

Saginaw United Methodist Church
40 Days of Transformation
A Lenten Bible Study



Exploring Varied Means to Pray, Read, Fast, & Give

Lenten Season Dates to Remember:

- **Sunday, Feb 18** - The Art of Prayer - Please join us after 11 am worship for an opportunity to explore a creative way to pray! Light lunch and all supplies provided.
- **Sunday, Feb 25** - Reading ourselves into the scriptures - The Way of the Cross. Please join us after 11 am worship for a light lunch.
- **Sunday, March 3** - Read through touch - Explore the Power of Touch - "see" with your sense of touch. Please join us after 11 am worship for a light lunch.
- **Sunday, March 10** - Fast from Busyness - Sabbath as a day of rest and reflection. Please join us after 11 am worship for a Jet's Pizza luncheon and a time of fellowship.
- **Sunday, March 17** - St. Patrick's Day - Give Praise to the Lord - sing in worship, celebrate, and give thanks to God. Please join us after 11 am worship for a special baked potato luncheon and dessert auction benefiting the Saginaw UMC Youth!
- **Sunday, March 24** - Palm Sunday parade of palms - please invite children, grandchildren, neighbors to come celebrate! Hosanna! 8:30 am & 11 am.
- **Wednesday, March 27** - Immersive experience of worship, prayer, and connection with our Triune God. Please join us in the fellowship hall for a come-and-go opportunity to employ all our senses and worship the Lord with all our everything! 10 am to 2 pm
- **Friday, March 29** - Good Friday worship service at 6:30 pm - Tenebrae service
- **Saturday, March 30** - Children's Egg Hunt from 10 am to 2 pm.
- **Sunday, March 31** - Easter morning, Resurrection Sunday! 8:30 am & 11 am

40 Days of Transformation: A Lenten Bible Study

This study is intended to take place from Ash Wednesday throughout the season of Lent. It culminates with a celebration of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday.

This Lenten study provides opportunities and devotionals for individuals as well as suggested opportunities to explore various means of worship as a community of faith. While this study targets adults, portions can be adapted for youth and school age children to participate.

The overall goal of this study is to acknowledge that God created us as beings who perceive through our senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell. This study provides opportunities to incorporate multiple senses to worship the Lord through prayer, reading of scripture, fasting, and giving. This study also recognizes that as individual beings, each person learns in different ways.

General sessions are held on Sundays. The lessons will be strengthened by coordinating the regular worship service to support the focus of that day's lesson. Multiple opportunities for embodied worship can be held during Holy Week

Invitation to the Observance of Lenten Discipline

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

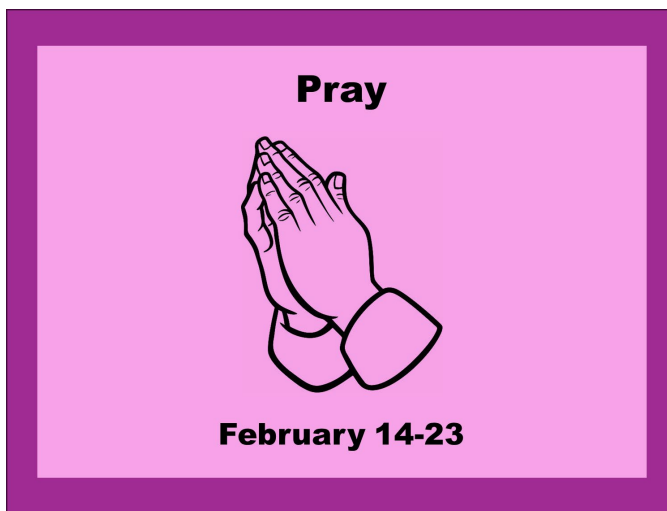
the early Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church that before the Easter celebration there should be a forty-day season of spiritual preparation.

During this season converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time when persons who had committed serious sins and had separated themselves from the community of faith were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness and restored to participation in the life of the Church.

In this way the whole congregation was reminded of the mercy and forgiveness proclaimed in the gospel of Jesus Christ and the need we all have to renew our faith. I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to observe a holy Lent:

*by prayer, self-examination, and repentance;
by reading and meditating on God's Holy Word;
by fasting and self-denial;
and by giving of yourself and your resources. **

* From the UMC Book of Worship, Service for Ash Wednesday, "Invitation to the Observance of the Lenten Discipline," 322.



Pray

Prayer is a means of worshipping, communicating, and relating with God. We connect with the Lord through spiritual means of conversation or communing. The common acronym ACTS stands for the ways we express our Adoration, Confessions, Thanksgiving, and Supplication. Adoration is a time of praise and admiration for all that the Lord is and does. Confession allows us to examine our lives, confess our shortcomings or sins of omission and commission alike. Thanksgiving is a time to express our gratitude for all that God is and the many blessings the Lord provides. Supplication is an opportunity to lift others up to the Lord in prayer (prayers of intervention).

When we think of prayer, we often think of everything we want God to do for us or those we love. It easily becomes a laundry list of things we expect from God. However, lengthy "to-do" lists and one-sided conversations do not nurture healthy relationships. Communication is multifaceted; it includes speaking and listening, quality time spent together, and being attentive to one another.

There are plenty of other forms of prayer and communion with the Lord. During these first ten days of Lent, we will explore various means of prayer. We'll begin with a familiar prayer and move on to include prayers that incorporate movement, creativity, music, personalizing scriptures, writing, and more. As you try new methods, pay attention to your soul. Which forms of prayer evoke greater feelings of connection? Which ones feel more fulfilling? Does changing up our regular prayer routine invite more engagement of our mind, body, and soul? Which types of prayer will we incorporate into our lives.

February 14 – Ash Wednesday – Corporate Prayer - The Lord's Prayer

Read: Matthew 6:5-13

Thought of Today: *"The Lord's Prayer can only really be prayed when the man who prays it knows what he is saying, and he cannot know that until he has entered into discipleship."* - William Barclay

Jesus taught his disciples to pray and gave them a template for prayer. Jesus emphasized that they should not spew forth a litany of heavy-handed theological platitudes. Instead, they should offer up words, emotions, and concerns from deep within – prayer should be a meaningful, intimate, conversation between us and our Lord (Matthew 6:5-7).

Jesus reminds us that God already knows what we need (Matthew 6:8); the prayerful conversation is more focused on deepening our relationship and expressing our true selves. While prayer at its best is expressing ourselves honestly, wholeheartedly, and openly, many people find themselves at a loss for words. Like a writer staring at a blank page, we might find it hard to begin. Mercifully, the Bible records the prayer that Jesus taught his followers, "The Lord's Prayer."

Many of us know the Lord's Prayer by heart. We repeat it in church each Sunday. We know it, yet how often are we simply *saying* it instead of *praying* it? Trust me, there is a difference! William Barclay asserted that "the Lord's Prayer can only really be prayed when the man who prays it knows what he is saying, and he cannot know that until he has entered into discipleship" (*The Gospel of Matthew*, 199). I believe that we cannot fully pray the Lord's Prayer until we first fully understand the depth of meaning behind each phrase.

During seminary, one of our wisest professors adamantly instructed us to pay careful attention to the beginning of each passage, adding that very often the things that come first, come first for a reason – they are of primary importance. I believe that the Lord's Prayer is a perfect example.

"Our." Consider the very first word, "Our." Jesus could have begun his prayer in a variety of ways. He could have started with "Holy," "Mighty," "Divine" or a host of other magnanimous adjectives. Instead, Jesus chose a determiner. He could have used "A" or "The" or "My" as the opening word. How astonishing to note that Jesus taught his followers to pray "Our." With the very first word, this prayer joins us all together within a shared community.

Prayer: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen

February 15 – “Father”

Read: Psalm 19:1

Thought of Today: *Jesus invites his followers into a relationship.*

“Father.” The next word is equally unexpected. Jesus could have offered a variety of options. He could have instructed us to address God as Lord, Elohim (Creator), Adonai (Master), El Shaddai (God Almighty), Jehovah (Yahweh), or a host of other titles. How should we address the Great I Am? Jesus instructs us to pray to Abba, which is Aramaic. The earliest texts use the Greek word Πάτερ or “Father” as translated into English. Again, Jesus invites his followers into a relationship.

