them to continue in their journey toward discipleship.

As Lent progresses, consider your own life and what you might do without.

**I know that I can be more acceptable in Your eyes, my God. Amen.**

**April 11, 32<sup>nd</sup> Day of Lent**

**John 12:3 “Then Mary took an extraordinary amount, almost three quarters of a pound, of very expensive perfume made of pure nard.”**

You likely recall this story in which Mary cleanses the feet of Jesus and, after using this perfume to anoint His feet, dries them with her hair. Judas Iscariot objects to the act and exclaims that it would be better to sell the perfume and use the money to feed the poor.

You may not be as familiar, though, with just what nard is and where it comes from. Nard or spikenard is an oil that comes from *Nardostachys jatamansi*, a flowering plant that grows in Nepal, China, and India. So how did this oil get from the Far East to Jerusalem? Ancient trade routes, in particular the Silk Road, brought goods back and forth by traders. You recall that two of the three wise men presented the baby Jesus with gifts of frankincense and myrrh. These, while not from the same region as nard, were also aromatics. All three were used in the preparation of the body for burial.

In the journey to the cross, Jesus' death and burial are just ahead. He knows what God's plan holds for Him.

**Your sacrifice was for me, my God. Amen.**

**April 12, 33<sup>rd</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 118:22 "The stone rejected by the builders is now the main foundation stone!"**

When construction of buildings included setting foundations more of stone than of poured concrete, builders placed safety walls around their projects. For the curious passers-by, peepholes were drilled at different heights to accommodate those who enjoyed watching progress. I recall as a young boy peering through those peepholes, taking special interest when an old building was destroyed, exposing the aged foundation one or two levels below the street. After workmen jack-hammered those old stones out of position, huge cranes lifted them up and dropped them into waiting trucks. Rather than dumping these stones into landfill, the trucks took them to a plant where they were crushed into fine powder for recycling into concrete for new construction projects.

Rejected by His own people, Jesus and His followers began the largest, longest lasting religious movement in the World.

**Jesus, You are my Savior. Amen.**

**April 13, 34<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Luke 19:40 "I tell you, if they were silent, the stones would shout."**

You know the story. Jesus directed His disciples to bring a small colt that had not been ridden. Sitting on it, He rode into Jerusalem. When the Pharisees challenged Him from the crowd, Jesus replied this. Joy of joys! Sing along and exclaim praise.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4L4ex-KBlak>

**I shout for joy, my Lord! Amen.**

## **April 15, 35<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Isaiah 50:4b “Morning by morning He awakens me and opens my understanding to His will.”**

There are those songs that one hears that seem to stay over time, year to year. The Negro spiritual “My Lord, What a Morning” is one of those songs. I first heard this song around a campfire at church camp in the ‘60s. The song reaches deep inside and connects me with God’s presence. Enjoy the Central Islip High School Concert Choir’s rendition.

Refrain:

My Lord, what a morning!  
My Lord, what a morning!  
O my Lord, what a morning!  
When the stars begin to fall.

1 You will hear the trumpet sound,  
To wake the nations underground,  
Looking to my God’s right hand,  
When the stars begin to fall.

2 You will hear the sinner cry,  
To wake the nations underground,  
Looking to my God’s right hand,  
When the stars begin to fall.

3 You will hear the Christian shout,  
To wake the nations underground,  
Looking to my God’s right hand,  
When the stars begin to fall.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q2PoTMVBFw>

**You give me another day to serve You. Amen.**

**April 16, 36<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Psalm 31:16 “Shine Your face on Your servant; save me by Your faithful love.”**

For those who grew up in a traditional Christian church or Jewish synagogue, how often has this been heard?

“The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up His face to you and grant you peace.” (Numbers 6:25)

As a benediction, I heard it nearly every week as our pastor closed the service then walked to the back of the sanctuary to greet worshipers. Occasionally, the choir sang a rendition of the verses.

Enjoy the combined choirs at the Mark Tallander Foundation Choir Festival at the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels conducted by John Rutter. While you listen to the beautiful words, imagine David appealing to God for His mercy.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICpxgEHqjFA&list=RDICpxgEHqjFA&start\\_radio=1&t=19](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICpxgEHqjFA&list=RDICpxgEHqjFA&start_radio=1&t=19)

**Shine Your face on me, my Lord. Amen.**

**April 17, 37<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent**

**Philippians 2:9 “Therefore, God elevated Him to the place of highest honor and gave Him the name above all other names.”**

The journey to the cross brings us to this. Jesus’ fate becomes clearer. God’s plan for His Son is playing out. Sing His name forever.

