

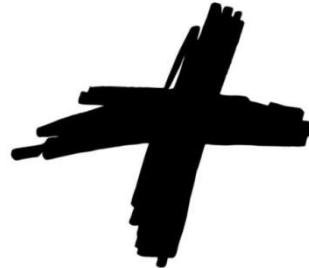
2021 Lenten Devotional



A gift from your faith family at
Messiah Lutheran

February 17, 2021 (aka Ash Wednesday)

Dear beloved saints, family and friends of Messiah
Lutheran Church,



Here is a set of 40 devotions for the 40 days of Lent of 2021 for you. We hope and pray that this resource will bless you and your family as we prepare to celebrate Easter this year. This year our authors have each written two sets of thematically connected Lenten devotions.

EC Ed Costa	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transformation March 1-5• Judgment March 18-20, 22-23
LF Linda Fraser	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The 7 Sorrows of Mary March 6, 8-11, 24-25• The Illusion of "Sacrifice" March 26• The Pain of Betrayal March 27• Courage and Compassion March 29
KH Karl Hester	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• It's a Long and Dusty Road Feb 17-20, 22• A Sense of Holy Week March 30-April 3
DR David Rinas	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Coming of the Light February 23-27• Songs of Hunger and Justice March 12-13, 15-17

Our hope is to continue to provide these devotionals seasonally. If you would like to be part of writing and/or putting together our next devotional please reach out to me. If it is helpful for you or someone with whom you would like to share this devotional you can find it in electronic form at www.messiahnh.org.

Peace, Pastor A handwritten stylized signature of the author's name, likely Karl Hester.

The 40 days of Lent (Sundays are not counted, considered “little Easters”)

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
			Feb 17 Ash Wednesday Day 1	Feb 18 Day 2	Feb 19 Day 3	Feb 20 Day 4
Feb 21 1st Sun of Lent	Feb 22 Day 5	Feb 23 Day 6	Feb 24 Holden Prayer Day 7	Feb 25 Day 8	Feb 26 Day 9	Feb 27 Day 10
Feb 28 2nd Sun of Lent	Mar 1 Day 11	Mar 2 Day 12	Mar 3 Holden Prayer Day 13	Mar 4 Day 14	Mar 5 Day 15	Mar 6 Day 16
Mar 7 3rd Sun of Lent	Mar 8 Day 17	Mar 9 Day 18	Mar 10 Holden Prayer Day 19	Mar 11 Day 20	Mar 12 Day 21	Mar 13 Day 22
Mar 14 4th Sun of Lent	Mar 15 Day 23	Mar 16 Day 24	Mar 17 Holden Prayer Day 25	Mar 18 Day 26	Mar 19 Day 27	Mar 20 Day 28
Mar 21 5th Sun of Lent	Mar 22 Day 29	Mar 23 Day 30	Mar 24 Holden Prayer Day 31	Mar 25 Day 32	Mar 26 Day 33	Mar 27 Day 34
Mar 28 Palm Sunday	Mar 29 Day 35	Mar 30 Day 36	Mar 31 Day 37	Apr 1 Maundy Thursday Day 38	Apr 2 Good Friday Day 39	Apr 3 Easter Vigil Day 40
Apr 4 Easter Sunday						

February 17

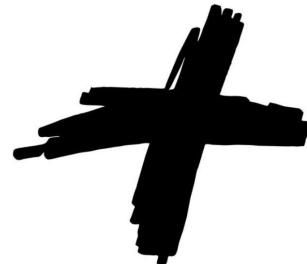
(39 more days of Lent)

Genesis gives us the image of the earth being covered in the chaos of the churning waters. God constrains the waters and the chaos and makes a land where creation can dwell. God brings to life the plants and the animals and humanity made in God's image. From the dust of the garden Adam and Eve come to life and into relationship with God.

Through choice and rebellion there is a breaking of trust and a breakdown of relationship. Adam and Eve are cast out of the garden and are reminded that they were taken from dust and that they shall return to dust. They are constrained to live in the chaos and the churnings of life without the ongoing palpable nearness of God.

Over the generations there are moments of restored relationship with God and stretches of embracing the rebellion and exile. Then comes John the Baptist. Who on behalf of God repurposes the original agent of chaos—water—into an agent of cleansing and hope and rebirth. The people flock to him in the wilderness.

Then comes Jesus making connection with a dry and dusty people. He comes bringing life-giving water to all who thirst. He befriends the dusty people he meets on his way. He loves them and heals them and joins them. And he teaches them of a hope and a way that transcends our mortality and our sin.



Ash Wednesday
Worship at 7:00 pm



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

God, Ash Wednesday reminds us starkly that we are dust and to dust we shall return. But Jesus is with us and points us to Easter and life beyond that glorious day as God's people. Help us know your love and live into your ways. Amen.



February 18

(38 more days of Lent)

Lent is a time where some people take on disciplines. For some they take on disciplines of additional piety—increasing time in scriptures, practicing additional acts of care and love towards others, increasing their offerings of time, talent and treasure towards holy purposes. For some they take on disciplines of restraint—giving up a favorite food or treat as a sacrificial offering to God, trying to put down a habit that may hinder one's walk with God or loving another, limiting something that may consume an undue amount of time or attention.

All of these disciplines can have some benefit. If it takes some 20-30 days to change a habit or adopt a new behavior then a period of 40 days (46 if you count the Sundays) could really help turn a corner in how we live in relationship with God and with others fashioned in God's image. Jesus sums up fulfilling the Law and the Prophets by loving God fully and loving neighbor as we would like to be loved ourselves. Surely disciplines to those ends can have a healing and beneficial outcome.

But we as a dusty people who are returning to dust can twist actions with even the best of intentions. We can look at our own choices in ways that become prideful and judging of others. We can look at the specks in the eyes of our brothers and sisters while somehow completely missing the logs in our own eyes. We can act as judges of others and in so doing driving a wedge between ourselves and God; driving a wedge between ourselves and our

neighbors made in God's image. Nothing seems to rouse Jesus' anger more than hypocrisy in religious practice.

I hope and pray that your time in Lent this year is blessed and good. That whatever things you might take up or cast off as you navigate these 40 days would be a blessing to you and God and to the relationships you have with your neighbors.

Just please don't let what you do or what you don't drive a wedge into the most important relationships you have—with God and with others.

If it comes down to a choice remember Micah 6:8. God has shown us mortals what is required beyond all sacrifice and disciplines: to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with your God.

God, please bless our time in Lent this year. Shape us into the people you desire us to be.



February 19

(37 more days of Lent)

We are from dust. Adam's name in the Hebrew is something like "Dust boy". His name reminds him and us of humanity's origin from the earth and dust. Speaking of humanity the "hum—" means "of the earth". Our collective name reminds us of our origin from the earth or dust.

Lent is a time of humility. A season to return to our dusty and earthen origins. A time to own our earthen and earthy natures and see what God and some disciplines might do to them. Humility is being connected to our earthly origins and not thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought. It is an opportunity to let others talk us up if they are so inclined rather than doing all of our P.R. work ourselves.

But humility is more than just stumbling through life with a downward gaze and a downcast spirit. It is a way to look at things rightly. It is an opportunity to really get the logs out of our eyes and become more aware of God's work.

C.S. Lewis in his classic *Screwtape Letters* has a marvelous take on humility. True humility is seeing things as they really are. When we achieve true humility they are able to see and celebrate gifts and achievements equally well whether they are in ourselves or in another.

God indeed fashioned humanity out of the earth and dust but when God was done spoke over that creation that it was "very good". God does great work with earth and dust and clay. Being "of the dust" isn't a mark of shame but a testament to the creativity of God.

There are lots of images of God and God's people being akin to the potter and the clay.

We as the clay don't always have the ability to determine how are to be or to what purpose we will be assigned. We need to allow God, who does fantastic, beautiful and "very good" work—to do what God will with us. Part of humility is trusting the earth artist to bring art to life in us and in others around us.