Sadly, for many people, their experience of their human father is not one of kindness, benevolence, or unconditional love. For those who did not enjoy a healthy, loving relationship with their earthly parents, it may be painful to consider God as Father. It may be difficult to disassociate an abusive earthly father from our good and holy heavenly Father. Rather than looking back to their negative experiences, encourage victims of childhood abuse to seek a qualified counselor who can help nurture and gently guide them to healing. With the right counselor and the encouragement and support of a loving congregation, they may be able to understand God as a good, good Father. Continue to pray for them and pray that they will come to believe the many verses in the Bible that assure us of God's goodness, protection, goodwill, trustworthiness, and great love.

Prayer Walking: Weather and abilities permitting, spend some time either walking or sitting outside. Notice God's creation all around you. Offer God praises and thanksgiving for all you see, hear, smell, touch, and even things such as fresh produce at a farmer's market that you can taste and enjoy.

February 16 – “Who Art in Heaven”

Read: Jeremiah 23:23-24

Thought of Today: God is not separated or distant. God is not far away or uninvolved. God is omnipresent; God is everywhere all at once; God is closer than our next heartbeat.

“Who art in heaven.” Often when teaching children about the Lord’s prayer, we overlook some of the more difficult words that, to a child’s mind, may not convey the same meaning. When I asked a class of first graders what “art” meant, one quickly explained that it meant that God loved him as much as his mommy did; enough to put the boy’s *art* on God’s refrigerator in heaven.

Other times, the words may be misunderstood. Once while helping a young girl create a bookmark during Vacation Bible School, the child chose to write out the Lord’s Prayer. She informed me that she had the prayer “memorized” and didn’t need any help. After helping other children, I came back and peeked over her shoulder. The girl had carefully printed “Our Father who *aren’t* in heaven...” Curious, I asked the little girl, “If God is not in heaven, where is God?” Beaming proudly the girl straightened her shoulders and pointing to her chest she proclaimed, “Right here!” Indeed! God is not separated or distant. God is not far away or uninvolved. God is omnipresent; God is everywhere all at once; God is closer than our next heartbeat.

Prayer Labyrinth: A prayer labyrinth is not a maze; one cannot get lost. A prayer labyrinth is an ancient means of following a path as a symbol of returning or centering ourselves on God. The path winds and turns, first leading us towards the center and then turning back away again. The path ultimately leads to the center where one is invited to stop and spend more time praying. Participants are invited to return and exit the labyrinth by reversing and retracing their steps along the same path.

There are many prayer labyrinths available at different churches and parks across the world. Some companies rent canvas prayer labyrinths to use indoors. Smaller “finger” prayer labyrinths enable people to place their fingers in a groove and trace it along the path to its center and back out again. You may use the one below to pray today.

Many UMC congregations have prayer labyrinths and readily provide information concerning their history and use as a spiritual discipline.

<https://www.fumcstw.org/prayerlabyrinth#:~:text=The%20Labyrinth%20is%20simply%20a,th%20same%20path%20back%20out.>



February 17 – “Hallowed Be Thy Name”

Read: Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11

Thought for the Day: *To hallow God's name means to regard it as holy, sacred, respected, and deemed of great importance.*

“Hallowed be Thy name.” Hallowed means to revere or hold dear. To hallow God's name means to regard it as holy, sacred, respected, and deemed of great importance. It is not something to be used lightly, abused, disrespected, or misused as part of a vulgar curse (Exodus 20:7; Deuteronomy 5:11).

Prayer: Prayer Through Singing

One of the ways that we can revere God's name is through singing. It has been said that those who sing, pray twice. The Psalms are songs that were beloved and vital parts of Hebrew worship. Our brains are wired in such a way that we are able to remember songs with greater ease than if we simply tried to memorize information. Think about the alphabet. Most of us learned our ABCs by singing a song with the same tune as “Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star.”

Mnemonic devices such as rhyming words, acrostics, pentameter, and catchy beats make songs stay with us and help us remember theological truths. Research with Alzheimer's patients reveals that even when a victim's brain no longer remembers how to speak, their ability to sing familiar songs remains.

So much theology is artfully woven throughout traditional hymns. Charles Wesley famously wrote thousands of hymns, many which remain in our United Methodist Hymnals to this day. One of his most beloved hymns is “O for a Thousand Tongues to Sing” and is still the first hymn in most current UM Hymnals. Encourage people to sing some of their favorite hymns, paying special attention to the words – many of which are based on scriptures.

Another favorite hymn by Charles Wesley is “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today” which would be most apropos for celebrating Christ's resurrection. For more hymns to sing during Lent, check out this website: <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/content/wesley-hymn-devotions-for-lent-and-easter>

February 18 – “Thy Kingdom Come”

Read: Luke 17:20-21

Thought for the Day: *We pray in anticipation of the Lord's kingdom, God's sovereign reign here on earth.*

“Thy kingdom come.” This points us back to our future hope. We pray in anticipation of the Lord's kingdom, God's sovereign reign here on earth. Many have opined that we don't have to wait for God's kingdom in some distant future. If we strive to be followers of Jesus, living according to Christ's teachings, then the kingdom of God is among us or some translations say, “within us” (Luke 17:20-21).

Prayer: Prayer Art – Sunday: Please visit the fellowship hall following the 11:00 am worship service for an opportunity to explore a creative way to pray. A light lunch and supplies will be provided. Love offering gratefully accepted.

Human beings were created by God and imbued with the imago Dei – the image of God (Genesis 1:27). The first two chapters of Genesis reveal that God created all things. The vast scope of God's creativity includes a variety of shapes, textures, colors, and infinite possibilities. Since we are made in our Creator's image, then surely, we too, can be creative.

We don't have to chisel *La Madonna della Pietà* out of Italian marble like Michelangelo Buonarroti or paint *The Last Supper* like Leonardo da Vinci, but we can still explore artistic means of meditation and connection with the Lord. We can use the meditative and often cathartic methods of creating art as a way of expressing our prayers.

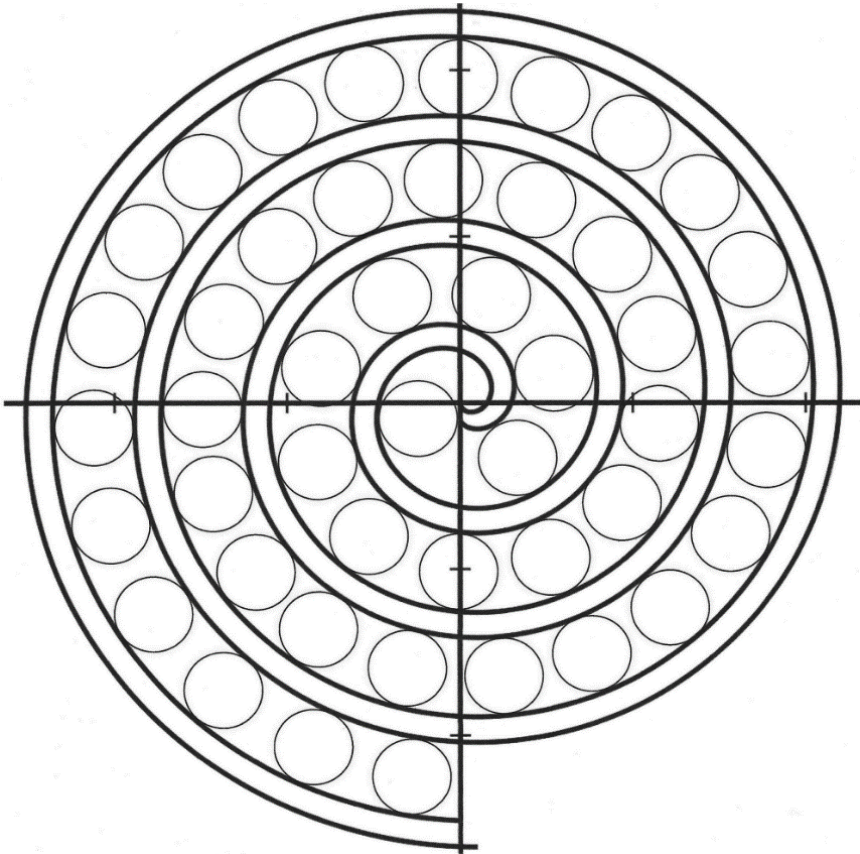
Exodus 35:31-35 assures us that God fills each of us with a variety of creative abilities. In our modern age of instant gratification, we rarely invest the time to develop those gifts, opting instead to take a picture or buy a copy online.

