



Confronting  
*the Pharisee  
in Me*

Part Two

Lent Devotional 2026

# March 13th - Proverbs 3:5-6 “What Are We Leaning On?”

Written by Sydney Anderson, Director of Promotions

Lent has a way of exposing what we lean on.

When something is taken away — comfort, sugar, distraction, noise — you suddenly realize what was quietly holding you up. We don't usually notice our leaning when life feels steady. We notice it when something wobbles.

When the conversation feels off.

When our emotions feel unpredictable.

When our plans shift.

When the future feels unclear.

And instinctively, we lean harder into our own understanding.

We replay the conversation.

We analyze the tone.

We interpret the silence.

We predict the outcome.

We brace ourselves.

Because understanding feels like control.

And control feels safe.

But Scripture gently interrupts that reflex.

*Lean not on your own understanding.*

In other words — your perspective is not sturdy enough to hold the full weight of your heart. Your feelings matter. Your thoughts matter. But they are not load-bearing walls.

God never asked us to pretend we don't think or feel. He just asked us not to build our foundation there.

*Trust in the Lord with all your heart.*

All your heart. Not just the confident parts, the spiritually mature parts, the anxious parts, the irritated parts, the tired parts. The parts that don't even like what they're thinking.

Lent is an invitation to shift our weight.

Instead of leaning on:

“If this feels off, something must be wrong.”

We lean on:

“Even if this feels off, God is steady.”

Instead of:

“I need to figure this out.”

We lean on:

“God already sees the full picture.”

And then comes the quiet promise:

*He will make your paths straight.*

Not because we perfectly interpreted everything or because we managed every emotion well. But because we chose to place our weight on Him instead of ourselves.

Maybe this Lent isn't about proving how disciplined we are.

Maybe it's about noticing where we're exhausted from holding ourselves up.

And asking, honestly:

What am I leaning on right now?

*My* need to understand?

*My* need to be validated?

*My* need to predict the future?

Or the God who already holds it?

Because one of those will eventually give out.

And one of them never will.

# **March 14th - 1 Peter 5:6-7**

## **“Humble Yourselves”**

**Written by Heather Schmitz, Director of Tiny Treasures**

Humble, according to Merriam-Webster, “not proud or haughty: not arrogant or assertive.”

When we are humble before God, we trust him with our weakness, our sin, and our need to repent. This humility is not forced on us but comes from trusting God. Trusting that God is in control, even when we want that control.

When we are in control, the anxiety builds. We carry all our burdens – family, work, health, future, failures. We think “they won’t survive without us.” We feel irreplaceable.

God did not make us to carry the burdens alone. To have all the answers. To have control.

During Lent, we are called to repent. Repent from thinking we are in control. Repent from trusting ourselves more than we trust God.

Peter tells us to “cast all your anxieties on Him.” Not to manage them, hide them, or minimize them. We are to throw them to the Lord. Why? “Because he cares for you.” He cares for us daily, here and now. He shows us how much he cares on the cross. He took our sins, fears, burdens, and deepest worries to the cross. There, by “the mighty hand of God ... he exalted you.”

Casting our anxieties on God takes faith. Faith to know he cares for you. Faith to know God has acted for our salvation. Faith to trust him with today's anxieties and tomorrow's unknowns. Faith that he will walk with you and carry the burdens.

**Prayer:** Father, I confess I try to carry my burdens and worries instead of trusting you. Forgive my anxious heart. Teach me to trust you with my anxieties, to give them to you, to let you have control. Let me trust you and feel your care for me. Amen.

# **March 15th - Matthew 9:35-38**

## **“Rest for Your Souls”**

**Written by Pastor Joe Meyer, Emeritus Pastor**

A lesson that you learn as you grow older is that one of the greatest gifts of your life is rest. As children, we typically rebel against rest. Taking naps when you are little can almost seem like a punishment and is therefore often pushed-against by children all over the world. But as you get older, you recognize the importance of “naps,” don't you? Better said, the longer you live in the world, the more you begin to truly value the times of rest.

You see, in general, adult-people work very long hours and work very hard during those very long hours as well...therefore resting is cherished. Even those who are yet to attain their full-time employ (students working towards college or working in college towards careers) understand just how precious rest is. The men and women working what used to be a forty-hour week but is now more likely fifty to sixty hours, definitely value rest. In my own stage and station in life, retired from full-time ministry, I definitely understand the gift given in rest. You know your brother Joe not only loves his work but has always put 110% into his work, and so I know just how marvelous coming to the place of rest really is. And maybe you do too.

In fact, I know you do, because as a Christian, you can especially appreciate the gift of rest that the Lord Jesus has given you. Of course, I'm not talking about a nap, or even a good night's sleep, but something altogether better, and that is, “rest for your souls.” To be sure, we all look forward to those mo-

ments in life when we can “sabbath” as the Bible would call rest. The Sabbath was designed for us by God’s own work on our universe and world at creation. Like Him we are called to work hard for six days and then take the seventh as a Sabbath day, a day of rest. Even though Christ has redeemed us from the strictures of the law, including the Sabbath Day regulations, we understand that the God-given structure of rest is amazing. Work hard and then rest.

Christians are indeed called to work hard and then rest. We are called not just to work hard at whatever vocation the Lord has called us into, but we are also called to work hard in His “harvest field” to bring others into the same work we have in the Lord. Said plainly, we are called to bring the Gospel to others, and then some day, when the “harvest” has fully come and Jesus returns, we will have our eternal “sabbath” our eternal rest in heaven forever.

However, in our text Jesus says it this way: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and...you will find rest for your souls.” Matthew 11:28,29. This “rest for your souls” isn’t just later in heaven... it’s right now and something connected but altogether different! Jesus is calling us to recognize that in Him and through Him we no longer need to labor to impress God. In Jesus and through Jesus we don’t just have “rest” but as Jesus says it, “rest for our souls.” “Rest for our souls” is exactly what every human-being needs. You see, people will tell me that they worry they haven’t done enough to get into heaven...and they

haven't. People will worry that they simply don't match up to others who are really "killing it" for Jesus...and they don't. And every Christian person has those types of thoughts creep into their minds from time to time. Those types of thoughts cause us to wonder if, in and of ourselves, we'll ever make it to the eternal rest in heaven.

But Jesus assures us here...we already have that eternal rest in Him, or as He says it, "rest for our souls." He did the work. He accomplished the task. He fulfilled God's commands and demands. And yes, He did it all for you. He did it all for you so that you could be at rest. Yes, work hard. Yes, work hard for the Kingdom of God. But as you do, you no longer have to worry, "Am I good enough" or "Have I done enough"...instead, you can have rest for your soul...in Jesus. You can. You can rest in Him now and for the whole of your life, and some day, you will rest in Him forever through His hard labor, His life, death and resurrection for you!