One of the songs that could easily be part of our Lenten hymnody is ELW 801 "Change My Heart, O God" by Eddie Espinosa. It could easily be the Lenten prayer of an earthy people:

*Change my heart, O God;
make it ever true. Change my
heart, O God; may I be like
you. You are the potter; I am
the clay. Mold me and make
me; this is what I pray. Amen.*



February 20

(36 more days of Lent)

Rob Bell (I could show you a picture of when I met him at a book-signing while wearing an Aaron Rodgers jersey. He made a comment about sending a text to Aaron who has written the forward to one of Rob's many books about our encounter but wouldn't want to distract from the devotional task at hand) is a creative and prolific communicator. He and his collaborators put together an engaging series of short and evocative videos called Nooma (which is a homophone for the Greek word for wind, breath and/or spirit pneuma- ($\piνευμα$ —in the Greek)).

One of my favorite episodes of Nooma is simply entitled Dust. If you want to partake you can find it on-demand for \$1.99 through Vimeo at www.vimeo.com/ondemand/nooma008. If you are inclined to view it I would heartily commend it to you. If the cost or downloading it is a hardship please let me know and I will gladly help you out.

The blessing Rob mentions and that is germane to this devotion is "May you be covered in the dust of your rabbi". If we are following Jesus closely enough then the dust that he traffics in will cake onto us too. If we follow Jesus closely enough we will stir up some controversies akin to what he did. If we follow Jesus closely enough the scent of the nard of his imminent death and burial spill off his feet onto our garments too. As Jesus stirs up the earth around him doing his ministry and revealing his love we will reflect the dust kicked up will find a way to coat us and shape our ways as well.

You could paraphrase the beloved John 3:16 as for God so loved this dusty, earthball that God sent Jesus. So that whoever would follow after Jesus as he stirs up dust and brings healing, life and joy may find themselves covered in everlasting life.

Ministry is a dirty and earthy business. If we want to be the people God has called us to be it involves getting dusty and dirty. If we want to truly grow into the healing and salvation God intends for us it sometimes requires honest assessments of the dirt and the earthly stains in our ways. Lent is a time that can be set aside for owning our own dustiness and for seeking after our rabbi and the dust that Jesus churns up.

*Jesus, may we be covered in the dust of you—our rabbi.
Amen.*



February 21

(36 more days of Lent)

Sundays are not considered part of Lent (they are thought of being “little Easters”). That is why the Lenten day countdown didn’t shift from yesterday.

Rather than provide a devotion for today we hope and pray that you will join us for worship.

If you aren’t able to be with us please consider reading the appointed lessons for today:

- Genesis 9:8-17
- Psalm 25:1-10
- 1 Peter 3:18-22
- Mark 1:9-15

1st Sunday of Lent

**9:30 am worship
ELW Setting 8**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual coffee hour
following worship on



February 22

(35 more days of Lent)

One of the songs that has long held my attention is by Beth Nielsen Chapman. I was at a convention. I can't remember the topic of the session I was in but there was in the room a woman with a guitar. She asked the leader if she could share her song. I then heard a hauntingly beautiful yet achingly sad song entitled "Sand and Water".

For the purposes of this devotion we'll consider sand to be of the dust family, genus and species.

The song is about Beth's life as she weathered the grief of her love and her husband dying and leaving her to raise their child alone.

I think the song resonated so deeply with me because that was near the time of my divorce. I was serving a call in a church and my marriage had come undone. I was physically and irreparably distant from my two kids. My dreams and hopes had come crashing down. I was in many ways all alone trying to pick up the pieces and move on. If you give the song a listen you can easily catch some of what resonated with me.

If you want to hear the song you can catch it on YouTube:

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

All of us have dreams and aspirations. We make promises and commit ourselves to journeys. Not all of them work out as we intended. We can find ourselves in dirty, dusty, sandy messes. Sometimes we are the ones holding the pickaxes and the shovels and sometimes someone else has done the

dirty work. Just because we are covered with dirt, dust and sand doesn't mean we've been following after our rabbi. Sometimes we are caught in the avalanches, dust devils and cave-ins that come with living here on earth.

But God does good work with sand and water. In and through baptism our earthbound hurts and tragedies can be made new or redeemed to serve as a balm for others.

God made us and all of creation "very good". And even when things get very bad God can bring healing, hope and joy to the dustiest and sandiest of places.

God, there is a reason so many resonate with the poem Footprints in which you carry one across the unbearable loads over the sands of life. Carry us too. Amen.



February 23

(34 more days of Lent)

The word "Lent" comes from an old English word for "lengthen," and it refers to this season of the year when the daylight gets longer each day. Light shows us what we could not see without the light, and increasing light can show us new truths as the light brightens. Epiphany was January 6, and is the "manifestation" of light. That was also the day when a mob of rioters stormed the US capitol in an attempt to overthrow a presidential election. I was horrified that day, but I also saw many things with a brighter light. These five devotions reflect what I saw. Pastor David Rinas

† † †

Therefore whoever resists authority resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. Romans 13:2

Dozens of the rioters inside the capitol building were chanting "Hang Mike Pence." They had even erected a gallows on the lawn before the capitol.

Perhaps when George Floyd and Breonna Taylor were killed earlier in the year, white men like me could live under the illusion that the people being killed were somehow "other" and that white men were safe. The riot at the capitol starkly exposed the danger that white supremacy poses to all people in the United States. I was reminded that day of the poem at the National Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, by Pastor Martin Niemöller (1892–1984).

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—Be cause I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

The roots of white supremacy have been a part of the American experience from the very beginnings of our nation. You don't have to see YOURSELF as "prejudiced" or even "racist." The problem is not only in our individual attitudes, but in our collective imagination. However you see your own position in our culture, it is time to speak out. The white supremacists are coming for all of us.

Lord, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, we live in a democracy in which we say that the authority for our government rests with the people united by a constitution. Give us good courage to live up to our responsibilities to work for just government, and to freely elect officials in authority, so that all God's people may live in peace and prosperity. In your holy name we pray. AMEN.

DR

February 24

(33 more days of Lent)

All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God;
Romans 3:23

Among the horrific images from the insurrection at the capitol was the police officer screaming as he was being crushed in a doorway between the rioters and the police. It reminded me of the dangers and courage in police work, and that there is something very right about the ways in which our police perform. Another image was of a police officer opening a gate and urging the rioters to enter, as though he was directing traffic to move more quickly. It reminded me that there is something very wrong about the ways in which our police perform.

I have been dismayed by the rhetoric that urges us to EITHER support our police OR support Black Lives Matter. We need both! Good police are essential to our safety and to help in times of dire need. The Black Lives Matter movement calls into sharp question the times when our police do not protect all of us. The insurrectionists killed a police officer. That is not supporting the police! Supporting good policing is a matter of clearly defining the ways in which they must protect all of us. It is not "either/or" it is "both/and."

Lutherans have a doctrine called "simul justus et pecator." It means that we are both saints and sinners at the same time. Admitting we have done wrong is not a condemnation of our entire being. Also, celebrating the good that God has placed in our hearts to do is not a blanket endorsement of all our actions.

Improving our lives by correcting our mistakes is a part of growing as human beings, both in our individual lives, and in our civic responsibilities. Black

**Holden Prayer
Worship at 7:00 pm**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship
Virtual choir rehearsal
after worship on



lives matter to me, and so do our police.

Lord, Jesus, our Savior, you came into our world to show us our sin and to forgive our sin. You have blessed us with your gift of salvation, and we give you thanks. Turn our thankfulness into opportunities to see the light and to confront the evils around us, so that we might not continue our sins, but to walk in the light of your love for all people. In Jesus' name we pray, AMEN.



February 25

(32 more days of Lent)

Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. Matthew 16:24

What appeared to me as a strange image was of a Black police officer aiming his gun at some of the White rioters as he fled up the stairs of the capitol building. He repeatedly stopped and pointed his gun at the man leading a group up the stairs, who were apparently following and threatening the officer. I kept wondering why the officer did not just shoot somebody in self-defense.