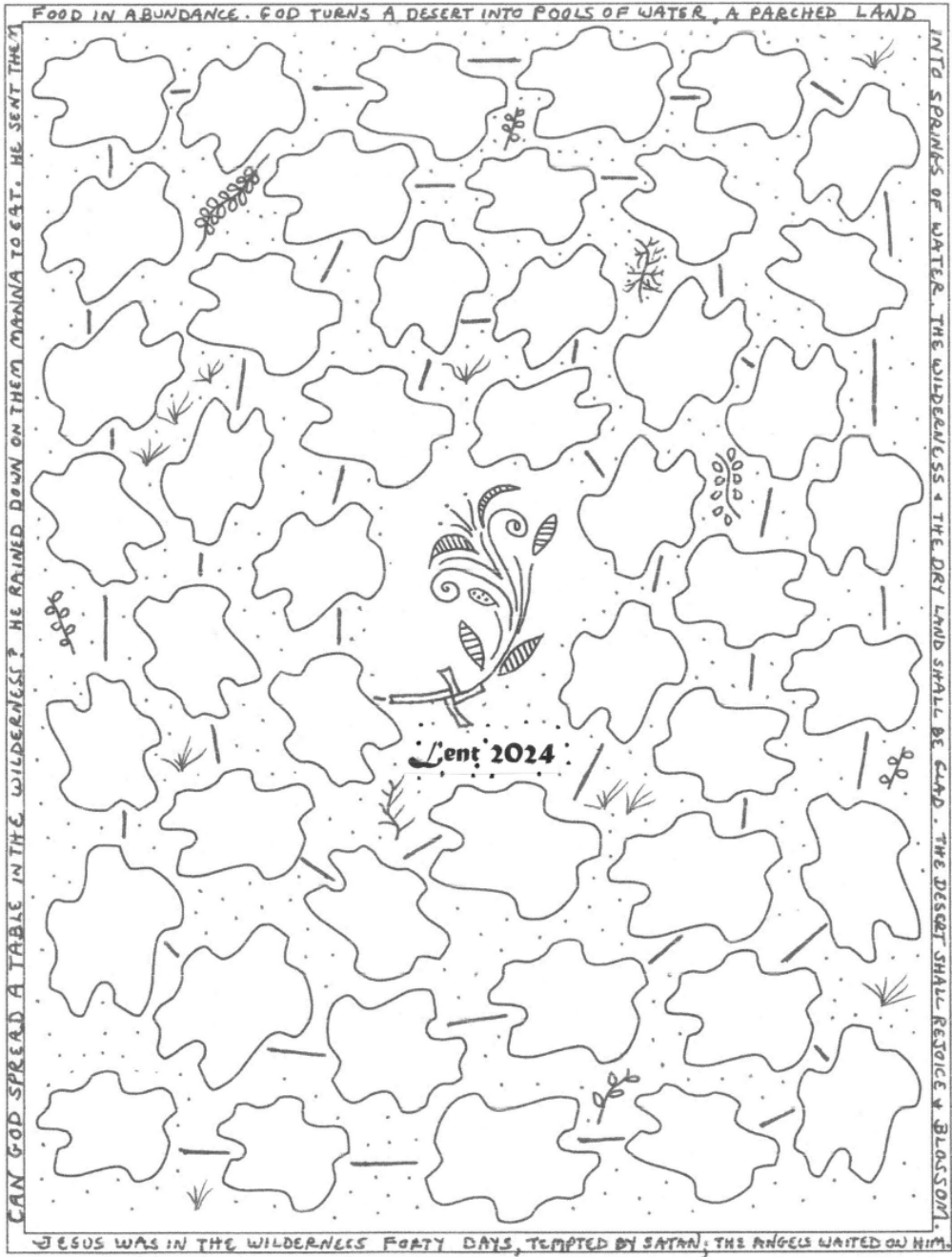
Encourage participants to explore a variety of mediums, paying more attention to the process rather than a predetermined outcome. Remind participants to use their art as a focus for meditative prayer during the week.

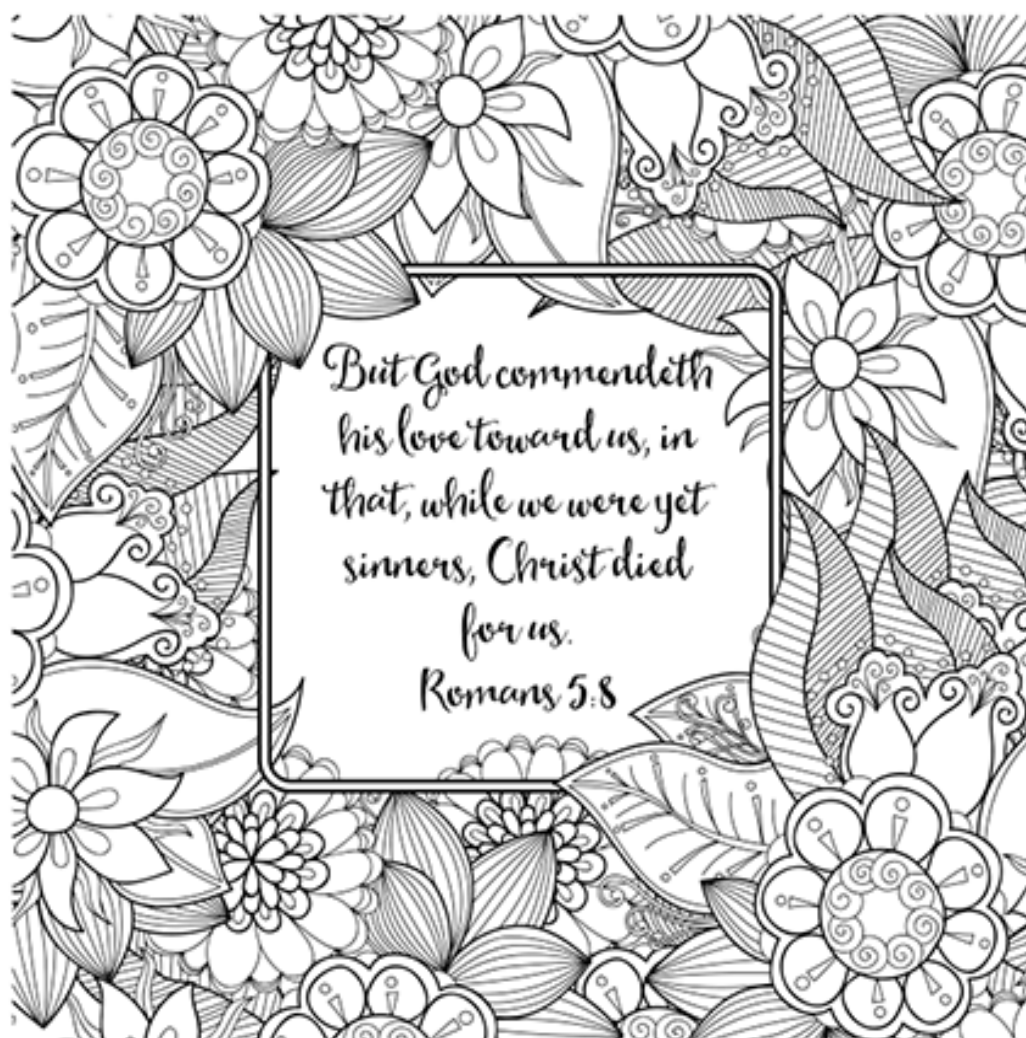
- How did this experience encourage a prayerful response?
- What other means of art can become forms of prayer?

- What other creative or artistic endeavors can invite us into a posture of prayer?