**Week 5**

*The Call to Compassion  
and Justice*

# March 16th - Matthew 20:29-34

## “Please Open Our Eyes”

Written by Pastor Christian Pieper, Associate Pastor

For those who believe that Jesus is who He says that He is, can you even fathom Him asking YOU this question. “What do you want me to do for you?” (Matthew 20:32)

Give me wisdom like Solomon.

Help me overcome every anxiety and doubt.

Heal the sickness in my body, in my family, in our church.

Mend the division in our nation.

Bring peace in our world.

Give me peace from my struggles and my sins.

So many great answers rush to my mind, because I believe in the power of His Kingdom. Yet while I cling to the hope that one day all God’s promises will be true, what do I do with His Word right now? There is weeping, there is mourning, there is pain, there is suffering, and the way of Jesus is always full of compassion. While I will certainly keep praying, and won’t lose heart asking these of my Father, there’s another prayer that you and I can ask for too.

“Lord, let our eyes be opened.” (Matthew 20:33)

Help me see the way that You see.

The story from Matthew 20 is utter irony that makes the point. Two blind men “see” Jesus, they recognize Him as the Son of David. Yet the crowd following the Messiah can’t see any more

than His fame. They treat Him like a celebrity who has no business with disabled distractions, but Jesus slows down, believing He belongs with outcasts like these.

How many outcasts do I pass? How many who are hurting do I hurry past? How many who are silenced do I ignore and walk by?

Is my comfort really that worth it? Is my schedule really that important? Or am I so blinded by my sin that what I truly need is Jesus' great mercy for me?

The bad news is that you and I can't change all the broken circumstances around us, nor can we fix all the brokenness in our hearts. But the good news is that Jesus is always full of compassion, He slows down to open the eyes of the blind.

“Lord, let our eyes be opened.”  
Help me see people the way that You see.

Jesus, fill us with Your Spirit to welcome outcasts in our lives, to sit with the suffering in their pain, to show sinners the grace You poured upon us. As we pray for Your Kingdom to come, and Your will to be done, empower us to share Your compassion. Help us never grow tired of fixing our eyes on You, loving who You love, and following wherever You lead.

## **March 17th - Luke 19:1-10**

### **“Jesus Wants Everyone”**

**Written by Pastor Ben Johnson, Lead Pastor**

Zacchaeus is curious about this Jesus but still cautious. He is eager to catch a glimpse but too ashamed to go right up to Him. He climbs a tree not because he is bold, but because the tree keeps him hidden. As a tax collector, he is wealthy, powerful, and deeply resented by the Jewish people. No one expects Jesus to notice him, or even more amazing, stop beneath the tree and call him by name.

Jesus does not wait for Zacchaeus to repent before extending a hand of fellowship to him. He invites Himself into Zacchaeus' home, and life, first. Grace precedes the change and this order of things matters greatly. Transformation does not begin with moral improvement but with being seen, known, and welcomed by Jesus.

The crowd's response reveals how offensive grace can be. They grumble because Jesus refuses to draw the same boundaries they do. Lent exposes how easily we adopt exclusion as a spiritual instinct by deciding who is worthy, who belongs, and who is beyond hope.

Yet in this story we see Jesus declaring, “The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” Lent widens our vision of who grace is for and who Jesus wants to invite Himself into their lives. It calls us to release our categories, our labels, our judgments and remember that salvation enters lives, not because

they are clean, but because they are loved.

## **March 18th - Matthew 25:31-36**

### **“Moved with Compassion”**

**Written by DeAnn McCue, Director of Women’s Ministry**

In Matthew 9:31–36, we are given a window into how Jesus sees people and how He responds to what He sees.

In this text, Jesus paints a vivid picture of the final judgment—not centered on living a perfect life or being the best, but on love embodied. The King identifies Himself with the hungry, the sick, the stranger, and the imprisoned. To encounter them is to encounter Him.

He tells this story not after the resurrection, not from heaven’s throne, but on the road to the cross. He is walking toward Jerusalem. Toward betrayal. Toward suffering. Toward the cross. The One who will judge the nations is first the One who will be judged, condemned, and crucified. The One who will be crucified is also the One who reigns.

That matters. It means judgment is not handed down by a distant ruler, but by the crucified Christ. The wounds in His hands tell us that God’s justice is never separated from God’s mercy.

Jesus begins with words filled with majesty:

“When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him...”

This is not the baby in the manger or the teacher by the lakeshore. This is the King of kings. Yet notice the Judge is the

same Jesus who washed feet and touched lepers. Judgment comes from wounded hands.

The King who will judge the nations is first the Servant who lays down His life. This is the exalted Christ—the One worthy of awe and worship. Yet what follows is unexpected. The glorious King defines faithfulness not by power, but by compassion.

The King is also the Shepherd. Judgment is not cold or detached; it comes from One who knows His flock intimately. The nations are gathered and separated—sheep and goats. The distinction is not belief stated or worship attended, but love enacted. What matters is not intention but response. This is uncomfortable, because it means faith is visible.

Jesus says, “Come you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you....”

“Inherit...” Inheritance is gift, not achievement, with God’s grace. Grace shapes the way we live. Grace comes first, always. And yet, grace leaves fingerprints.

Jesus identifies Himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and the imprisoned. He says, “You served Me.”

The holy moment is not always dramatic. Sometimes it looks like food shared, a door opened, a visit made. Jesus points to acts of mercy—feeding the hungry, welcoming the stranger, caring for the sick. These are ordinary acts. Quiet acts. Often

inconvenient acts.

The righteous ask, “When did we see you?” They didn’t act to be noticed. They simply responded to need. They simply acted in love.

May we live ready—not with fear, but with compassion—so that on that day we hear the words we long for most: “Come... inherit the kingdom prepared for you.”

It asks us to be faithful where we are.

A meal shared.

A visit made.

A welcome extended.

A burden carried with someone else.

Jesus, dusty-footed, rejected, and soon crucified, is the King who will judge the world, but first the Servant who gives His life for it. Judgment does not come from a distant ruler, but from the One who knows suffering from the inside. The scars on His hands remind us that God’s justice is never separated from God’s mercy.

This passage doesn’t whisper. It speaks plainly. It tells us that love—lived, embodied, practiced—matters eternally. Lent tells us to notice—to slow down enough to see people we have rushed past, and to recognize Christ hidden in ordinary human need.

**Prayer:** Jesus, Servant King, open my eyes to see You in the

faces around me.

Break my heart for what breaks Yours. Teach me to love not only in word, but in action and truth. Amen.