The officer was Eugene Goodman and he was not running away to protect himself. Rather, he was leading the mob away from the Senate chamber so that other police officers could secure the safety of the Senators. He was risking his own safety for the sake of the people he was protecting.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples about taking up their cross, he was referring to the humiliation that condemned prisoners had to endure as they were going to their own crucifixion. This is something Jesus would do, not as a guilty criminal, but as an innocent man who did not shy away from his love for the people he came to save, even if it meant humiliation and death. Inside the capitol we had a Black police officer being chased by a White mob that had been chanting "hang Mike Pence." I cannot imagine the horror of that

chase for Officer Goodman. Yet, he did it willingly. He took up his cross. I keep thinking of how I might take up my cross in these days when so much courage is required of all of us.

Lord, Jesus, Lamb of God, you have called your disciples to take up our cross and to follow you. So often, those opportunities come upon us in unexpected times and ways. Help us to be watchful so that when we are called, we will act with the courage necessary to boldly protect those who are most vulnerable among us. We pray in the name of the Lamb of God, who gave Himself for us. AMEN.

DR

February 26

(31 more days of Lent)

Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Malachi 2:10

When the rioters were storming the capitol building, I felt as if our nation was so vulnerable. In other situations in Washington, DC, when there had been mostly peaceful protests against police violence, there were so many more police protecting our buildings. Some of the "police" were in uniforms without identification, neither to their names nor to their branch of service. There were also National Guard troops at the ready, or in positions to block entrance to our buildings.

However, with the armed insurrection, there were only the capitol police. Later reports showed that the capitol police had pleaded for reinforcements, but the pleas were denied because of the bad "visual" of National Guard troops defending the building from (White) people trying to get into a public building, even though they were smashing windows, breaking through doors, and carrying weapons. Many commentators noted that if the rioters had dark skin, they would have been killed on the spot. The difference could not have been more clear, and it had been the subject of protests for months before.

We are all God's children, created in the image of God, male and female, of all colors and ethnic origins. We all deserve the same protection, and when the levels of protection and forceful response are so varied among groups, that should give all of us at least a pause to reflect on what we have become. This is especially true when the difference in response is based on the superficiality of the tone of one's

complexion! Racial discord has been written into our laws, enhanced in our practices, and covered with self-righteous indignation. So many of God's children in our nation, people of all colors, are now saying "ENOUGH!" The light has been shining on our sin, and we are ready for change.

Heavenly Father, you have created us in your own image, not so that we would think of ourselves as little gods, but rather that we would reflect your goodness and your love for all creation. Remind us of our identity as we look into the eyes of those people whom we are tempted to see as "different" so that we would see people to love as you have first loved us. We pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. AMEN.



February 27

(30 more days of Lent)

'You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hidden.¹⁵ No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house.¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. Matthew 5: 14-16

Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman was half finished with her inauguration poem when the riots occurred on January 6, the day of Epiphany. The events of that day helped to give her the energy, inspiration, and insight to complete her remarkable poem for January 20. My favorite line ending her poem is this:

When day comes, we step out of the shade,
 aflame and unafraid.
The new dawn blooms as we free it.
 For there is always light,
 if only we're brave enough to see it.
 If only we're brave enough to be it.

I see this as an amplification of Jesus' sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5. With all of the things we have seen in January 2021, we certainly know more about our country than we knew before. With all the sermons and stories that Jesus taught us, we have a mandate to be the loving light of those who follow Him. This devotional is not the place to call for particular actions, but it is the place to say that we need to respond more courageously to the specific actions that are called for all around us. We have so many stories of courageous faithfulness in God's Holy Bible,

And we have many more stories of such courageous faithfulness in the history of our response as Christians. We are not in a time calling for only passive reflection, but rather for active engagement. "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John 1:5

LORD God, you have sent your WORD into our world to give light and life. You have given us the power to become your children and we look to your Son, Jesus, for light and salvation. Help us to not only SEE the light, but to BE the light, so that the darkness of this world will not overcome the good that you have called your creation to be. We pray in the name of Jesus, the light that you have sent into the world. AMEN.

DR

February 28

(30 more days of Lent)

Sundays are not considered part of Lent (they are thought of being “little Easters”). That is why the Lenten day countdown didn’t shift from yesterday.

Rather than provide a devotion for today we hope and pray that you will join us for worship.

If you aren’t able to be with us please consider reading the appointed lessons for today:

- Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16
- Psalm 22:23-31
- Romans 4:13-25
- Mark 8:31-38

2nd Sunday of Lent

**9:30 am worship
ELW Setting 8**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual coffee hour
following worship on



March 1

(29 more days of Lent)

1 Samuel 10:6

The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.

The prophet Samuel anoints Saul with oil and then tells him what will happen to him as he continues his journey. He will meet other prophets and join in their prophesying and be turned into "a different person." The story of Samuel and how God directs him to anoint Saul is not just a history lesson on the nation of Israel, but one of what God can do when you acknowledge His presence with you. You become a different person.

How I lived my life when I was in my twenties and how I live my life now, speaks to great change and not just in age. My priorities are different and my sense of what is right or wrong has changed. It is no longer black or white.

Why? I would like to think that wisdom has come with time, but I know I have God with me and I have been spiritually reborn again. I am a different person and I have made myself present to Him.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, guide us in getting closer to you, in becoming a different person. A person who always seeks your Will for how we live our lives and for loving all peoples. Help us spread the Good News so that all will become a different people...a people of God. Amen.

EC

March 2	(28 more days of Lent)
John 3:1-3 <i>Now there was a Pharisee, a man named Nicodemus who was a member of the Jewish ruling council. He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the signs you are doing if God were not with him." Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again."</i>	
Nicodemus was a "teacher of the Jews" (John 3:10) and being a Pharisee, lived by the strictest possible religious rules. Seeking truth, he wanted to know more about Jesus and what He taught. Although Nicodemus was a well-educated religious teacher himself, the Lord showed him that he was spiritually blind. As we journey through our Lenten period of reflection and deepen our relationship with Jesus, are we spiritually blind? Although the Spirit enters your life when you believe, are we really embracing this world and forgetting we are spiritually born again? Or have we been transformed? Prayer: Lord, help us to see again, to see and feel our spiritual birth. Please fill our hearts with new life as we embrace our Lord Jesus and live with new meaning. Amen.	EC

March 3

(27 more days of Lent)

Ezekiel 36:26

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

The Lord God is telling Ezekiel to convey His words to the house of Israel, that He will bring them into their own land, and put a new spirit within them. He continues to say that “you shall be my people, and I will be your God.” The Lord promises to change the people only because He desires to save His people. However, in order to receive God’s Word and nurture spiritual growth, their stony hearts or hard hearts need to become hearts of flesh.

We are Christians, followers of Christ. Yet, with all that goes on among us (i.e., politics, pandemic, cyber-hacking, etc.) have our hearts hardened? Have we moved away from remembering who died for us so that we may live?

Prayer: Holy God, help us to keep our hearts of flesh and not be hardened by the ways of this world. Please help us to witness the Spirit within our hearts to reflect that we have been born of God. Amen.

**Holden Evening
Worship at 7:00 pm**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual choir rehearsal
after worship on



March 4	(26 more days of Lent)
Romans 12:2 <i>Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.</i>	
The forces of this world want to control our minds, but God not only gives us hearts of flesh for the Spirit within, but also wants to transform our minds (Eph. 4:17-24, Col. 3:1-11). The world wants to change your mind so it exerts pressure from without (e.g., advertising, politics, social media, etc.). But the Holy Spirit changes your mind by releasing power from within. It has been said if the world controls your thinking, you are a conformer; if God controls your thinking, you are a transformer.	EC
Prayer: Gracious God, strengthen our minds to live the ways of you. Help us to keep our priorities in order, to take daily time for prayer and Your Word. Amen.	

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

The forces of this world want to control our minds, but God not only gives us hearts of flesh for the Spirit within, but also wants to transform our minds (Eph. 4:17-24, Col. 3:1-11). The world wants to change your mind so it exerts pressure from without (e.g., advertising, politics, social media, etc.). But the Holy Spirit changes your mind by releasing power from within. It has been said if the world controls your thinking, you are a conformer; if God controls your thinking, you are a transformer.