LENT 2024







But God commendeth
his love toward us, in
that, while we were yet
sinners, Christ died
for us.
Romans 5:8

February 19 “Thy Will be Done”

Read: Judges 2:7-10

Thought for the Day: *God is sovereign in heaven and earth.*

“Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” God is sovereign in heaven and earth. We sin, when we opt to follow our own whims rather than follow the will of God. Although most of us think of sin as something individuals commit against God and neighbor, the bible introduces the concept of communal sin. Communal sin occurs when a society or a nation sins against God.

The Bible offers plenty of examples of the chaos and evils that ensue when humanity follows their own sinful natures. The Book of Judges is replete with gruesome stories of violence and evil that resulted from the people's refusal to follow God's will. While most of the sixty-six books in the biblical canon reveal greater insights when read in their entirety, to fully grasp the overarching message of Judges, it needs to be consumed in one sitting.

Early in the book, the author lays out the problem:

⁷The people served the Lord all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great work that the Lord had done for Israel. ⁸Joshua son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred ten years. ⁹So they buried him within the bounds of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash. ¹⁰Moreover, that whole generation was gathered to their ancestors, and another generation grew up after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:7-10).

The scriptures say that “another generation grew up after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.” When people do not know the Lord or all the wonderful things God has done for us, then people no longer serve the Lord or obey his will. The book of Judges depicts this in sometimes graphic detail. Judges ends with this ominous statement:

“In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Why is it so important to follow God's will? Imagine a large, ancient ship sailing out across the sea far from any land or lighthouse to help navigate its course. If each person on that vessel decided to help steer according to their own wishes or what they thought was right, how could they ever reach their destination?

A good captain knows how to get his bearings and finds his way by looking up. Long before GPS, those who sailed the oceans looked up to the heavens to get their directions. Many primitive seafarers followed birds to find land. Savvy sailors used the sun as a compass during the day; at night, they navigated by the stars and constellations. Skilled sailors had one thing in common, a singular focus to find their way in the dark. Looking up to the North Star, they found a constant guide, a steady, faithful assurance from which to confidently move forward.

In much the same way, we have a constant and faithful guide to help us navigate through the dark. We can look up and trust the Lord to direct us (Psalm 121:1-2).

Prayer Meditation – Focusing our mind and Listening for God

For this passage, I prefer the Amplified version of the Bible. I love the idea of contemplating things that are worthy of reverence, just, lovely, and winsome!

Philippians 4:6-8 (Amplified)

⁶ Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance *and* in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God.

⁷ And God's peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison *and* mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸ For the rest, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is worthy of reverence *and* is honorable *and* seemly, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely *and* lovable, whatever is kind *and* winsome *and* gracious, if there is any virtue *and* excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think on *and* weigh *and* take account of these things [fix your minds on them].

Prayer isn't a long laundry list of things we expect God to do for us. Prayer isn't about bending God's will to ours; prayer should be about aligning our will with God's. Remember, in the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples, they were to pray, "Thy will be done..." Not that it's easy to relinquish our own desires and obey the Lord; it can be a struggle to acquiesce to plans that we don't fully understand. When Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, he knew what was being asked of him. Jesus knew the suffering, torture, humiliation, and excruciating death he would endure, yet Jesus remained obedient to the Father's will (Matthew 26:39; Mark 14:35-36; Luke 22:39-43). The Synoptic Gospels all record that Jesus prayed, "not my will, but yours be done."

How could Jesus pray for God's will to be done when Jesus knew the cost? I submit that the answer can be found in Luke 22:39. It was Jesus' custom to withdrawal to the garden and pray. John 18:1-2 notes that Jesus' pattern of prayer was so certain that Judas led the soldiers and police to the garden where they could arrest Jesus. Jesus made a regular habit of prayer and aligning his own will with the Lord's. Such deep prayer needs to become our habit as well.

February 20 – “Daily Bread”

Read: Deuteronomy 8:2-3

Thought for the Day: *God provides for our needs, but not necessarily our wants.*

“Give us this day our daily bread.” God provides for our needs, but not necessarily our wants. Please note that we are not instructed to pray for our daily pizza or filet mignon. Each day, God provides for our present needs, but not in excess. Just as the Hebrews were given manna from heaven, they had what they needed for that day. The day before the Sabbath, God provided enough for that day and for the next so that the people could rest from their labors (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 5:12-15). Any excess that the people tried to gather spoiled in the night (Exodus 16:4-6, 29-31). The people needed to learn to trust the Lord to supply for their needs (Deuteronomy 8:2-3). When we offer this prayer, we remind ourselves to trust in the Lord. God will provide our daily bread. Those familiar with the many names of Jesus will also recall that Jesus proclaimed that he is the Bread of Life (John 6:48).

Praying Scriptures: “All prayer is restored to its proper context in the word of God” (Peterson, 61).

Praying Hebrews 4:16 & Psalm 121

- 1. Begin by praying a Scripture that prepares your heart for connecting intimately with God.**

“Gracious God, I come boldly to your throne. I need your mercy and grace in my life.” (Based on Hebrews 4:16)

- 2. Turn a verse into a first- or third-person prayer.**

I raise my eyes toward the mountains.

Where will our help come from?

² *My help comes from you,*

the maker of heaven and earth.

³ *You won't let our foot slip.*

God, our protector, you won't fall asleep on the job.

⁴ *No! O God, you*

never sleep or rest!

⁵ *God, you are our protector;*

You are our shade right beside us.

⁶*The sun won't strike us during the day;
neither will the moon at night.*

⁷*Please protect us from all evil;
God will protect your very life.[\[a\]](#)*

⁸*The Lord protect us on our journeys—
whether going or coming—
from now until forever from now. (Based on Psalm 121)*

In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray, Amen.

February 21 – “Forgive”

Read: Matthew 18:21-35

Thought for the Day: *We try to put a comma or a pause to separate our desire to be forgiven from our call to forgive others; however, there is no punctuation in the text.*

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.” The Bible reminds us that God repeatedly forgives us and calls us also to forgive others (Luke 6:37; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:13). All too often, we fail to see the connection; we hope to compartmentalize forgiveness. We try to put a comma or a pause to separate our desire to be forgiven from our call to forgive others; however, there is no punctuation in the text. Our forgiveness depends on our forgiveness of others. Jesus taught that we are to forgive and not keep count of wrongs. When Peter asked how many times he should forgive, Jesus’ replied with what may have seemed to be shocking abundance. Jesus told his disciples that they should forgive not only seven times, but seventy times seven (Matthew 18:21-22).

Prayer Journaling:

- Grab a journal or spiral notebook and a cup of coffee or hot tea.
- Set aside 20-30 minutes to simply bask in God's presence and write down any feelings, insights, or questions you'd like to share with God.
- Write down the names of the people who you need to forgive.
- Write down what you would like God to forgive you for.
- Now forgive and ask for forgiveness.

Sometimes, I find lighting a candle to symbolize God's presence helpful as I sit alone with the Lord. As I stare at the flame, my breath softens, my heartbeat slows, my shoulders relax, and I can listen to the whispers of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes I write down what my heart wants to say to God or where I've seen God active. Other times, I write down what the Lord is saying to me. Always, it is time well spent.

February 22 – “Deliver us from Evil”

Read: 1 John 2:5-6

Thought for the Day: *We need the strength to resist temptation and the courage to turn away from our own forms of kryptonite.*

“Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.” For most of us, we don't need to be led into temptation; we can find it all by ourselves. Temptations are all around us, lurking in plain sight. We need the strength to resist temptation and the courage to turn away from our own forms of kryptonite. Most of all, we need the wisdom to choose a better direction.

For anyone to lead us, we must first be willing to follow. Jesus called his disciples (students) to follow him, and they immediately left everything behind to go with him. Are we willing to follow Jesus? The Bible teaches us to walk in his ways (1 John 2:5-6). Notice that the disciples were a group. Christianity is meant to be practiced in a community of believers. Within that community, there is accountability, encouragement, and support. Praying for others is one of the ways that we help each other resist temptation.

Pray with Others:

Praying for others is our responsibility and our joy. Many of us hear of someone in distress or in need of healing prayer, and our hearts go out to them. We offer to pray for them, wish them well, and continue our day. We promise to pray for them, but we do it later. If we remember, we might pray for them before bed.