## **March 19th - Luke 15:1-7**

### **“Bring Them In”**

**Written by Tim Kightlinger, Director of Youth Ministry**

When I was a teenager, I did not have a relationship with Jesus. I believed there was a God, but I couldn't tell you anything about that God or give a reason for why I believed there was a God. I was a lost sheep. But thanks be to God, he brought my wife into my life when I was in high school. We started dating the December of our senior year in high school. As our courtship developed a conversation had to happen. Julia was a strong Christian woman and she vowed and desired to marry a strong Christian man. A problem existed...I was not a strong Christian man. As a matter of fact, I wasn't a Christian at all.

So, I had a decision to make. And I think I made the right one, in my humble opinion. I began going to church with her and now I believe in Jesus... and I got the girl!

In our reading we find that Jesus hung around sinners. Who are these sinners? People who aren't Christian, who aren't followers of God. People like me when I was in high school. It's interesting to point out that the religious people had a problem with this. Did you catch that? The people who knew God the most were the people who judged the “sinners” the most. As Christians we do like John 3:16 don't we. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him will have eternal life.” But have you read John 3:17? The verse that follows must stay connected to John 3:16. Verse 17 says, “But Jesus didn't come to condemn that world, he came

to save it.”

In our Luke reading Jesus tells a story of a shepherd. This shepherd, when a sheep (a sinner) is missing from the flock, he goes out and searches for that one sheep. Why? Because every sheep is important, not just the ones in the flock!

As we go about our lives, it's easy for us to stay focused on our own faith and protecting our flock. And yes, we need to protect our flock (especially our kids and their faith), but there are people in our world, in our circles of influence, who are missing out on a significant life that's connected to our God! You just may be the one person who will be the difference maker in their spiritual journey. John 10:10 tells us that the thief (Satan himself) wants to keep that sheep (you, me, and those around us) from following our shepherd (Jesus). But, once we are connected to Jesus, we have a full and abundant life. Now that's something to rejoice and throw a party over!

God, open my eyes to those around me. Who do you want me to share hope with today? Give me the courage and words to say. Open my heart to love those around me with the love that you have given to me. Amen.

## **March 20th - Matthew 9:35-38**

**“Here I Am! Send me.”**

**Written by Mike Martens, Director of Men’s Ministry**

As you can see by the title, I’ve started with Isaiah’s commission from the Lord in Isaiah 6:8, because that’s where we’ll land the plane for our reading today. But let’s first begin our time together focusing on the attributes of the Lord of the harvest, Jesus. Matthew tells us that He went through all the towns and villages, teaching in synagogues, which were places for reading and studying Scripture, perhaps even in private homes. You see, Jesus didn’t set up shop and put His sign out for people to come to Him. Jesus went out to seek and to save the lost. As He moved among the crowds, He saw their obvious physical needs, but more importantly He saw their deeper spiritual need. Matthew tells us that Jesus saw people and had compassion on them because they were “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (v.36). Jesus had pity and He was moved with deep compassion for the crowds as they were lost. He was determined to rescue as many in that crowd as possible and that’s still His mission today. Do we see people the same way Jesus sees people? How do you see that difficult person in your life? Do you see them with an attitude of frustration? Do you look at their situation as broken and beyond repair, especially the spiritual things of their life? Or do you see them through the lens of Jesus? Do you see them as a person Jesus loves, someone He died for and redeemed, and someone He wants to spend an eternity with? If not, ask the Lord to help you see others with the same compassion He sees you! Next, Jesus uses an agricultural metaphor when He says, “The

harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few” (v.37). Jesus is saying there are a lot of people who need to hear the Gospel, the Good News of Jesus Christ. I have an alarm set every day at 10:02. Maybe you do as well. If you’re not familiar with 10:02, this is the same verse from Luke 10:2. This is a great reminder to us every day of the heart and compassion of our Lord and the heart He wants us to have for everyone. Tenth Avenue North has a song titled Control and one of the lyrics reads, “God, you don’t need me, but somehow you want me.”<sup>1</sup> Let’s be clear this harvest we’re talking about is the Lord’s harvest field and He will see to it that the necessary workers bring in the harvest. The Lord will accomplish this with or without us. Again, He certainly doesn’t need us, but He wants to use us. Please don’t ever see this as a burden, but simply as a privilege. The harvest belongs to God, not us. And this work is His. He’s just inviting us to join Him in this all-important work that has eternal ramifications. And the first thing He asks you to do won’t cost you anything except a little of your time. He asks you to “pray earnestly” or beg Him to send more workers into the harvest field (v.38). And when you pray this way, He may just begin to shape you into those very workers. Father, help our prayers center us and align our hearts with Your mission.

In Matthew 25:35-40, Jesus talks about “the least of these.” By washing the feet of others, we are washing the feet of Jesus. It’s easy to become overwhelmed by the magnitude of where to start, but please don’t let this intimidate you into inaction. Just be a light in this world impacting one life, one day at a time. A pastor once told the story of a woman who decided to pray each morning, “Lord, send me to someone who needs

encouragement today.” God didn’t send her across the world – He sent her across the street. Your impact might be sharing the Gospel with an unchurched person, bringing a warm cup of coffee to a homeless person, or surprising a neighbor with a warm plate of sticky buns to cheer on recovery. Maybe it’s a co-worker going through a divorce or a grocery-store cashier who simply needs a kind word spoken over them. Gloria Dei, this is exactly what Missionary Pathway is all about. It’s an 8-session discipleship training meant to equip you and embolden you to share your faith where God already has you going every day. Where you live, work, learn, and play. Please contact me if you would like to know more about Missionary Pathway.

Lord of the harvest, open our eyes to see as You see. We pray for You to send workers Lord. And if You desire, here I am! Send me. Amen.

# **March 21st - Matthew 19:13-15**

## **“Never Block the Path”**

**Written by Chris Thomson, Executive Director**

Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.” And he laid his hands on them and went away. – Matthew 19: 13-15 (ESV)

Christians are fond of saying that we want to be the hands and feet of Jesus. What do we mean when we say that?

It certainly means that we want to make a tangible difference in this world, that we want to serve others, that we want to meet the poor and oppressed in their needs, both physical and spiritual. We want to love others the way Jesus loves us. What are some characteristics of that kind of love?

The kind of love we are talking about is agape love – a Greek word for a selfless, unconditional, sacrificial, and benevolent love. It is often described as the highest form of love, rooted in God’s love for humanity and the love that we strive to have for God. And that is precisely what we see in this passage. We see Jesus offering unconditional and selfless love for the parents and their children as they flocked to Him. The disciples saw them as a distraction. Jesus saw them as His mission.

How do you see people?