Prayer: Gracious God, strengthen our minds to live the ways of you. Help us to keep our priorities in order, to take daily time for prayer and Your Word. Amen.

March 5	(25 more days of Lent)
Matthew 18:3 And he said: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. After the disciples asked Jesus who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, the Lord then called a child forward. He said whoever humbles himself like a child will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. In other words, have childlike trust, dependence, the desire to make others happy, an absence of boasting. Humility is more than just a characteristic of a Christian. The Lord was telling His disciples that they had to change their thinking or they may never enter the kingdom of heaven. Trudi (my wife) has a bumper sticker on her car that says "God Bless the Whole World, No Exceptions." That message reminds me that although I am a Christian, I am no more important than other people. Can I put others first before my own wants and desires? Do I look at all peoples with equal eyes? Prayer: Dear Lord, we pray for hearts of humility, that we can be kind and compassionate to all no matter what their status may be economically or what their faith may be. Please help us to embrace our fellow human beings with agape love. Amen.	



March 6

(24 more days of Lent)

During the Christmas Season, Pastor Kim Hester led us in a lovely service. She reflected on the popular Christmas song 'Mary Did You Know?'. Her answer was Yes, Mary did know. As some of us came together on Zoom after the service, some said they don't feel they know much about Mary and they turned to me (the former Roman Catholic Nun, of course). I shared a bit about how Mary has always been a figure of strength for me as a woman. Joyce Rupp cites passages from the New Testament that speak clearly of the Seven Sorrows of Mary in her book Your Sorrow Is My Sorrow.

For the next few days let's reflect on and try to imagine Mary's sorrow and her strength and her faith!



The First Sorrow: The Prophecy of Simeon

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God... Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother, Mary: 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too.; (Luke 2:27-35)

Simeon did not mince any words here. Mary's son was going to shake things up. Heads were going to roll. He would be opposed by many as he spoke the Truth. And Mary's soul would be pierced by a sword! I don't know about your Mom, but I am pretty sure my Mom would have said 'OH NO! Not on my watch.' My mom never wanted me to make trouble or cause problems. I was to be a quiet and obedient little girl. When I did get into trouble I always wondered why she told me she must be doing something wrong and had failed as a mother. Not only had I gotten myself in trouble but I made my mom feel like she was a failure. I could accept that I had made a mistake and made her angry, but I also felt guilt for making her feel less than competent as a mom.

But Mary knew she had to let Jesus do what he needed to do. Simeon warned her and she listened. Imagine if our mothers had been told of the mission we have in this life in God's eyes. For God has a plan for each of us...a plan for good. She knew that there was a Power greater than she that was a play. She had to let go and she was warned it would cut her like a sword right through her soul!

Let us pray:

Oh Loving Creator, through Mary, you help us understand the perils and challenges of parenting. Even if we are not parents, we are ultimately responsible for supporting the growth and freedom of those around us. Mary shows us the importance of a loving and supportive presence. We will see as we continue to reflect on Mary that she was ALWAYS there. She did not tell him what to do, but rather trusted him and was always there. Help us to be that loving and supportive presence to those around us...even when we know it is going to hurt! And we pray for those who are stunned, shocked, dismayed, distraught over distressful news that will bring suffering to them in the future...

LF

March 7

(24 more days of Lent)

Sundays are not considered part of Lent (they are thought of being “little Easters”). That is why the Lenten day countdown didn’t shift from yesterday.

Rather than provide a devotion for today we hope and pray that you will join us for worship.

If you aren’t able to be with us please consider reading the appointed lessons for today:

- Exodus 20:1-17
- Psalm 19
- 1 Corinthians 1:18-25
- John 2:13-22

3rd Sunday of Lent

**9:30 am worship
ELW Setting 8**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual coffee hour
following worship on



March 8

(23 more days of Lent)

The Second Sorrow: The Flight into Egypt

...an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said 'Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him.' Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. (Mat 2:13-15)

Have you ever been told to go somewhere and stay put until you are told you can come out? I imagine those of you who have military experience may have experienced such an order. But imagine you received the order AND you had to bring your wife and child along. Just do it! Do what I say! You obey the order, but imagine if you are the wife and you must move in the middle of the night and bring your child. You know there is danger.

I have heard people call this 'Blind trust', some call it 'faith', some call it 'letting go and letting God' whatever it's called, it is never easy to do something you know must be done but you don't really want to face it. I have come to admire people who face the most difficult challenges and do it GRACEFULLY. There is a graciousness about them as they walk headlong into a seemingly impossible situation. I bet you know that feeling when you have experienced it yourself or have seen others with that grace.

'The Hail Mary' is a prayer known by many, especially Roman Catholics. 'Hail Mary, full of Grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. AMEN.' This is a prayer I pray aloud with Roman Catholics, when I am with people who are transitioning through end of life.

For the rest of us, I pray with them for peace and comfort... Mary understood pain in so many ways, but she also understood Grace, and she was 'Graceful'.

Let us pray: Oh Loving God, may we go about our lives trusting in God's grace and calling upon ourselves to move through life 'GRACEFULLY'. And we pray for those who are in dangerous situations, those who need to flee from harm.

LF

March 9

(22 more days of Lent)

The Third Sorrow: The Loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple

When the festival was ended and they started to return, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but his parents did not know it. Assuming he was in the group of travelers, they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among the relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem to search for him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers... When his parents saw him they were astonished; and his mother said to him, 'Child, why have you treated us like this? Look, your father and I have been searching for you in great anxiety.' He said to them, 'Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house? But they did not understand what he said to them. Then he went down with them and went to Nazareth, and was obedient to them. His mother treasured all these things in her heart.' (Luke 2:43-51)

Ah yes, Mary was human and so was Jesus! Mary was worried sick. For three days Jesus had been missing! And Jesus sounds like the pre-teen or teenager we all know! Why were you worried. I was fine. I have things I need to do! I love this exchange! But Jesus does go with them to Nazareth 'and was obedient to them'. If you're a parent, it's OK to set boundaries. If you're a teen, sometimes you are going to make your parents uncomfortable. They will worry. But sometimes you have to do what you feel you must do. In this case, no one was hurt...and Mary came to treasure these things in her heart.

I am thinking about how difficult it must have been to parent Jesus. YIKES! Dare I say, no more difficult than it is for you to parent your child/children. For I bet you also know that your child has a unique call. Each of us works to our dying day to discover meaning in our life. As I work with elders, I call it 'Meaning Making'.

Listening to their stories of what they have come to 'treasure in their heart' is a gift and a wonder. This is real and it is important. What are the things I have come to treasure in my heart?

Let us pray: Loving God, are you calling us to not only be a parent to our own children but also to guide and support all those we know as a parent would their own child. This is a tall order, but you do give us tall orders! Those times when we don't understand the actions of others, are you calling us to try to understand. And Jesus gave us a powerful example here. He told his parents he had work to do, and then went along with them to Nazareth. Mary, Joseph and Jesus knew their motivation and acknowledged one another and moved on together. Listening, accepting and acknowledging their different points of view and concerns....Humm....

LF

March 10 (21 more days of Lent)

The Fourth Sorrow: Mary Meets Jesus Carrying the Cross

A great number of people followed him, and among them were women who were beating their breasts and wailing for him. (Luke 23:27)

Some of these people were following cheering his demise. Some were mocking him. And some women, and remember, women at the time never played a visible role in public activities, but some women were there, and Mary came to Jesus at that time.

Think of the horror of that moment! Think of Mary's heart ache! All the gospel says is that Mary met Jesus Carrying the Cross. She just did it. She was there. She met this head on with Grace!

Let us pray: How difficult must it have been to see your mother there in the midst of the riotous crowd who was determined to kill you Jesus! You loved her and knew she was there for you and she was strong. Both of you knew there was really nothing she could do! Nothing but LOVE!



Holden Evening Worship at 7:00 pm



Streamed worship with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual choir rehearsal after worship on



Image is a screenshot from the Passion of the Christ with Jim Caviezel as Jesus.