While praying for people later is still a good thing, offering to pray for them right then, in that moment, can be powerful! Think about the times when others have stopped in the middle of their busy day and prayed. It helps the other person know that we've grasped the immediacy of their concern; we've prioritized their well-being. Such a prayer impacts people positively and powerfully!

February 23 – “Power and Glory Forever. Amen.”

Read: 1 Chronicles 29:11

Thought for the Day: *Affirmation*

“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever.” Most scholars consider this doxology a later addition to the text. This ending does not appear in the earliest known manuscripts of Matthew or Luke. However, the ancient Dead Sea Scrolls were not discovered until a shepherd found clay jars in a cave at Qumran in the late 1940s. For centuries prior, the King James Bible, or Authorized Version of 1611, was the standard. In the early 1600s, England's King James gathered the most brilliant theologians into a committee. The king charged the 47 leading biblical scholars to create an authentic translation that was true to the earliest Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts available at the time. It took the committee seven years to generate the King James Version of the Holy Bible. Within that translation, the Gospel of Matthew concluded the Lord's Prayer with this doxology.

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen (Matthew 6:13).

Scholars believe that the doxology parallels a similar benediction found in the Old Testament. King David speaks to the majesty of God's kingdom and offers similar statements in his praises to the Lord (1 Chronicles 29:11).

“Amen.” This is a term of affirmation. In biblical Hebrew, amen usually appears after a statement and can be translated as a confirmation of what precedes. The Hebrew word amen (אמן) can be translated as “so be it.” In the New Testament, the original Greek word amen (ἀμήν) often appears at the beginning of Jesus' statements. These are translated as “verily” or “truly I say to you.”

Pray Ancient Prayers:

Practice praying traditional prayers of the Christian faith such as those found the book of Common Prayer or the Wesleyan Covenant Prayer.

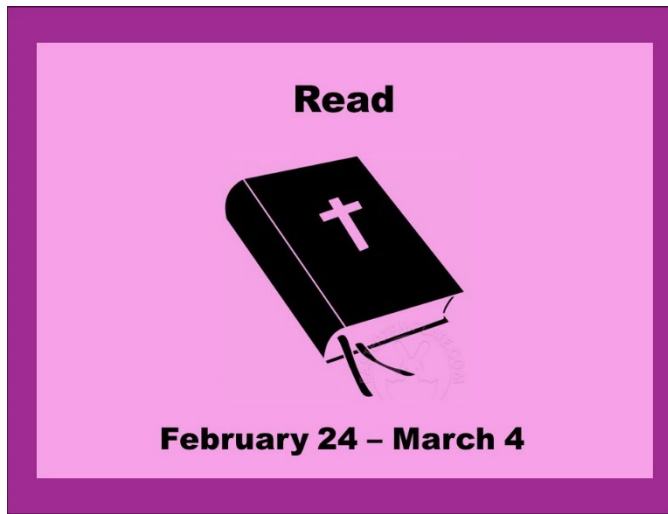
John Wesley's Covenant Prayer

"I am no longer my own, but thine.
 Put me to what thou wilt, rank me with whom thou wilt.
 Put me to doing, put me to suffering.
 Let me be employed by thee or laid aside for thee,
 exalted for thee or brought low for thee.
 Let me be full, let me be empty.
 Let me have all things, let me have nothing.
 I freely and heartily yield all things
 to thy pleasure and disposal.
 And now, O glorious and blessed God,
 Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,
 thou art mine, and I am thine. So be it.
 And the covenant which I have made on earth,
 let it be ratified in heaven. Amen."

Reflection Time:

Making time to consider the Lord's Prayer and gain a more detailed understanding can transform words that we simply repeat automatically and imbue them with more meaning and power.

- How has this information changed or enhanced the way we approach corporate prayer?
- How has this encouraged us to be more intentional in our prayers?
- How can we personalize scripture or corporate prayers?



Read

Reading seems self-explanatory, but all too often, we fail to be intentional in our engagement with the Holy Scriptures. For the next ten days, we will find a variety of ways to revitalize our time in the Word. The Bible may be the most widely sold book in the world, however, it may also be the least read. We quote and misquote scriptures, taking them out of context, and using them to prop up our own agendas.

Together, we will focus on God's Word as we make time to memorize favorite passages, explore what the Bible says about Christ's journey to the cross, and more. We will discover various ways to internalize scriptures through our senses of seeing, hearing, and even touching. We will learn to read for deeper understanding and also have opportunities to share God's word with others.

February 24 – Memorize Scripture**Read:** Deuteronomy 11:18-25

Thought for the Day: *'Scripture is a means of grace. If we want to be made peaceful and powerful through divine grace, Peter says it happens "in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord." That knowledge is only found in Scripture.'* (Quote from Belia Thompson)

¹⁰ I have tried hard to find you —
don't let me wander from your commands.

¹¹ I have hidden your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.

Psalm 119:10-11

Choose your favorite verses from scripture to memorize.

Prayer: My loving God, open my spiritual eyes to show me the glimpses of glory I cannot see by myself. Let me enjoy learning more about my Savior, Jesus. May the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, enlighten my heart. Have mercy on me, a sinner. Change my life and let me bear fruit in acts of love for others. Make me a more loving person as I read and study your Word. In the name of Jesus, Amen. (prayer by Belia Thompson)

February 25 – Scriptural Way of the Cross – Sunday

Many of us have heard of the traditional Stations of the Cross. The Stations have been celebrated for centuries as a pillar of the Roman Catholic means of worship, especially during Holy Week. However, only eight of the traditional fourteen stations have a canonical scriptural foundation. ***Please join us in the Fellowship Hall immediately following the 11a.m. worship service to participate in this spiritual practice and a light lunch. Love offering gratefully accepted.***

1. Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane; Matthew 26:36-41
2. Jesus is betrayed by Judas and arrested; Mark 14: 43-46
3. Jesus is condemned by the Sanhedrin; Luke 22: 66-71
4. Jesus is denied by Peter 3 times; Matthew 26: 69-75
5. Jesus is judged by Pilate; Mark 15:1-5, 15.
6. Jesus is scourged and crowned with thorns; John 19:1-3
7. Jesus takes up his cross; John 19:6, 15-17
8. Jesus is helped by Simon of Cyrene to carry his cross; Mark 15:21
9. Jesus meets the women of Jerusalem; Luke 23:27-31
10. Jesus is crucified; Luke 23:33-34
11. Jesus promises his kingdom to the repentant thief; Luke 23:39-43
12. Jesus entrusts Mary and John to each other; John 19:25-27
13. Jesus dies on the cross; Luke 23:44-46
14. Jesus is laid in the tomb; Matthew 27:57-60
15. Optional – Resurrection; Matthew 28:1-6; Mark 16:5-6; John 20:11-16; Luke 24:13-35

- Have we considered all that Jesus endured, or do we simply go from the waving of palm branches to the celebration of Christ's resurrection?
- How is this a different experience or way to understand what Jesus suffered?
- Why is it important to remind ourselves of all that happened during Holy Week

February 26 – Read Yourself into the Story

Read: Psalm 23

Thought for the Day: *Imagine*

Being able to place ourselves into the story, to visualize the scene all help us better grasp what is happening in the text. What sights surround us? What sounds or smells can we imagine? If we were there, how would we feel or react? How would we be different?

Reflective prayer:

Merciful Lord, who calls us to the table of grace,

Help us to find ourselves in this story.

Who would we be?

If we were Peter, we would misunderstand your radical hospitality. We'd stick to the rules, argue about what we believed we did and did not deserve.

If we were Judas – the one who betrayed You, we might fail to see all the good right in front of us, we might think that somehow, we aren't worthy of Your love. Help us see that we would be wrong.

If we were one of the unnamed disciples— watching, but not speaking, silently missing the opportunity to tell You what we believe and how much we love You.

If we were to place ourselves at Your table, we are confident that we would have made the same mistakes that your well-intentioned disciples made.

Help us to know that despite our many flaws, you still invite all of us to your table. You would have washed us clean. Lord Jesus, forgive us we pray. Cleanse not only our hands, but also our hearts. Let this water refresh us to go forth and serve. Amen.