We can definitely fall into the trap of seeing people as a distraction. We are busy. We have things to do. A lot of us are exhausted at the end of the day just from checking off items on

our own task list. We simply don't have time or space for others. We aren't available. We can't be interrupted.

But Jesus could be. Jesus had a deep empathy for people, a profound, visceral feeling of shared suffering and concern for others. No other religion claims that its god suffered the way our God suffered.

Do you feel lonely and misunderstood? Have you been betrayed? Destitute? Facing death? Jesus understands all of these feelings and situations personally.

Do you feel abandoned by God?

So was Jesus..on the cross.

## **March 22nd - Matthew 9:35-38**

### **“Compassion Leads to Mission”**

**Written by Jenn Fuller, Director of Children’s Ministry**

Harvest always brings to mind the fall and the farmers in the fields working to get their crops in before winter. I remember as a child staring out my grandparents’ large picture window and watching the combine cut through the corn stalks while they spoke of what the harvest would be.

In Matthew 9:35-38, the harvest is mentioned but Jesus isn’t talking about crops. It is here where we find the bridge between Jesus’ active ministry and His call for disciples to join in the work. This passage shows that true mission is not born of duty but is the natural overflow of a heart transformed by compassion.

Jesus has been traveling through “all the cities and villages” teaching, preaching, and healing. Verse 36 gets to the core of what Jesus was doing – “He saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.” He did not just feel for the people, but he felt with them. He saw them as “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd”. They looked like they were unable to find their way – their spiritual way. The leaders of the time were not sharing what they needed to hear – they burdened the people with rules rather than shepherding them with love.

What did Jesus do? He had compassion and shifted the metaphor from a suffering flock to an abundant harvest. He made this a teachable moment for his disciples. Jesus shared that while the “harvest was plentiful”, the “laborers were few”. The

people longed for spiritual knowledge of the Kingdom of God, yet there were not enough guides to lead them.

This is still the need for today. Our world remains filled with “harassed and helpless” souls seeking meaning amid spiritual confusion and isolation. The harvest field is as vast as ever and workers are still needed.

Yet, Jesus does not immediately command the disciples to “go” – He first commands them to pray. Mission begins on our knees. We are instructed to “pray earnestly” to the Lord to send out workers. Prayer aligns our hearts with God’s and recognizes that the harvest ultimately belongs to Him. Many times, those who pray for laborers are the ones God taps on the shoulder to go. True mission involves stepping out of comfort zones to reach the “distressed and dejected” in our own families, workplaces, communities, and world.

The mission that God has given each of us may look different – and that is okay! The mission He gave to me has also changed over the years. I used to spend a lot of time with Middle and High School students and now I spend my time with Children. My good friend Kathleen prayed and God sent her to China to be a missionary there for over a year to share the Gospel. What is God doing in your life? What mission is He sending you on? How are you praying for the harvest and the workers?

Let’s pray. Lord Jesus, you are the Lord of the Harvest, fill our hearts with Your compassion for the lost and suffering. Open our eyes to see the fields that are ripe for harvest. Grant us the

courage to not only pray for laborers but to be the hands and feet that carry Your message of hope to a weary world. Amen.

**Week 6**

*Humility and the Cross*

## **March 23rd - John 13:1-17**

### **“Jesus Washes Feet”**

**Written by Emma Griffiths, Contemporary Worship Director**

In the time of Jesus, a servant would commonly wash the feet of guests of a home before they would relax and eat at the table. Today this might look like taking someone’s coat and hanging it up for them when they arrive at your house.

In this last evening before the crucifixion, Jesus knew he had limited time to give information to his disciples. Here, he doesn’t just teach them, but he gives them an example of how to love each other. He dressed himself as a servant, filled the basin with water, and prepared a towel to dry them off. Jesus serves all of his disciples, even with the knowledge that Judas would betray Him, and commands that they do the same.

Is this something you’d be comfortable with? Many of us engage in acts of service for those in need. Healthcare workers caring for their patients and parents caring for their children. Hairdressers and nail technicians wash and care for the bodies of their clientele. It’s not out of the question for us to serve others. But would you knowingly wash the feet of someone like Judas? Of a criminal? Someone outspoken of the opposite political party? Jesus washed Judas’ feet knowing that he would be betrayed in hours. With the grace of God, I think we could find it in ourselves to wash someone else’s feet.

In verse 14, Jesus leaves them with a command: “If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to

wash one another's feet." As He is speaking to His apostles, it is with the expectation that at some point, they will be the washers, and at other times, they will be the washed. How willing we are to help others doesn't always translate to allowing others to help us. To have a heart like Jesus, we must be able to do the work of a servant, but we also must give up our pride and control to allow others to care for us. Letting someone help you means giving up control. It means adding trust and vulnerability and reducing self-sufficiency. Where in your life can you let someone in and accept the help that Jesus commands that we give to each other?

## **March 24th - Matthew 16:24-26**

### **“Take Up Your Cross and Follow”**

**Written by James Thompson, Traditional Worship Director**

24 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. 25 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. 26 What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?”

This is the third of three devotionals I wrote for this 2026 Lenten season. As I study this text from Matthew, I can’t help but think of the 1 Corinthians 10:31 that was a verse from the first devotional I wrote for February 28:

31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

These texts work in coordination: If (1Cor 10:31), then (Matthew 16:25).

If we commit to glorifying God in all that we do, then we must be prepared to forfeit our comforts, status, perhaps our very way of life to which we’ve grown accustomed. As Christians, we know the reward for this sacrifice is eternal salvation. Conversely, the price for “gaining the whole world, but forfeiting the soul” is much too costly.

With Easter Sunday and the renewed promise of salvation on the horizon, how can you boldly and proudly “take up your

cross?” What barriers or challenges will you face as you outwardly demonstrate and affirm your faith? How will you overcome these challenges?

## **March 25th - Isaiah 53:1-6**

### **“The Suffering Servant”**

**Written by Pastor Tim Phillips, Care Pastor**

“Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.”

Lent is a season when we reflect on the suffering of Jesus. We know every detail of His Passion. We have read the Scriptures, heard many sermons and even watched movies portraying Jesus’ sufferings and death.

Suffering is part of life this side of heaven so what makes Jesus’ sufferings different?

We can think of it in three ways: First, Jesus’ suffering was substitutionary—He suffered in our place. Have you ever been punished unjustly? You took a beating for something someone

else did. As a kid I remember my younger brother did something totally out of character for him. He was probably 11 or 12 years old and he took a beer out of the refrigerator. I was about 15 so my dad assumed I was the guilty one. I was reprimanded and of course I denied it. Then I found my brother and administered justice!