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0335345>



March 11

(20 more days of Lent)

The Fifth Sorrow: Mary Stands beneath the Cross of Jesus

Meanwhile, standing near the cross of Jesus were his mother, and Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, 'Woman, here is your son.' Then he said to the disciple, 'Here is your mother. From that time on this disciple took her into his home. (Luke 19:25-27)

Jesus' last act before he died was to take care of his mother. This is such a powerful picture of human love. Jesus was surrounded with love and he made sure his mom would be taken care of. At this time every year when I read this passage, I ask myself if I would have been brave enough to be there and to stand beneath the cross. Mary is such an example for us! She could and she would!



Let us pray: Oh Jesus, and Mary, at this moment all I can say is thank you for being human and showing us the Divinity in our humanity. WE pray with those who vigil beneath the cross of another, unable to take the pain away from those they love...

Christ on the Cross is a painting by Mihaly Munkacsy

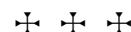
Location:
Budapest, Hungarian National Gallery

LF

March 12

(19 more days of Lent)

For years I have associated Lent with food. Part of that is the Wednesday evening Lenten suppers of soup and bread that are so popular. Another part is the annual emphasis on feeding the hungry. This year we cannot gather for soup and bread, but we do have the option of reflecting on hunger together in the ELCA study, "What Will It Take to End Hunger?" A number of my favorite hymns lift up God's concern for the hungry, so I share five of them here. The prayers are from Bread for the World's "Lenten Prayers for an End to Hunger." www.bread.org



"Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is an epileptic and he suffers terribly; he often falls into the fire and often into the water."

Matthew 17:15

Near the beginning of our Sunday worship services we sing some version of the Kyrie. It is based on several instances in Matthew, Mark, and Luke where people call upon Jesus for help. (Kyrie Eleison means "Lord have mercy.") My favorite version of this ancient song for mercy is in setting 8, ELW, page 184, which we have been using in the season of Epiphany which was written by Dakota Road. While I had heard it before coming to Messiah, I came to love it at Messiah. It is so lively and speaks of the energy in our church community. My favorite line is, "That we may live out your impassioned response to the hungry and the poor." It is a call to God to help us to be God's hands in our world. It is not just asking for

something for ourselves, but it is asking God to help us change to be a blessing to others. What a powerful way to begin our worship!

O Christ, we give thanks that during this season of Lent you come into our lives, proclaiming God's salvation. Renew our faith in this good news so that we who are baptized in your Spirit may raise our voices on behalf of those who hunger in our world. Amen.

DR

March 13

(18 more days of Lent)

¹⁶And taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces. Luke 9:16-17

This passage from Luke recounts the story of the feeding of the 5000. It is the only miracle of Jesus that is recorded in all four of the Gospels. I find in its words an echo of one of our favorite hymns, "Christ Be Our Light: (ELW 715). The most pertinent words are "Longing for food, many are hungry. Longing for water, many still thirst. Make us your bread, broken for others, shared until all are fed." In the story, the disciples want to send the crowd away because they believe that they do not have enough food to feed everyone. Jesus prays over the five loaves of bread and the two fish, and there is enough to not only feed everyone, but also enough to gather 12 baskets of leftovers. There are times in our lives as well when we believe that we have too few resources to do what Jesus calls us to do. The song shows us Jesus' will that all are fed, and the miracle demonstrates the faith needed to accomplish that will, even when we think we have too little.

O Christ, you enable us to worship God with our entire lives. Grant us the courage to speak out against greed and injustice in our world. Embolden us as we challenge our nation's leaders to change the conditions that allow hunger to persist. Amen.

PSA:

Daylight Saving Time begins at 2:00 am tomorrow morning. You might want to make sure your timepieces are set properly before you go to sleep tonight. We wouldn't want you to be late for church.



Image courtesy of:
<http://clipart-library.com/>

DR

March 14

(18 more days of Lent)

Sundays are not considered part of Lent (they are thought of being “little Easters”). That is why the Lenten day countdown didn’t shift from yesterday.

Rather than provide a devotion for today we hope and pray that you will join us for worship.

If you aren’t able to be with us please consider reading the appointed lessons for today:

- Numbers 21:4-9
- Psalm 107:1-3, 17-22
- Ephesians 2:1-10
- John 3:14-21

4th Sunday of Lent

**9:30 am worship
ELW Setting 8**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual coffee hour
following worship on



March 15

(17 more days of Lent)

¹¹Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. ¹²When they were satisfied, he told his disciples, ‘Gather up the fragments left over, so that nothing may be lost.’ John 6:11-12

Here is the same story as the previous one from Luke. The Gospel of John has several layers of meaning in its stories, and in this rendition of the feeding of the 5000, we have a hint of what the reign of God looks like. All are satisfied and nothing is to be lost. I find this sentiment in another favorite hymn, “Hear I Am, Lord, (ELW 574). “I will set a feast for them, my hand will save. Finest bread I will provide till their hearts are satisfied.” The feast is also in the imagery of that wonderful hymn of praise, “This is the Feast of Victory for our God.” When I think of this image of God’s reign being a magnificent feast in which everyone is included, I am reminded of a professor in seminary once said, “if we already know what God’s reign looks like, why would we want to live as though it is not here already.” God’s future for us breaks into our present and draws us closer to the day when all are satisfied.

O God, you desire that all people should eat and be satisfied. As we follow Jesus to Jerusalem and the cross, may our hearts be so transformed that we lose our lives in sharing your bounty with all in need. Amen.

DR

March 16

(16 more days of Lent)

The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the Lord....All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. —Psalm 22:26-27

The theme that all shall be satisfied in God's reign is not limited to the Gospels. Here we find it in a beautiful Psalm. We also find it in one of our beloved communion hymns, "You Satisfy the Hungry Heart," (ELW 484). Having communed at the Lord's table, we rise renewed by His Spirit, and we sing, "You give yourself to us, O Lord; then selfless let us be, to serve each other in your name in truth and charity." With all the joy we share together around the Lord's Table; sharing the peace with everyone at worship, receiving Jesus into us, and singing beautiful communion hymns, it may be easy to forget that this part of our worship centers around the sacrifice of His broken body given for us, and His blood poured out for us. He lost Himself for us so that we might lose ourselves for others. In this way, all the families of the nations shall be satisfied and will worship before him.

*O God, you lift up your Son Jesus on the cross so that the whole world might be saved.
Sustained by your love, may we not grow weary in working to help protect and restore the natural environment that sustains us all. Amen.*

DR

March 17

(15 more days of Lent)

(Christ) humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross.
Philippians 2:8

This passage is a small part of what we believe is the oldest hymn of the Christian church. We have the words, but not the music. It has been set to music in our liturgies, and the main point of the mournful notes is the humiliation that Jesus allowed Himself to suffer in order to become one of us and to show us the limitless love of God. The same sentiment is found in this favorite hymn, often chosen for worship during Lent: “Lord, Whose Love in Humble Service.” The most haunting line for me is this: “Still your children wander homeless, still the hungry cry for bread; still the captives long for freedom; still in grief we mourn our dead.” It is a reminder of the troubles of our world into which Jesus entered, even though He was divine. We also have many opportunities to reach out in understanding and in help to people struggling with the burdens of difficult lives: refugees, asylum seekers, the homeless, and any who are hungry. We can dare to be a part of their lives, even if only briefly, reaching out in humble service, reflecting the love of our Savior.

O Christ, we give thanks that, in your suffering and death, you reveal God's glory and offer us the gift of new life. As you create a new heart in us, may our eyes be opened to new ways we can create hope and opportunity for those who hunger and live in poverty. Amen.

**Holden Evening
Worship at 7:00 pm**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual choir rehearsal
after worship on



March 18

(14 more days of Lent)

Psalm 7:8

Let the LORD judge the peoples. Vindicate me, LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High.

David is crying out to God for vindication and deliverance because of being persecuted by wrongdoers (i.e., Cush the Benjamite). The theme is God's vindication of His servants and judgment on those that persecute his servants.

David is seeking refuge in the Lord.

How about you and me? When we feel wronged by people no matter what the circumstances, do we take refuge in the Lord? Do we pass judgment, or do we leave that to God?