Here is an inspiration for today: “Jesus, Name Above All Names” sung by the New Life Worship.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cRJZNosHJKU>

**I sing praises to You. Amen.**

**April 18, 38<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent, Maundy Thursday**

**Isaiah 50:4 The Sovereign Lord has given me His words of wisdom, so that I know how to comfort the weary."**

As Presbyterians, we follow rules and regulations that govern all member congregations of the Presbyterian Church of the USA. Among those rules is the ordination of elders. Those ordained as ministers are referred to as "teaching elders" and those ordained from the laity are referred to as "ruling elders." I love the concept that our pastors are known as teachers. They preach, but they also bring comfort to the sick and grieving. Through their training, they interpret God's word and bring understanding to God's followers.

Jesus spent His last hours before crucifixion with His disciples. Through His words and His example, He taught them that His sacrifice was His mission. Jesus used the words God gave Him.

Now He faced the cross.

**My teacher, my Savior, thanks be to God. Amen.**

**April 19, 39<sup>th</sup> Day of Lent, Good Friday**

**Luke 22:26 “But among you it will be different. Those who are the greatest among you should take the lowest rank, and the leader should be like a servant.”**

Writer Patrick Lencioni includes among his books “The 5 Dysfunctions of a Team” (2002) a view of leadership different than most of us were raised to believe. Teaching about how teams work and collaborate together is, according to Lencioni, dependent on five interconnected characteristics: Trust, Harmony, Commitment, Accountability, and Results. Lencioni purports that if there is an absence of trust, team members can’t move forward with the work. With trust, then when conflict arises, team members can work through differences. At the fourth level – accountability – in traditional systems a hierarchy exists in which team members turn to the appointed leader for guidance. In collaborative groups, however, everyone shares responsibility for his/her own accountability for getting the work done. Leaders in these situations adopt roles of service to team members and to the team as a whole.

Jesus’ disciples were captured by the top-down leadership model and wondered who it would be that took on the role of leader after Jesus was gone. Jesus saw things differently. If any of the disciples were to be successful in carrying on His work, they would need to become servant-minded. Jesus’ life was characterized by servant leadership. After He was gone, He implored them to follow His example.

**Help me be a servant to others. Amen.**

**April 20, 40<sup>th</sup> Day and Last Day of Lent**

**Luke 23:31 “For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?”**

Social media today is filled with examples of bullying. A crowd gathers in a school hallway to witness a bully taunting another student, all the while the crowd watches and does nothing. Cell phones are out to record the event, but no one steps in to stop it.

Jesus is on His way to death. The bullies in the crowd have convinced Pilate of His guilt. The meaning behind Jesus’ statement may indicate that Jesus, loyal to the Roman government and innocent of breaking any Roman laws, is still destined for crucifixion. He asks the crowd to consider what will happen to them if this is what happens to Him? The mission given to Jesus, of course, is of greater magnitude. He is covering their sins and the sins of generations to come. Still, Jesus asks the question. And, the crowd presses on.

**You gave Your life for my sins. Thanks be to God. Amen.**

## **April 21, Easter**

**Matthew 28:1 “Early on Sunday morning, as the new day was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went out to visit the tomb.”**

Easter! Hallelujah! Praise God’s name in the highest! Let the celebrations begin!

For many years as a youngster and young adult, Easter Sunrise Service was a tradition at 1<sup>st</sup> Presbyterian Church in KCK as it was in many other churches. Our congregation traveled a few miles to the west and took over a shelter house at Wyandotte County Lake where folks would gather by 6:00 a.m. to witness the dawn as the sun rose above the lake and forest. One Sunday School class, the Couples Club, arrived even earlier to prepare breakfast. Some mornings were crisp and cold while some (only a few) were a tolerable temperature. We didn’t mind the weather, although a few times the weather was so bad that we opted for the church’s fellowship hall. Somehow, being in the great outdoors on this special day was a reward in itself. I also recall with more recent memory once when a group of us who had traveled together to Nogales, Sonora, Mexico gathered in the garden at Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church for our own version of an Easter Sunrise Service.

Regardless of the manner in which you celebrate the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, make the most of every minute of this extraordinary day.

**Prayer: May the peace of Christ be with you and yours. Amen.**