In the case of Jesus, He willingly took the punishment our sins deserved. Romans 6:23a says, “For the wages of sin is death,”. What He endured was all ours. He was innocent but our sins were put on Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21a “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,”. Jesus was nailed to our cross.

The second way that Jesus’ suffering is different is that He chose to suffer. John 10:18 says, “No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”” Jesus willingly obeyed God the Father and laid down His life for us. Paul’s explains this in his letter to the Philippians 2:4-8 “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Finally, the third way that Jesus’ suffering was different is that it results in our salvation. Isaiah 53:5 reads, “But he was pierced

for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.” 1 Peter 2:24 says it this way, “He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.”

In the Second Article of the Apostles Creed Luther teaches this way:

## Redemption

And in Jesus Christ, His only son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died and was buried. He descended into hell. The third day He rose again from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God, the father Almighty. From thence He will come to judge the living and the dead.

What does this mean? I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death, that I may be his own and live under him in his kingdom and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true.

As we reflect on Jesus' sufferings...the anguish, the excruciating pain and the humiliation, we begin to comprehend His great love for us. Love moved Him to take our place. What will His love move you to do?

## March 26th - Galatians 2:20

### “No Longer I Who Live”

Written by Sydney Anderson, Director of Promotions

Lent brings us face to face with surrender.

We talk about sacrifice in small, manageable ways — giving something up, adding a spiritual habit — but this verse goes much deeper. It speaks of death. Not self-improvement. Not behavior modification. Death.

*“I have been crucified with Christ.”*

That means the version of me that must win, must be understood, must control outcomes — she is not meant to run my life anymore.

And yet she tries.

She shows up when I feel dismissed.

When I want to replay a conversation.

When I start building a quiet case in my head.

When I cling to irritation because it feels justified.

But crucified things aren't supposed to keep climbing off the cross.

*“No longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”*

This is not the erasing of personality. It's a transfer of authority.

My emotions are real, but they are no longer my leader.  
My thoughts are powerful, but they are not ultimate.  
My instincts are loud, but they don't get the throne.

Christ in me means I respond from a different center.

Instead of reacting from pride, I can pause.  
Instead of guarding myself, I can soften.  
Instead of spiraling, I can trust.

Not because I'm strong — but because His life is active within mine.

*“The life I now live in the body...”*

In our ordinary, complicated, emotional bodies.  
In marriage.  
In parenthood.  
In stress.  
In seasons that feel dry or confusing.

We're called to live it by faith.

Faith is choosing to believe that surrender produces something better than control ever could.

Lent is an invitation to stop resuscitating the old self every time it feels threatened.

What if freedom isn't found in defending myself more skillfully?

What if it's found in remembering we already died with Christ — and the One living in us is far steadier than we are?

That changes how we speak, think, and love. Not perfectly, but differently.

# March 27th - Mark 10:42-45

## “Not To Be Served But To Serve”

Written by Heather Schmitz, Director of Tiny Treasures

James and John ask to sit at Jesus’ right and left hand, causing the disciples to argue about greatness. Our society thinks of greatness as having control and recognition. Jesus says greatness is being a servant, a slave. Serving is the greatest.

We want to be served – we eat out, hire a cleaning person, pay someone to mow or remove snow, stay at hotels... We want to be appreciated and recognized for our work. Especially for our “good works.”

Jesus’ counter-cultural approach is that “the last will be first and the first last” Matthew 20:16. He calls us to repentance for the inward focus and our misuse of authority, time, and gifts.

Jesus doesn’t just teach humility – He lives it. Jesus, the Son of Man, true God and true man, came not to gain earthly power and wealth but to serve sinners. He serves us on the cross. He took on our sins, our pride, and our selfish ambition.

On the cross, he gave us the gift of salvation. He freed us from ourselves. He freed us from the need to be served. He gave us the gift of serving others, following his example.

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, forgive us for our desire to be first and to be served. Thank you for serving us through your suffering and death. Shape our hearts by your grace, that we may gladly

serve others in humility and love, for your sake. Amen

## **March 28th - Philippians 2:5-8**

### **“Have the Mind of Jesus”**

**Written by Pastor Ben Johnson, Lead Pastor**

In this section we are given a beautiful description of the mind, and heart, of our Savior. Yet, Paul does not simply describe Jesus' humility, but he commands our imitation. “Have this mind among yourselves,” he writes, pointing to Jesus as the pattern for Christian life. The movement of Christ is downward as we see Him move away from privilege, power and status toward servanthood and obedience.

Jesus does not cling (hang onto) equality with God, but empties Himself, by taking the form of a servant. Think of all that Jesus willingly let go of in order to take hold of you? Lent invites us to consider what the things are that we need to let go of so that we can take hold of the mind of Jesus? It is tempting to grasp recognition, control, comfort, ambitions and vision of life. It is tempting to make life about my goals, dreams, values and focuses but the problem with that is that then we aren't operating from the mind of Jesus. This is not self-hatred, but holy surrender.

The obedience of Jesus leads Him all the way to the cross. Lent reminds us that humility is not theoretical; it is truly costly. Following Jesus reshapes our ambitions, recalibrates our values, and reorientates our understanding of the successful life. To have the mind of Christ is to trust that the way down (humility) is the way of life. Lent forms us not by elevating us, but by teaching us to kneel, to love sacrificially, and live faithfully in

quiet obedience...Just Like Jesus.

# **March 29th - John 12:12-19**

## **“The Misunderstood King”**

**Written by Pastor Joe Meyer, Emeritus Pastor**

When you witness an event, what that event means can be altered by your own background or thoughts or ideologies, or even desires. When you see something happen, that “something” is often colored-by or interpreted-by the lens you had on, in the moment.

Perhaps you’ve had that experience. I know I have. I’ve been in situations where something has happened, a moment when I was with other people and some event came to pass. We all went through the same, exact experience together. We all saw precisely the same thing go down. We all stood looking on as the event transpired. But then, when recounting that event to those who weren’t there, it was obvious that we had differing interpretations of what happened, and sometimes, even what the event meant. People interpret events differently based not on what they saw, but on how they filter what they saw.

That very human phenomenon happened in our account from that first Palm Sunday found in John twelve. We know the crowd had one idea of what Jesus’ triumphal entry meant to them, though some saw it one way and others saw it another. We know the religious leaders definitely had a separate idea of what this ride was signifying. We’re told in John twelve that, likely, even the Apostles also had preconceived notions of what Jesus was doing and what His actions were indicating. We can say with surety, every person who saw Jesus on the donkey

that day came up with similar, but nonetheless differing, interpretations of what that very important moment meant.

But what was the right interpretation? What was happening that day?