Prayer: Holy God, help us to stop passing judgment on others and instead turn to you for refuge, guidance, and strength. Help us to be just in your eyes, by our words and our actions. Amen.

EC

March 19

(13 more days of Lent)

Isaiah 33:22

For the LORD is our judge, the LORD is our lawgiver, the LORD is our king; it is he who will save us.

Do we put our trust into our world and expect our government to be our lawgiver (legislative), to be judge for interpreting and applying the laws (judicial), and the executive branch system for enforcing the laws ("king")? Is it possible for the government to submit to the will and purpose and laws of God?

These past four years have made me take a hard look at our country and the many areas of conflict, narcissism, control of power, and those who are suffering to greater depths. We need to remember that Christ is alive, reigns, and has brought salvation. Lent is a time for reflection on where our priorities lie and to keep hope alive because Christ is Lord.

Prayer: Oh God, do not let us continue to rely on our own powers and do not allow us to follow the wrong path set by this world. Let your Spirit have power over us and put us on the path that leads to Your peace, through Jesus Christ, the Messiah, Your Word, our guide, who lives and reigns with You. Amen.



March 20

(12 more days of Lent)

Matthew 7:1-2

"Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

Our society is quick to label people into segments that may be derogatory, unfair, or solely based on economic positioning. When we see a man by the stoplight with a sign saying "Will work for food." What comes to mind? Do we pass judgment on him without even knowing the circumstances of his life? Is he equal to us? He may be a fraud, or he may be a person in true need. Which one? It should trigger the thought that we will be judged as well...by how we view and judge others.

Prayer: (from Huub Oosterhuis) Lord God you want the well-being of people and not their destruction. Take all violence from our midst. Extinguish hatred in our hearts. Help us not to judge each other's lives. Give peace on earth to all humankind. We ask you this through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.



Image courtesy of:
<http://clipart-library.com/>

EC

March 21

(12 more days of Lent)

Sundays are not considered part of Lent (they are thought of being “little Easters”). That is why the Lenten day countdown didn’t shift from yesterday.

Rather than provide a devotion for today we hope and pray that you will join us for worship.

If you aren’t able to be with us please consider reading the appointed lessons for today:

- Jeremiah 31:31-34
- Psalm 51:1-12
- Hebrews 5:5-10
- John 12:20-33

5th Sunday of Lent

**9:30 am worship
ELW Setting 8**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual coffee hour
following worship on



March 22

(11 more days of Lent)

Romans 14:10

You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat.

Would you think of a prison inmate as a brother or sister? Or would you say something like "They get what they deserve; it's where bad people should be." Someone once said "there are no bad people in prison, only people who have made bad choices." As Christians who are preparing for the Lord's death and resurrection, can we truly say we are no different than prison inmates? Yes, we can. We are all sinners and we also make bad choices. They and we will stand before God's judgment seat and have to face our God. Are we ready?

Prayer: Lord God, we pray that you help us to view all people, whether friend or stranger, with equal eyes of agape (*ἀγαπή*) love. Let us be more loving with our fellow human beings and less condemning. Please instill in us a kind heart, a heart of compassion and humility. Through Jesus Christ Your Son, our Savior. Amen.

EC

March 23

(10 more days of Lent)

Luke 6:42

How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Jesus is saying before we point out the faults or sins of our brothers and sisters and judge accordingly, we must do a self-awareness inventory. Before we fall into the trap of pride and self-importance, as Christians we need to take a hard look at ourselves and recognize that we are to be judged by God. Since we are human, we make mistakes. Do we deserve forgiveness based on our own merits? No, Christ has died for us so that our faults, our sins, are forgiven and forgotten. We must also recognize that is true for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Prayer: Heavenly God, please send Your Holy Spirit upon us for keeping our hearts filled with your love so that we are compassionate and humble with all we encounter. Help us to remember that we do not earn our way into Heaven. Jesus, through love, has brought us that salvation. Keep hypocrisy out of our lives. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

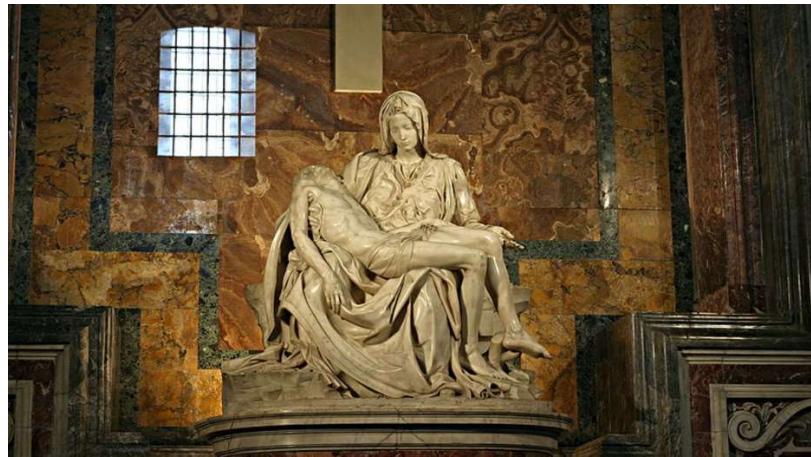
EC

March 24

(9 more days of Lent)

The Sixth Sorrow: Mary Receives the Dead Body of Jesus

Joseph of Arimathea, who was a disciple of Jesus, though a secret one because of his fear of the Jews, asked Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus. Pilate gave him permission; so he came and removed his body. (John 19:38)



Michelangelo captured the essence of the moment when Mary received the dead body of Jesus. For this first time, today when looking at this sculpture, I noticed Mary's left hand is open. This is a position of openness and acceptance. Again she is open to the will of God even as her heart is surely broken. She is 'full of Grace'.

Let us pray: Oh Jesus, your mother was with you to the end. She cradled you, her son, to the end. She prayed to the end. And someone who was fearful of the Jews had the courage in the end to come forward and take care of your remains. There are so many powerful emotions and yet at that moment they believed it was the end. Give us faith to know that what seems like the end often is not. Give us courage to keep going. We pray with those who are receiving loss and death into the arms of their lives...

**Holden Evening
Worship at 7:00 pm**



Streamed worship
with a watch party



Streamed worship

Virtual choir
rehearsal
after worship on



The Pietà is the
pictured sculpture by
Michelangelo in St.
Peter's Basilica,
Vatican City.



March 25

(8 more days of Lent)

The Seventh Sorrow of Mary: Jesus Is Laid in the Tomb

Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews. Now there was a garden in the place where he was crucified, and in the garden there was a new tomb in which no one had ever been paid. And so, because it was the Jewish day of Preparation, and the tomb was nearby, they paid Jesus there. (John 19:39-42)

Imagine the horrors of that day. Mary walked with her son. She and Mary Magdalen were there for him to the very end. While others came and went, they stayed. I used to wonder how Mary did it. I wondered if I would have been able to do it. Today I have come to understand the power of love. Only love gets us through something like this. Love takes over and is with us to the very end.

I believe the most difficult moment in a memorial service is when the loved one is laid to rest. There is a sense of finality. Life has changed! It will never be the same. But Love never ends...

Let us pray: Oh Lord, Mary stayed with you all the way... And you knew she was there... We pray with those who are saying farewell to those they love. We join with all who need to let go and move on with their lives.