February 27 – Detailed Reading

Read: 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Thought for the Day: *Don't assume.*

We often think we know the Bible and what it says; however, much of what we think we know can be attributed to what others have interpreted and shared with us. Look at most nativity sets, and they contain three magi. Matthew uses the plural form to indicate that there was more than just one, but nowhere in the text does it say that there were three magi. Most of us assume that there were three because Matthew lists three types of gifts that were brought to give to the newborn king.

Choose a passage and read the scriptures as if it were the first time.

Prayer: Lord, may Your Holy Spirit give us the wisdom to see how Your scriptures bring us deeper into Your love, grace, and redemption. Amen. (prayer by Nathaniel Metz)

February 28 – Reading for Transformation

Read: Psalm 119:105

Thought for the Day: *When we read the bible, we need to read for transformation.*

According to William Barclay, there is a distinct difference, “Christianity does not mean *knowing about Christ*, it means *knowing Christ*; and to do that requires not earthly wisdom but heavenly grace”. When we are in school or college, we read for information. When we read the Bible, we need to read for *transformation*!

Reading scriptures should not be a passive activity. Active reading involves interpretation – internalizing what is read.

Prayer: Holy and gracious God, the Psalmist said, “Your word is a lamp before my feet and a light for my journey” (Psalm 119:105 CEB). Every day help us to live by your word in all our thoughts, our talking, and our actions. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen. (prayer by Rev. Dr. Jay Beavers)

February 29 – Lectio Divina

Read: Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:8; Isaiah 43:1-4)

Thought for the Day: *Meditate*

Meditate on the word of God.

(suggested passages include but are not limited to Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; Isaiah 26:3; Philippians 4:8; Isaiah 43:1-4)

The traditional Benedictine method of Lectio Divina focuses on steps of reading the scripture, meditating on the passage, praying, and contemplating what the Lord may be lifting up for the reader to act upon.

See detailed instructions courtesy of the Upper Room:

Pick out a portion of scripture (just a few verses is fine) and make some time for quiet. You'll read the verses three times, listening for a different thing each time.

1. As you read the scripture this first time, listen for the word or phrase that leaps out at you. What word or phrase calls to you or sticks in your memory? As you hear the word, gently take it into your heart and silently recite or ponder the word during the silence.
2. As you read the text this second time, meditate on the word or phrase that speaks to you. Let it interact with your thoughts, your hopes, and your memories. Consider how the word or phrase is touching your life today.
3. As you read the text this last time, consider how God calls you into doing or being through this scripture. Allow God to use these words to touch you and shape your life today. Before you return to your activities, pray and meditate for a few more moments. If you keep a journal, make some notes about this time apart. When you are finished, go in God's peace and love.

(<https://www.upperroom.org/resources/lectio-divina-praying-the-scriptures>.)

Other suggested passages of Scripture include:

- Isaiah 43:1-4
- Ephesians 1:3-10
- 1 John 3:1-3
- Colossians 1:15-20
- John 17:20-24

Prayer: Speak Lord, your servant is listening. Amen.

March 1 – Visio Divina

Read: Galatians 1:11-24

Thought for the Day: *Prayerful consideration of artwork can open the soul to be receptive to revelations from the Holy Spirit.*

Use art to focus your attention and allow space to encounter the divine. Prayer consideration of artwork can open the soul to be receptive to revelations from the Holy Spirit.

See detailed instructions courtesy of the Upper Room:

Try Visio Divina

1. Pick out an image from a website, a photograph, a painting, or an icon.
2. Look at the image and let your eyes stay on the very first thing that you see. Keep your attention on that part of the image that first catches your eye. Try to keep your eyes from wandering to other parts of the picture. Breathe deeply and let yourself gaze at that part of the image for a minute or so.
3. Now, let your eyes gaze at the whole image. Take your time and look at every part of the photograph. See it all. Reflect on the image for a minute or so.
4. Consider the following questions:
 - What emotions does this image evoke in you?
 - What does the image stir up in you, bring forth in you?
 - Does this image lead you into an attitude of prayer? If so, let these prayers take form in you. Write them down if you desire.
5. Now, offer your prayers to God in a final time of silence.

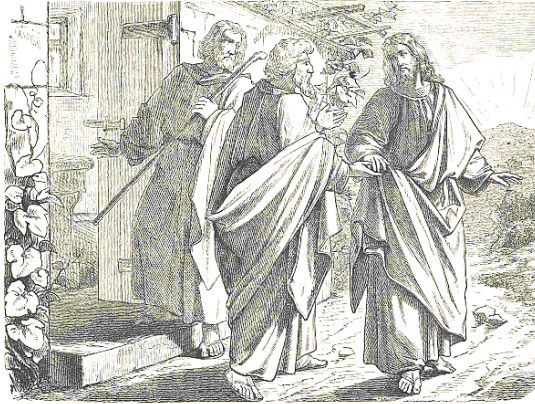
(<https://www.upperroom.org/resources/visio-divina>)

Suggested artworks may include:

- *The Return of the Prodigal Son* by Rembrandt
- *The Last Judgment* by Michelangelo
- *Christ of Saint John of the Cross* by Salvador Dali
- *Christ in Gethsemane* by Heinrich Hofmann
- *Trinity* by Andrei Rublev
- *The Denial of Saint Peter* by Caravaggio
- *The Good Samaritan* by Eugene Delacroix (see if you can discern whether the Samaritan is helping the wounded man onto or down from the horse)

Prayer:

Open my eyes that I may see
glimpses of truth thou hast for me.
Place in my hands the wonderful key
that shall unclasp and set me free.
Silently now I wait for thee,
ready, my God, thy will to see.
Open my eyes, illumine me,
Spirit divine!
Amen.



March 2 – Reading the Signs – Walk Outside

Read: Choose your favorites or try reading from the list below.

- Psalm 77:12; 98:7-9; 118:23; 150:6
- Nehemiah 9:6
- Isaiah 35:1-2

Thought for the Day: *Walk expectantly, eager to encounter the Creator.*

Before venturing outside, consider a few scriptures that speak to the majesty of creation. For those who prefer music, sing or listen to or read the words of the hymn, “How Great Thou Art.” Once our hearts are prepared, walk out in nature and explore God's creation at a park or botanical garden. Gaze into the sky and marvel at a brilliant sunrise or sunset. Enjoy the fragrant blooms and beautiful colors of spring. Walk expectantly, eager to encounter the Creator.

Pay attention to nature and listen with all your senses.

- What do you hear?
- What do you see?
- What do you feel (the breeze blowing through your hair, the sun warm on your face, the rough bark of a tree, the soft petals of a flower)?
- What do you smell (freshly cut grass, a wood fire burning in a neighbor's chimenea, sweet-smelling blossoms of the season)?

Prayer: Father God, we give you praise and glory for your greatness in all the earth. We thank you for recording your amazing story for us to see our lives in your story: convicting us in our sin, redeeming us in your grace. We pray that you fortify us to spread your great story of love, grace, and redemption through Your Son, Jesus the Christ. Amen. (prayer by James Young)

March 3 – Read Through Touch – Sunday

Read: Matthew 9:27-31; Mark 8:22-26; John 9:1-7, Mark 10:46-52; Luke 18:35-43.

Thought for the Day: *How does Bartimaeus “see” what the crowd cannot?*

Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem when he encounters a blind beggar on the outskirts of town. How does Bartimaeus “see” what the crowd cannot?

Following both worship services, there is an opportunity to “read” or explore through our sense of touch in the Saginaw UMC fellowship hall. Please join us for a light lunch. Love offering gratefully accepted.

Recognize the power of touch in our dealings with others. A gentle pat on the shoulder, a steadying arm for those who are mobility impaired, a welcoming handshake to greet a visitor, a reassuring hug for a child who might have bumped their knee. All these types of touches (done appropriately and with consent) can be powerful means of conveying our compassion and concern for others.

- How can we use our sense of touch to see?
- How can others recognize God's touch through us?
- How did Jesus employ the power of touch?