To begin with, Jesus was making a statement about Himself as He fulfilled Scripture on His Palm Sunday entrance into Jerusalem. John reminds us that Jesus was fulfilling Zechariah 9:9 which reads: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout aloud, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; righteous and having salvation is he, humble and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” His Palm Sunday ride said, loud and clear, to all who were there, “I AM Israel’s true King!” Everyone would have seen that. Everyone would have realized that was what Jesus was claiming by the ride and in the moment. After all, Jesus did exactly what King Solomon had done almost 1000 years before (See 1Kings 1:33).

But, all of them seem to have misunderstood this King as they interpreted that fulfillment and His kingly ride, differently. The crowd had some variation of “He’s going to rescue us from the foreign oppression in our land.” Their cry of “Hosanna,” which means “Lord, save us please,” would have meant to them “Save us from the Roman overlords...please!” The religious leaders of the Jews definitely interpreted it differently as they saw Jesus as a threat against their power, saying as John records it, “You see that you are gaining nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!” And again, the disciples misunderstood what was happening in the moment, as John tells us, “His disciples

did not understand these things at first...but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about him and had been done to him” John 12:16.

Regardless of the varying opinions however, there was in fact one correct interpretation of this event, and that one, correct interpretation comes from Jesus Himself. Notice what John tells us in the verse above...the disciples misunderstood, but “...when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered...” The correct interpretation of this event, both for the Palm Sunday people long ago and for us, the Palm Sunday people of 2026, is found in what Jesus intended to say that day about His “glory” as He rode into Jerusalem. (His “glory” is spoken of later in John twelve.) So, was Jesus saying He was the King of Israel? Yes. But how was His Kingship to be defined? Jesus clears up the misunderstandings when He tells us this about His “glory” later in John twelve: “‘And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.’ He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.” His ride indeed said “I am Israel’s King!” But, we must remember these things: His Kingdom was not of this world; His crown would be made of thorns; His subjects would mock and deny Him; His back would be torn, His hands and feet would be nailed, as He was “seated” on His true throne...His true throne, the cross.

Don’t misunderstand what happened that day. This event indeed meant that Jesus was claiming to be King. But don’t misunderstand the truth of His kingship either. Jesus, our King, came not for glory. Jesus our King came not for palaces and posh-living. Jesus our King came “not to be served, but to

serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45). Jesus came as King that day, but came as a King who would die in His subjects’ place, in order that, His subjects might live in His Kingdom forever!

**Week 7**  
*Holy Week*

**March 30th - Mark 11:15-19**  
**“You Are a Temple of the Holy Spirit”**  
**Written by Mike Martens, Director of Men’s Ministry**

As we dive into our reading today, we see there is a connection between the cleansing of the temple and the unproductive fig tree in the previous verses. Jesus is always teaching and here He used the event of the fig tree to deepen the disciple’s understanding of what was about to come with the cleansing of the temple. It’s also important to note that Jerusalem is called a vineyard throughout Scripture (see Isaiah 5:1-7). A vineyard is typically known for bearing fruit. So, what is Jesus teaching the disciples? He’s using the fig tree and temple cleansing to tell them, “Don’t pretend that your life is full of fruit when it’s not.” He wants them to bear fruit and not to simply appear religious. This is no clearer than when we read the Words of Jesus in John 15:1-11 where He says, “By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples” (v.8). Producing fruit for God and His Kingdom is not optional. The bearing of fruit is always shown throughout Scripture to be the visible result of an intimate relationship with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

As Jesus walks into the temple, that is the court of the Gentiles, it resembles a scene that looks more like a busy marketplace than a holy place of worship. It was the only place in the temple where the Gentiles could go to pray, to hear God’s Word, and to meditate. Now picture yourself at Costco on any given day but add the smell and sound of animals along with the clinking of coins, the cries of money changers, and constant noise. Not

only was this a place of merchandising, but the court of the Gentiles was also a shortcut between the eastern section of Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives. The Gentiles were robbed of the one place in the temple that was meant for worship. Worship is simply giving God the best that He has already given you. So now Jesus is about to let the disciples know that by having blessed them, He had the right to expect fruit from them. Now we get to see the heart of God when in righteous anger, He drives out all those who had polluted the temple for their personal gain and exorbitant profit. He was getting the clutter out of the temple that did not belong. How about you? Is there any clutter in your life that's affecting your worship of King Jesus? Hurried lifestyles with full calendars and constant commitments along with the distraction of constant entertainment. Where does prayer and worship fit in with this kind of lifestyle? Jesus is calling us to clear away anything that hinders our fellowship with Him.

We hear God loud and clear in 1 Corinthians 3:16, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?" You and I are God's temple made for worship! We belong to God and He owns us. Today, let's apply this Scripture to our own lives and make it deeply personal. Jesus is inviting us to reflect and ask...

What noise is drowning out God's voice? Like Jesus in the temple, silence that commotion so we can hear God's voice again.

What distractions need to be filtered out where prayer, God's Word, and meditation belong?

What “tables” need to be overturned in your life to ensure that God is in first position?

Jesus, thank You for the renewal and cleansing you bring into our lives. Help us enjoy unhindered fellowship with You. And just as the temple was meant to be “for all the nations,” help our lives daily reflect your presence everywhere we go and to everyone we meet. We ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

# **March 31st - Matthew 21:28-32**

## **“Burn For Jesus”**

**Written by Tim Kightlinger, Director of Youth Ministry**

“I’ll pray for you.” That is a phrase that’s spoken often, but when it comes time to pray, we at times forget that we promised to pray. Maybe we start praying right then and there with/for them?

Jesus tells a story of a man with 2 sons. The first one just refuses to go do it. Oh, the nerve of that ungrateful kid we think to ourselves, if we’re honest. But remember, this is a parable, so let’s go with it and see what Jesus is trying to teach us. Jesus does tell us that the son did eventually come to his senses and went out into the vineyard. The second son says he’ll go and do it, but then doesn’t. He thinks he’ll get away with not working and just having a leisurely day to himself. Oh, the nerve of that lying kid we think to ourselves, if we’re honest.

There are a lot of us who at times go through the motion of being a Christian, and if we’re honest with ourselves we’ve done it a time or two. We say, yes Lord, I’ll follow you no matter what and then just go about our business and ignore his leading and prompting.

Jesus is addressing the religious people again here. He’s saying to those who know and follow God that they need to follow through with their commitments. Don’t just go through the motions. Paul tells Timothy to “fan the flame of faith.” God has started a fire in your life when you became a Christian, and he’s calling you to do whatever it takes to keep that fire burn-

ing strong and bright.