LF

March 26	(7 more days of Lent)	
<p>The Illusion of "Sacrifice"</p> <p>Hosea 6:1-6 'Go learn the meaning of the words, what I want is mercy, not sacrifice, knowledge of God, not burnt offerings in the temple.'</p> <p>Luke 18:9-14 'Jesus spoke this parable addressed to those who believed in their own moral superiority and who help everyone else in contempt. Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.'</p> <p>Jesus often found himself in the midst of what we might call 'holier than thou' types of people. He had to defend himself and Hosea gave him the message that resonated with him: 'What God wants is merciful people, not heroic sacrifices. God wants you to know how love intimately works.</p> <p>Jesus uses this phrase in Hosea to defend himself from people who accused him of 'hanging around' with sinners and again to defend himself and the disciples who were being accused of not honoring the Sabbath.</p> <p>Both times Jesus precedes it with a strong imperative: 'Go, learn the meaning of these words,' or 'If you only understood the meaning of these words.' Imagine anyone saying these words to you. I know they would stop me in my tracks! Jesus was a great teacher!</p> <p>The Pharisee is the all too common 'heroic sacrificer'... You know, the ones who tell us how much they have done, or given or sacrificed. People do not realize that these words and thoughts feed the ego and one's sense of self. God does not need it! We need it. Do we really believe God needs our sacrifice? Might we be bargaining with God? 'I fast twice a week, I pay tithes on all I possess'. Do I give so others might admire me for my generosity? Don't get me wrong, we all love to give because it makes us feel good and because we hope it will help! I am just stepping back today and double checking if I might sometimes be a 'heroic sacrificer'. The social payoffs are usually ego-inflating.</p>	<p>Is it making me feel better about myself, to build up a more positive self-image? Note the Pharisee's words: 'I give thanks, God, that I am not like the rest of men, grasping, crooked and adulterous'.</p> <p>The tax collector has apparently 'gone and learned the meaning of these words', because from a distance with bowed head 'All he did was beat his breast and say, 'God be merciful to me a sinner'. And Jesus continues to teach! 'Believe me, this man went home from the temple justified before God, but the other did not.' <u>Today it occurs to me that Jesus is never upset with sinners! He is only upset with people who do not think they are sinners.</u> The Pharisee is a public holy man who is not holy at all. The Tax Collector at that time was seen as a public sinner but who in this case was the beloved by Jesus. God wants mercy, not sacrifice. I am again reminded of my favorite passage...Only this do I seek, to act justly, to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with my God'. Micah 6:8</p> <p><i>Let us pray: Merciful God, all I can give you, all you ever want, is who I really am. This little woman (or man) that I am now gives you my only and true self.</i></p>	

March 27	(6 more days of Lent)	
The Pain of Betrayal		
Isiah 49:1-6		
<p>John 13:21-33, 36-38 I tell you solemnly one of you will betray me. Be quick about what you are about to do (Judas)... And it is night! 'you will lay down your life for me (Peter)? I tell you truly the cock will not crow before you have disowned me three times.'</p> <p>'I thought I had toiled in vain and uselessly. I have exhausted myself for nothing.' (Isaiah 49:4) For sure this is how we feel when someone we love turns on us. For sure, we felt we were totally committed, we felt we had made a contract, but something happened and life is not as we expected it to be, and we feel a searing pain. We feel betrayed. This happens to all of us in many different ways. It is a gut punch that leaves us with a sense of abandonment, futility and emptiness.</p>	<p>all at once for me. Sometimes when I feel like I just got smacked it takes a few hours, or days. But when I have felt truly betrayed by someone I loved, it has taken years.</p> <p>But Jesus moved through this betrayal in a way that it was 'natural'. What we see is that there were no words of bitterness, only a calm un-blaming description of that night.</p> <p><i>Let us pray: Jesus, you become more solitary as you live the final week of your life. We see you stripped of everything, naked, except for your hope in God. I do not know how I would respond to such a test. I can only hope I would know Love in the midst of the pain...</i></p>	

LF

March 28

(6 more days of Lent)

Sundays are not considered part of Lent (they are thought of being “little Easters”). That is why the Lenten day countdown didn’t shift from yesterday.

Rather than provide a devotion for today we hope and pray that you will join us for worship.

If you aren’t able to be with us please consider reading the appointed lessons for today:

- Mark 11:1-11 (Triumphal entry)
- Isaiah 50:4-9a
- Psalm 31:9-16
- Philippians 2:5-11
- Mark 14:1-11

Palm Sunday

**9:30 am worship
ELW Setting 8**

**Live worship in parking lot
(if weather and pandemic
permits, stay tuned to our
weekly up-to-dates)**



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.

March 29 (5 more days of Lent)

Courage and Compassion

After the November 3rd election I knew I needed to do something! I was hurting! I stood before my bookcases looking at the volumes some read and some unread. On title jumped out at me: Boundless Compassion by Joyce Rupp. I pulled it off the shelf and have been praying with it each morning. She encourages us to pray! And she offers lines that taken one day at a time have challenged and supported me over these last months. I share them with you...



Ponder where your courage AND COMPASSION RESIDE.
Pray for these virtues to be fortified.

be faithful to a spiritual practice even when constant duties lure me away from it;

resist a response that blames an underprivileged group for the injustice they experience;

persist in clearing my heart of its emotional armor and tendency toward building walls;

recover self-worth after being maligned by another's harsh treatment;

change my biases, prejudices, and baseless views about other religious beliefs;

cultivate and open mind and heart toward those I am inclined to quickly dismiss;

go beyond mere acceptance and enter into relationship with people of diversity;

speak up for those who do not have the power of means to speak for themselves;

choose to live with fewer material possessions so others' basic needs are met;

enter into dialogue when angry differences and misunderstandings create division;

refuse to harbor thoughts and feelings of revenge and retaliation toward anyone;

cultivate a spirit of gratitude and eliminate entitlement from my expectations;

accept my deficiencies and allow them to teach me about being compassionate;

step out of my tight schedule and choose to be a caring presence with someone;

uncinch and release my strong opinions until they drop out of my padlocked grasp;

re-gather my hope for people's well-being when their situations look dismal;

focus my wandering mind and listen with full attentiveness to others;

stand on a firm foundation of prayer and approach all persons with compassion.

*Taken from Out of the Ordinary
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March 30	(4 more days of Lent)	
<p>HEAR</p> <p>Jerusalem is a noisy and active city to this very day. Imagine all the sounds of the people and the animals around the Passover. There was commerce and bartering. There was bleating of sheep and the crowing of roosters. There were more ominous sounds of the Roman military occupiers who were stationed at Antonia fortress keeping a watchful eye on all of the goings on.</p> <p>The sounds of the triumphal entry of Jesus just last Sunday still resound in the air. "Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord" "Make way for the king!"</p> <p>Soon those same crowds will be calling out something different "Give us Barabbas! Crucify Jesus!"</p> <p>And then the horrific sounds of spikes being driven through the flesh and into a crossbar so those ones who pushed too hard against the Romans can be hung out for all to see.</p> <p>The sounds of the dying men and their last words are coughed out between death pangs and mocking ones passing by.</p> <p>And the sounds of rueful tears by one who had spoken so assuredly that he would never deny or abandon Jesus no matter what anyone else might do.</p>	<p>And the crowing of a rooster reminding him that this denial and broken promise was part of the pain the Jesus endured.</p> <p>The unholy sounds of soldiers gambling for the possessions of the soon to be dead man cast an audio pall on this awful seen.</p> <p>Weeping of disappointed and frightened followers of Jesus—including the sorrowful sounds from Mary—are part of the mix too.</p> <p>Sounds of indifference blather on as many don't know and don't care what has transpired. Crucifixions aren't so very novel and there is business to be had.</p> <p>What sounds catch our ears this Holy Week? What might God say to us were we to really stop and listen for a moment.</p> <p>God, speak. We want to know your voice. Amen.</p>	



March 31 (3 more days of Lent)

SMELL

The sense of smell can be very evocative of memories. A certain scent of perfume can whisk us back to a place and time like it was yesterday. Simmering foods can stir up recollections of people and gatherings long gone by.

There is a vivid tale of scent told in John 12. Jesus is with the recently resuscitated John at a dinner party (You know the one who was supposed to smell so badly because he had been in the grave decomposing for four days). Martha was serving dinner (perhaps a favorite meal of John's in celebration of his return or a favorite meal of Jesus in honor of this guest of honor's presence in the home). Breathe in the smells that are wafting through the home.

Then Mary comes up to Jesus. She pours a costly ointment of nard on the feet of Jesus. This fragrance fills the house and catches the attention of all the noses in the house.

Judas sticks his nose up indignantly (perhaps smelling the money "squandered" that he won't be able to pocket for himself). Judas calls out this waste of money. His nose is clearly out of joint.