Prayer: Lord, enable us to recognize the ways in which You animate life all around us. Open our spiritual vision to perceive how You are active all around us. Amen. (prayer by Nathaniel Metz)

March 4 – Read Scriptures to Others

Read: Matthew 22:37-40 NRSV

Thought for the Day: *Volunteer*

Volunteer at a local assisted living facility and offer to read the Bible with those who are lonely or unable to read for themselves. Teach a children's Sunday School class. Volunteer to visit home-centered people who cannot attend church and read their favorite Bible passages.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the gift of your inspired word. May we use it as intended and share it with others. Amen. (prayer by Dee Griffith)



Fast

Read: *Esther 4:1-16 & Luke 4:1-13*

Thought for the Day: *When we are called to fast, our focus should be on the Lord, not food.*

There are multiple examples of fasting throughout the Old and New Testaments. In the Hebrew Bible, one well-known example of fasting is found in the book of Esther. Haman plotted to commit genocide and kill all the Jews in Persia. Esther's uncle, Mordecai sent word for her to beg the king for help. However, Queen Esther knew that to defy the king would be to risk her life. How did she summon the courage to go to the king?

¹When Mordecai learned all that had been done, Mordecai tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry; ²he went up to the entrance of the king's gate, for no one might enter the king's gate clothed with sackcloth. ³In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

⁴When Esther's maids and her eunuchs came and told her, the queen was deeply distressed; she sent garments to clothe Mordecai, so that he

might take off his sackcloth; but he would not accept them. ⁵Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, who had been appointed to attend her, and ordered him to go to Mordecai to learn what was happening and why. ⁶Hathach went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate, ⁷and Mordecai told him all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay into the king's treasuries for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸Mordecai also gave him a copy of the written decree issued in Susa for their destruction, that he might show it to Esther, explain it to her, and charge her to go to the king to make supplication to him and entreat him for her people.

⁹Hathach went and told Esther what Mordecai had said. ¹⁰Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message for Mordecai, saying, ¹¹"All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—all alike are to be put to death. Only if the king holds out the golden scepter to someone, may that person live. I myself have not been called to come in to the king for thirty days." ¹²When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, ¹³Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, "Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. ¹⁴For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this." ¹⁵Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, ¹⁶"Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:1-16).

Do not fast from water. Consult with a physician before attempting to fast from food. The intensity with which Queen Esther fasted and prayed was profound. Have we ever felt called to pray or fast with such determination and intensity? If so, what was the result?

The New Testament offers a powerful account of fasting in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus fasted forty days and was tempted by Satan.

¹Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, ²where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. ³The devil said to him, 'If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread.' ⁴Jesus answered him, 'It is written, "One does not live by bread alone."' "

⁵Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. ⁶And the devil said to him, 'To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. ⁷If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.' ⁸Jesus answered him, 'It is written,

"Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.' "

⁹Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, 'If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, ¹⁰for it is written,

"He will command his angels concerning you,
to protect you", ¹¹ and

"On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' "

¹²Jesus answered him, 'It is said, "Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' "

¹³When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time (Luke 4:1-13).

Jesus is fully human and fully divine. Jesus could fast for 40 days, but we cannot. **Do not fast from water.** Consult with a physician before attempting to fast from food.

When we are called to fast, our focus should be on the Lord, not food. Many who have been called to fast report that they were not hungry and that their experience drew them closer to God and deepened their faith. May it be so with us as we explore various forms of fasting over the next ten days.

Prayer: Jesus, we praise you for the opportunity to feast on your word every day so that we are satisfied and made whole. We pray that all may recognize that even in today's fast-paced world, we will not be satisfied unless we know that we cannot live by physical food alone. In the mighty name of Jesus we pray: Amen. (prayer by Gabrielle Smith)

March 5 – Fast from social media (Facebook, TikTok, Instagram, Twitter/X)

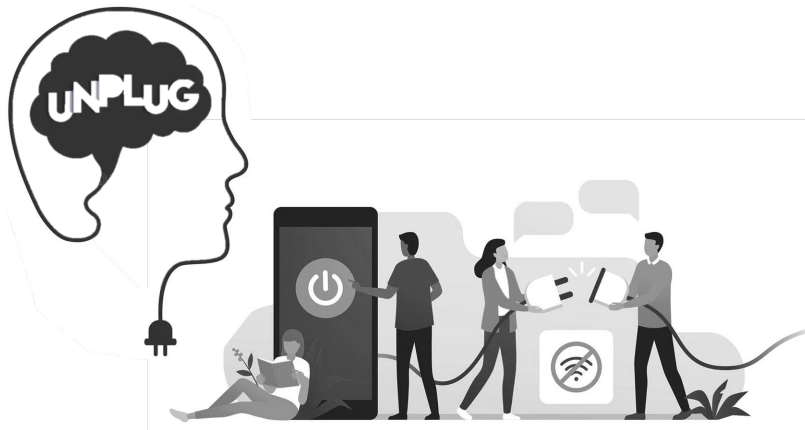
Read: Philippians 4:8

Thought for the Day: *Focus on spiritual disciplines.*

Consider how much time we spend on our screens? Many cell phones provide trackers to calculate how much time we spend staring at our phones daily.

If it feels overwhelming or impossible to fast entirely from our social media, at least try to cut our screen time in half. Take a break from social media and use the time we might have spent scrolling through cat videos to focus on other spiritual disciplines or send a friend a handwritten note or card instead.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, help us to be mindful of how we spend our time. Draw us nearer to you, deepen our faith, create in us a deep desire to know you, teach us to hear your voice and the gentle whispers of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



March 6 – Fast from talking – spend time in silence.

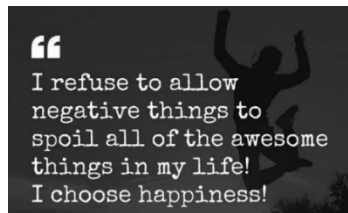
Read: Psalm 46:10

Thought for the Day: *While words are powerful, silence can be even more so.*

As a pastor, I spend a great deal of time talking. My husband patiently listens as I practice sermons and prepare for Sundays. Once, after hearing me practice a difficult sermon, my husband quipped, "If silence were golden, we'd be broke!"

While words are powerful, silence can be even more so. Spend ten minutes in silence. Listen. The Spirit often whispers to our hearts if we will make time to be still (Psalm 46:10).

Prayer: Pray silently for those who have no voice.



March 7 – Fast from Negativity

Read: James 1:19-27

Thought for the Day: *Give up bitterness, grudges, anger, or other negative attitudes."*

Take a day and commit to being positive. Give up bitterness, grudges, anger, or other negative attitudes.

Before going to sleep, reflect on all that transpired during the day.

- Were you successful at fasting from negativity?
- How did it feel?
- How did others respond?
- How can being more positive become a new habit each day?

Prayer: Dear Loving Triune God, please forgive me for holding on to bitterness, grudges, anger, and other negative attitudes. Help me to forgive people who have harmed me or my loved ones. Help me show the same measure of grace to others you have shown me. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen! (prayer by Ramon F. Smith, Senior Pastor)

March 8 – Fish Friday

Read: Deuteronomy 8:1-5 and Matthew 4:12-22

Thought for the Day: *Follow Jesus*

Fast from beef, pork, or chicken. Spend time contemplating what it may have been like for Peter, Andrew, John, and James to set aside their fishing livelihoods and follow Jesus to “fish” for people.

Prayer: Use the Lectio Divina to contemplate Matthew 4:12-22.



March 9 – No Screens

Read: Romans 12:2

Thought for the Day: *Spend “quality time” with loved ones.*

Fast from TV, video games, tablets, smartphones, YouTube, or movies. Instead, spend quality time playing cards, dominoes, board games, charades, or other games as a family.

Prayer: Loving God, help me to be fully present with you and my loved ones. In the name of the Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen! (prayer by Ramon F. Smith, Senior Pastor)

March 10 – Fast from Busy-ness – Sunday

Read: Exodus 20:8

Thought for the Day: *Revere a time of Sabbath and make good use of that time to pause, rest, and honor the Lord.*

Encourage yourself to honor the Sabbath. While we don't need to count the number of steps we take or become legalistic about what constitutes labor, we do hope to revere a time of Sabbath and make good use of that time to pause, rest, and honor the Lord.