He's also saying, there are people out there who "rejected" the good news of God's love the first time they heard it, but still need to hear the message again. Why do they need to hear the message? Because God wants them on his team. 1 Timothy 2:4 says, "God desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth." All people! Look around today, who in your immediate circle needs to hear about God's love, hope, forgiveness, peace?

Let your faith be seen and, in the process, let your words be heard that lead someone to believe that Jesus is who he says he is. Our Savior and Lord!

God, thank you for your love and salvation. Your sacrifice on the cross and resurrection has changed my life. I desire to led by your Holy Spirit to those around me. Give me boldness to live out my faith and not stay on the fringes, but to be a blaze of fire for your glory to those around me. Amen.

## **April 1st - Matthew 26:6-13**

### **“Love Poured Out”**

**Written by DeAnn McCue, Director of Women’s Ministry**

As we move deeper into Lent, the Gospel brings us to a quiet moment just before the storm. Jesus is only days away from the cross. Tension is rising. Opposition intensifies. Betrayal is near, fear hangs in the air, the shadow of death looms. And right here—before the arrest, before the trial, before the nails—an unnamed woman steps forward and does something extraordinary.

In today’s text, the disciples speak of waste—but Jesus speaks of beauty. Lent invites us to consider what kind of devotion we bring to Christ when the cost is high and the outcome uncertain.

As Jesus approaches the cross, an unnamed woman steps forward, breaks open an alabaster jar, and pours out what she has on Jesus. Others immediately object. The fragrance could have been sold. The money could have been given to the poor. What they see as waste, Jesus names beauty.

The perfume is not ordinary. It is expensive—likely the most valuable thing she owns. When the jar is broken, there is no going back. The room fills with fragrance, and the cost becomes obvious to everyone.

The disciples protest: “Why this waste?” Their concern sounds faithful and responsible. From a practical perspective, they are

not wrong. The resources could have been used more efficiently, more responsibly. It could have helped many people. It could have been used more “wisely.”

The woman says nothing. She does not defend herself. The criticism comes quickly, even from those closest to Jesus.

But Jesus reveals something deeper—love. Sometimes love is poured out simply because He is worthy. Jesus intervenes: “Why do you trouble her?” He protects her dignity. He becomes her advocate.

Jesus reframes the moment. He names her action not as waste, but as beauty. She has anointed Him for burial—whether fully aware or not, she responds to the gravity of the hour. While others argue, she worships. As death approaches, she offers love.

Jesus promises that her act will be told wherever the gospel is preached. In a story filled with powerful men, religious leaders, and political authorities, it is this unnamed woman, no name recorded, no title, no position, yet one whose act of love becomes unforgettable.

Today’s text stands in sharp contrast to betrayal and denial that soon follow. The woman offers Jesus extravagant love at precisely the moment when His suffering is drawing near. She may not fully understand what is coming, but she recognizes who He is—and responds with her whole heart.

As we journey toward the cross, Jesus calls us to love—to pour out our lives in response to His grace.

May we be willing to break open what we treasure.

May we love even when misunderstood.

May we dare to do beautiful things for Christ.

## **Closing Prayer**

Lord Jesus, teach us to love You with open hands and open hearts. Teach us to love You with all that we have, to offer our lives as beautiful gifts in response to Your grace. Amen.

**April 2nd - Luke 22:14-20**  
**“The Last Supper: A Meal Made More”**  
**Written by Pastor Christian Pieper, Associate Pastor**

A few years ago, my parents decided to visit my wife Sarah and I in California, where we'd been living for a year or two. Seeing as my family lives in Minnesota, and her family in Texas, we were always excited to have family visit. The first night they arrived happened to be my parents' anniversary, which we thought should just be their night alone. But my parents insisted that the four of us would have dinner together, so we went out for a celebration meal. After enjoying a lovely reunion, paired with delicious food, I brought out a card to give to my parents. I handed them our gift as we wished them a “Happy Anniversary”, and we waited anxiously for them to discover what was inside. It was a copy of a sonogram, showing a tiny picture of our first child. We couldn't wait to announce the news of Sarah's pregnancy!

At that moment, this celebration meal took on a whole new meaning. It didn't diminish their anniversary, it only brought more joy for the future. The love that started in my parents' marriage would be growing even deeper and deeper.

When we share Holy Communion, we partake in an ancient celebration. That even before it was the Lord's Supper, God's people celebrated the Passover. Ever since God rescued the Israelites from Egypt, they commemorated His victory in this meal. It was a reminder of God's powerful, faithful deliverance - a story passed down from generation to generation. But at

the Last Supper, Jesus gave His disciples a new center of the celebration.

In Luke's account, Jesus does something striking: He takes the familiar elements — bread and cup — and places new meaning on them. He says “this bread IS my body”, which the Jews had always practiced as remembering the “bread of our father's affliction”. Then Jesus spoke again and said “this cup that is poured out for you IS the new covenant in my blood.” While the Passover commemorated the blood of firstborn lambs that covered Israelites doors as a sign for God's judgement to pass-over, how much more will the blood of the holy lamb of God take away the sin of the world?

That dinner in California was still an anniversary meal. But with one revelation, it became something more — a promise that love would keep growing, that joy would deepen, that the story wasn't ending but unfolding.

So it is with the Lord's Supper. Jesus takes the old story of Passover and fills it with new and lasting meaning. The meal becomes not only a remembrance of rescue, but a celebration of eternal redemption — and an invitation to the greater joy that is still ahead, when He will drink it new with us in the Kingdom of God. Come soon, Lord Jesus, Amen.

## **April 3rd - John 19:16-30**

### **“It Really Is Finished”**

**Written by Pastor Ben Johnson, Lead Pastor**

At the cross Jesus speaks His final words, not of defeat, but of fulfillment. “It is finished” does not mean the story ends but it means the work has now been fully accomplished. Every promise, every sacrifice, every act of obedience converges in this one monumental moment.

John presents the crucifixion not as chaos, but as a moment of completion. Jesus remains fully present and intentional to the very end as we see Him fulfilling scripture, caring for His mother and offering Himself fully. Even in His suffering Jesus is never passive but willingly lays down His life.

Lent brings us face to face with the limits of our effort. We cannot fix ourselves, redeem our past, or secure our own salvation. The cross declares that what we could never finish on our own has been completed for us in Jesus. It really is finished!

Lent invites us to come and rest beneath the cross. To release our striving. To trust that forgiveness is real, grace is sufficient, and our hope has been secured. “It is finished” is not an ending, but the beginning, of our new life in Jesus.