Jesus says that this use of this costly ointment was in preparation for his burial.

We can imagine that the meal continued on after this exchange but the hint of the imminent death could still be detected.

One of the mysterious symptoms of COVID-19 is people losing or having a diminished sense of smell and taste.

What smells engage us as we enter into this Holy Week? What memories are evoked? What meals do we engage with our sense of smell? A seder meal, perhaps. Communion?

What scents of death and sin and decay offend our senses?

Or have we, as the commercial says and COVID-19 can cause, gone nose blind?

God, engage us this holiest of weeks through all our senses. Let our prayers rise to you as incense. Smell our prayers. Amen.



April 1

(2 more days of Lent)

TOUCH

Human interaction and touch is crucial to human well-being and development. Images of babies isolated through medical necessity or through abandonment to over-crowded orphanages are heartbreaking. One of the cruelest things about this COVID-19 are how many are forced to live and die in isolation—cut off from the touch of loved ones.

Jesus knows the importance of touch. He came into the world and took on flesh—he became incarnate—so that he could literally touch humanity. He reached out to lepers, he touched the infirmed and the possessed, he came to touch those cut-off and isolated on the fringes.

The Last Supper is a particularly touching scene. Hands connect in the passing of the bread. These beloved disciples eat leaning against one another sharing the intimacies of food and conversation.

Then Jesus takes the touching to a whole new level. He takes a basin and towel and washes the feet of his disciples. He touches their dirtiest parts. He engages the parts of them that have been sullied by the world. He touches them in a way that causes discomfort from shame and exposure. He loves them fully through touch and encourages them to go and to likewise. He gives them the great commandment (the mandate, the maund- of Maundy Thursday) to go and touch others likewise.

Maundy Thursday

7:00 pm worship

**Live worship in parking lot
(if weather and pandemic
permits, stay tuned to our
weekly up-to-dates)**



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.

*God, thank you for coming to
the world to touch it with your
love. Send us to go and touch
likewise. Amen.*



April 2

(1 more days of Lent)

TASTE

We taste the things that come into our mouths and taste things when they go out (be they words or digestion run amok). Jesus says it is not really the things that go into our mouths and through our digestive systems that make us unclean but rather the things that come from our hearts out of our mouths.

The scene of the cross is full of distasteful words and unclean hearts.

Jesus who has come into the world to show God's love and God's way has been tortured, harangued and hung up for all to see between two thieves. The soldiers and the passers-by have purged their venomous bile upon the dying man.

When Jesus asks for something to quench his thirst he isn't given water or ice chips as a comfort to a dying love one but rather sour wine vinegar.

Somewhere not too far away Judas is tasting the bile of his betrayal. And will soon take his own life.

Somewhere not too far away Peter is tasting his own bile of denial. Thankfully he is able to muddle through until Jesus restores him with the taste of restoration through bread and fish (a very familiar comfort food to the followers of Jesus) at the breakfast at the beach in John 21.

Good Friday

7:00 pm worship

**Live worship in parking lot
(if weather and pandemic
permits, stay tuned to our
weekly up-to-dates)**



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.

ELW 493 encourages us to "Taste and See" the goodness of the Lord. Part of how we see that is in recognizing that Jesus ate of the sinfulness and evil of the cross

God, you fill our mouths and hearts with good things. Help us eat our fill and bring all who will come to the table with us. Amen.



April 3

(last day of Lent)

SIGHT

We put a lot of stock in sight. "Seeing is believing" gets bandied about. We talk about having eyes of faith. Some people heap way too much abuse on Thomas because he merely and understandably wanted to see and touch what the other disciples got to of the resurrected Jesus.

The first Easter Vigil was so hard because of what the disciples saw—Jesus arrested, condemned, crucified and buried. It was hard because of what they couldn't see—Jesus, a way forward, an escape route from a similar fate. And they could not yet see the empty tomb. They gathered in rooms with locked doors for fear of what might happen. They probably lurked in the dark and in the corners. The eyes of faith grew understandably dim that evening.

But we know the rest of the story. We know the joy of Easter morning. We know that Good Friday happened but also that Easter will happen. The dawn will soon enlighten the world, our hearts and our eyes.

We gather around a new fire to feast our eyes on the crackling and vibrant symbol of hope that is the imminent empty tomb.

We wait in hope and trust that the light that has come into the world will shine again on us, in us and through us on Easter morn and beyond.

Easter Vigil

7:00 pm worship

**Live worship in parking lot
(if weather and pandemic
permits, stay tuned to our
weekly up-to-dates)**



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.

*God, in the words the song:
Open our eyes Lord, we want
to see Jesus. To reach out and
touch him. And say that we
love him. Open our ears Lord,
and help us to listen. Open
our eyes Lord, we want to see
Jesus. Amen.*



"Open our Eyes" by Bob Cull
(CCLI song 1572)

April 4

Easter

One of the earliest liturgies of the church:

One: Χριστός Ανέστη

All: Αληθώς ανέστη!

One: Χριστός Ανέστη

All: Αληθώς ανέστη!

One: Χριστός Ανέστη

All: Αληθώς ανέστη!

and now in English:

One: Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

One: Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

One: Christ is risen!

All: He is risen, indeed!

9:30 am worship

Live worship in parking lot
(if weather and pandemic
permits, stay tuned to our
weekly up-to-dates)

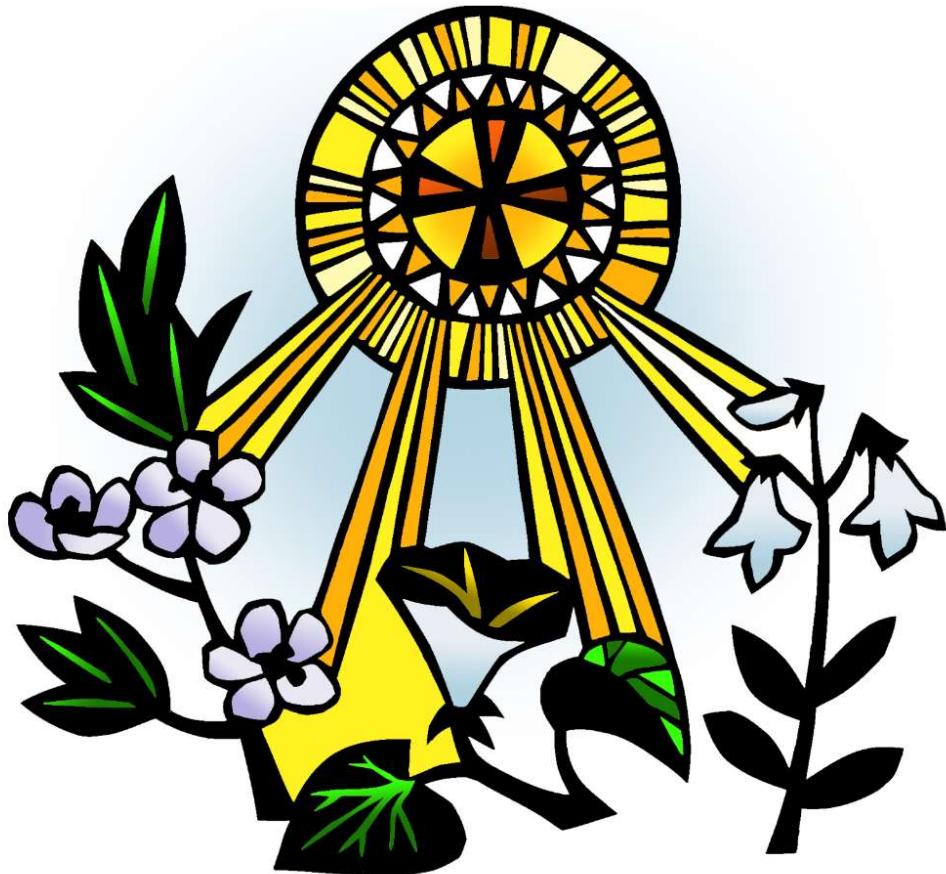
This service will be
presented live on



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.



Streamed worship
will be posted ASAP.



Blessed Easter to you.

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