# **April 4th - Psalm 88**

## **“Waiting in Silence”**

**Written by Pastor Tim Phillips, Care Pastor**

“O Lord, God of my salvation, I cry out day and night before you. Let my prayer come before you; incline your ear to my cry! For my soul is full of troubles, and my life draws near to Sheol. I am counted among those who go down to the pit; I am a man who has no strength, like one set loose among the dead, like the slain that lie in the grave, like those whom you remember no more, for they are cut off from your hand. You have put me in the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep. Your wrath lies heavy upon me, and you overwhelm me with all your waves. Selah.

You have caused my companions to shun me; you have made me a horror to them. I am shut in so that I cannot escape; my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O Lord; I spread out my hands to you. Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you? Selah.

Is your steadfast love declared in the grave, or your faithfulness in Abaddon? Are your wonders known in the darkness, or your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? But I, O Lord, cry to you; in the morning my prayer comes before you. O Lord, why do you cast my soul away? Why do you hide your face from me? Afflicted and close to death from my youth up, I suffer your terrors; I am helpless. Your wrath has swept over me; your dreadful assaults destroy me. They surround me like a flood all day long; they close in on me together. You have caused my

beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness.”

On this day we find ourselves sort of stuck in the middle. We are still thinking about Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, trial, beatings, crucifixion and burial. We try our best to remain there...lingering in our thoughts for what would seem a respectable time. And, even though we try not to run ahead, we begin to see the dawn of the resurrection!

How long should we stand by the tomb? For the disciples, they were limited by Sabbath restrictions. They had to go away to keep the Sabbath which began at sunset. Many times I have stood with a family at the graveside. Some choose to linger. Others leave quickly. Often they take flowers as a remembrance. What do we take with us from the tomb of Jesus?

Think of those first disciples. What was it like for them? We know that a few of them took His body down from the cross and buried Him. We know that the women prepared spices to anoint the body at a later time. It seems likely that those close to Him did not sleep. We also know that they were afraid. They thought they might be next! Do you remember when you lost a precious loved-one? What did you do for the next 48 hours? When you consider your own experience you can imagine what the disciples were going through.

For some, their reaction to grief is like a call to action. They begin to take steps to move forward. For others, their loss robs them of their motivation or purpose. They seem to flounder

and become disorganized.

This day is for us a time to pause and reflect. But, try as we might, we cannot forget what tomorrow will bring. That is the beauty of our faith! We know that tomorrow is the day of Jesus' resurrection! The shadow of death is already giving way to a glorious resurrection sunrise! We know Jesus rose from the dead!

In a similar way these thoughts bring us comfort in our time of loss. We know where they are! We know they are filled with inexpressible joy! We know our separation is temporary! We can hardly wait to see them again!

The Third Article of the Apostle's Creed is explained by Luther this way:

### Sanctification

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy Christian Church, the communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.

What does this mean? I believe that I cannot buy my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith. In the same way He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian church on earth, and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith. In this Christian church, He daily

and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers. On the last day, He will raise me and all the dead, and give eternal life to me and all believers in Christ. This is most certainly true.

So, as we wait for tomorrow, in our hearts we have already begun to celebrate. And so we should! Every moment of every day should be dominated by our thoughts of Jesus' resurrection! May the peace of knowing Jesus fill your heart and mind!

**April 5th - John 20:1-18**  
**“The Risen Lord Calls You By Name”**  
**Written by Pastor Joe Meyer, Emeritus Pastor**

Many years ago I had a very short and yet very impactful post-worship event happen over the course of two back-to-back Sundays. On the first of the two Sundays, I met a couple who was new to our congregation, just visiting that day. Like many people do, they stopped and talked to me on the way out the door from the Sanctuary. I found out that their names were Barb and Ray and that they'd recently moved from Illinois to Arizona and intended to live in Arizona full-time. They made sure I knew that they weren't just snow-birds, but were in truth looking for a permanent church-home in our State. They were from Roselle, Illinois and were from a well-known congregation in Roselle known as Trinity.

Fast forward a week to the next Sunday and out come Barb and Ray from the earliest of our services. I put out my hand and welcomed them again and said “Well, hey there Barb and Ray... welcome back! So glad to have you with us in worship again this week!” Ray was absolutely gobsmacked but they were both blown away. He said “You remember our names?” I sheepishly said “Yes sir...you're from Roselle, Illinois, and you were members of Trinity, right?” Ray and Barb could not believe that I had done that— that I had cared enough about them to remember their names. I must've heard Ray tell that story a hundred times over the years. Perhaps needless to say then, we not only became fast-friends, but they joined our church and became very faithful members and solid leaders within the congregation.

Truth is, we really like it when people remember us and call us by our names. Better said, we absolutely LOVE it when people, and yes, especially our pastors, remember us and call us by name...it's that important to us.

Well, our Lenten Journey has ended. We've come to Easter Sunday. But we've also come to what had to have been a pivotal moment in the life of the woman named Mary Magdalene. Jesus had done a mighty work in her life. Along with all of the others Jesus had healed, He'd also healed Mary of seven demons (See Luke 8:2). He had healed her and had restored her life to her in that exorcism. But Jesus would do that even more fully on the first Easter...as recorded here in John twenty...long ago in the garden by the tomb. You know this story well, but don't lose the gravity of what Jesus did for Mary that day. Mary was grieving. Mary was hurting. Mary wanted her Lord back in her life but Mary believed Jesus was dead and therefore just wanted to properly bury Him and go home to grieve some more.

The Risen Lord Jesus had other plans for Mary that day. Jesus was going to call her by name! Indeed, Jesus was going to open Mary's eyes to the truth of the Gospel. Jesus was going to show her that He conquered death. So what does Jesus do? Again, Jesus simply called her by name saying "Mary", and in the moment He opened her eyes to the Risen Christ and more importantly, opened her eyes of faith to the truth of His salvation. An amazing and wonderful faith-story for Mary, to be sure.

Also an amazing and wonderful faith-story for you. What hap-

pened to Mary has also happened to you! Jesus has also opened your eyes to the truth of the Gospel. Jesus has also opened your eyes to the fact that He can conquer death. Jesus has done so then, by, so to speak, calling your name. Isaiah wrote these wonderfully applicable words: “But now thus says the LORD, he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: ‘Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.’” Isaiah 43:1. What was true for Israel is true for you and me. In our baptism into Christ, Jesus has claimed us as His son or daughter saying “...you are mine!” In our baptism into Christ, Jesus has also “...called you by name.” He called us by name and made us His children as He opened our eyes, and yes, caused us to believe, that He died for us and that He rose again for us on the third day!

Praise be to God...on the day Jesus “called you by name” in your baptism, you and Jesus also became “fast-friends” and you became a “member” of the Body of Christ from that day forward. Rejoice this Easter yet again Christian, because the Risen Lord Jesus loves you, knows you and has called you by name!