Whether you choose to set aside a Saturday or a Sunday, the focus should be on setting aside a special time to rest and adopt an attitude of worship, gratitude, and reflection. In our modern culture, our days are overscheduled, and people are pressured to do more. A true Sabbath should not be “just another day.”

- What does it feel like to set aside a day to rest and reflect on God?
- How do we respond to businesses who choose to close on Sundays?
- How can we make this a regular practice?

Following the 11:00 am worship service, you are invited to join us for a potluck lunch and time of fellowship.

Prayer: Dear God, help me set aside time to rest in you. In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

March 11 – Fast from Sugar

Read: Matthew 4:2

Thought for the Day: *“Fasting leads us to a deeper understanding of God's will for us.”*
(quote from Rev. Dr. Jay Beavers)

Avoid anything sweet.

Whenever we are tempted to reach for a sweet treat, sugar in our coffee or honey in our tea, instead, take time to pray for those experiencing the bitterness of oppression.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, rather than filling our cravings for sweet treats, help us crave the sweetness of friendships, kindness towards others, and feasting on your holy word. Amen.

March 12 – Fast from Fast Food**Read:** Matthew 14:13-21**Thought for the Day:** *Give so that others have food to eat.*

If we regularly stop by for fast food lunches, dinner out on Friday night, or our favorite beverages at Starbucks, fast from our routines. Instead, set aside the same amount we usually spend and give the money to Community Link, or a food bank of your choosing, so that others might have food to eat.

Prayer: O God, please awaken in us the need for the Bread of Life. By your grace, give us the power to choose life, fill us up with your love, and help us to grow in grace daily. Amen.



March 13 – Fast From Candy

Read: Romans 8:18-25

Thought for the Day: *How can I serve?*

Instead, fill plastic eggs with candy for the Saginaw UMC Egg Hunt, benefiting community children.

Prayer:

Practice Using the ACTS Method of Prayer

1. Adore God.
2. Confess our sins.
3. Thank God.
4. Supplications are requests.

Here is an example.

Gracious God (adoration), I have failed to hear the cry of the children in our community who need us (confession). I thank you for all the many ways you have blessed us (thanks). Help us to discern how to champion children and youth in our community (supplication). Help us see the needs and lovingly address the needs out of the abundance of gifts and resources you have entrusted to us (supplication).

In the name of Jesus Christ, I pray. Amen.

March 14 – Break Your Fast

Read: Psalm 34:8

Thought for the Day: *The Lord is good.*

End your fast; taste and see that the Lord is good (Psalm 34:8). Prepare a meal filled with some of your favorite recipes. Invite family, friends, or neighbors and share this good meal with friends/neighbors. Offer up a heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving and blessing before enjoying the food.



Give Intentional Acts of Kindness

Traditionally, Christians give up a variety of things during Lent. Some give up sweets, chocolate, or carbs to kickstart their diets. Some give up cigars, alcohol, or other vices. Still, others choose to give up their morning coffee. While those may be good things to give up, the real point of giving up things is to draw us nearer to God.

What if we focus on giving rather than giving up? Whenever we are called to give, the first thing that often comes to our mind is money. Money is not the only way to give to the Kingdom of God. What if we gave up bitterness, unforgiveness, or anger? What if we picked up positive things in their place? What if we give kindness?

The following is a suggested list of people or groups we can show kindness towards during our ten days of Intentional Acts of Kindness (March 15th through March 24th). Additionally, we have provided suggestions for acts of kindness.

Consider doing some of these acts with a group or Sunday School class. Please remember to include a kindness card with your acts of kindness. Lastly, we would love to hear your stories about how your small act made a big impact. The form can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/bhjdyfwn>

Saginaw Firefighters

Address: 400 US-287 BUS, Saginaw, TX 76179

Phone: (817) 230-0403

Saginaw Police Officers

Address: 505 W McLeroy Blvd, Saginaw, TX 76179

Phone: (817) 232-0311

The Lodge Nursing Assisted Living Staff

Address: 848 West McLeroy, Saginaw, TX 76179

Phone: 682-900-1210

Saginaw Elementary School Lunch Workers and Custodians

Address: 301 W McLeroy Blvd, Fort Worth, TX 76179

Phone: (817) 232-0631

Little Blessings Parents

New Neighbors

Estranged loved one or old friend

Unchurched people

Free or low cost:

- Thank you cards or handwritten thank you notes
- Invitation to come to Church
- Reconnecting with an old friend or a family member
- Bags of candy

Other ideas:

- Order Pizza for Firehouse or Police Station
- Baskets with snacks (chips, candy bars, jerky, popcorn, etc.)
- Cases of Gatorade, Powerade, or Water

March 15 – Give Your Time

Read: Galatians 6:6-10; Hebrews 13:16

Thought for the Day: *Give Kindness.*

Volunteer at Community Link, with Friends of Lancaster, with our Kid's Hope program at Saginaw Elementary, our church, Saginaw UMC, and other local charities.

Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request (forgiveness))

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 16 – Give Your Talents/Skills**Read:** 1 Corinthians 12**Thought for the Day:** *Share*

Share what we love to do, such as music, quilting, woodworking, gardening, knitting/crocheting, or other hobbies.

Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request forgiveness)

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 17 – Give Praise to God – Sunday

Read: Exodus 15:1-3

Thought for the Day: *Come Worship*

Come worship with us at Saginaw UMC! Sing in the choir, raise the roof in praises to our Lord, teach a Sunday School class, pray for others, play an instrument in our church orchestra, or greet visitors. There are 10,000 Reasons to bless the Lord, worship his holy name, and sing like never before. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DXDGE_IRIOE

We can also worship together by blessing others, sharing joys, telling others where we've seen God at work in our lives, and inviting friends and neighbors to come to church.

- Are we expecting to experience God in our lives?
- How do we praise God after church and during our day-to-day activities?

Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

Please join us in the Fellowship Hall after the 11 am worship service for a St. Patrick's Day baked potato luncheon. There will also be a dessert auction benefitting the SUMC Youth!

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request (forgiveness))

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 18 – Give in to God's Will

Read: Matthew 25:35-40

Thought for the Day: *Be mindful and intentional in seeking God's will.*

As we learned the Lord's Prayer, we touched on "Thy Will be Done." Are we mindful and intentional in seeking God's will? William Barclay put it this way, "Prayer ought always to be an attempt to submit our wills to the will of God" (Gospel of Matthew, Vol. 1, 199).

What is God's will for our life? For our church? For our community? How are we working to see that God's will is done in areas of social justice – caring for the poor, visiting those in prison, caring for the sick or lonely, feeding the hungry, and protecting the children? Are we working to fulfill our mission as a Matthew 25:35-40 church?

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, remind me of your love and all your many blessings. Help me trust you more each day. Thy will be done. Amen.

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request (forgiveness))

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 19 – Give Alms/Funds/Resources

Read: Matthew 6:2-4

Thought for the Day: *We are blessed to be a blessing!*

We are blessed to be a blessing! The Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea are both part of the Jordan river. The Sea of Galilee allows the waters to flow both in and out. It's teeming with life! The Dead Sea takes everything that flows with the Jordan and keeps it all. Nothing leaves the Dead Sea except through evaporation. The salt content is so high that nothing can survive. It does not release anything. The Dead Sea only holds tightly to all it can. We need to be a conduit of God's blessings.

²“‘So whenever you give alms, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, so that they may be praised by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward. ³But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matthew 6:2-4).

“Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back” (Luke 6:38).

Prayer: Choose one of the prayer practices that you have learned from this devotional or pray as you feel most comfortable.

March 20 – Give Up Control**Read:** Proverbs 3:5-6**Thought for the Day:** *Surrender*

We need to surrender our desires to control. Start off each day by surrendering our day's agenda to the Lord. What would God have us do? Whom would God have us meet or pray for today? Are we waiting expectantly for the gentle nudge of the Holy Spirit?

- ⁵ "Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
and do not rely on your own insight.
⁶ In all your ways acknowledge him,
and he will make straight your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6).

Prayer: Choose one of the prayer practices that you have learned from this devotional or pray as you feel most comfortable.

March 21 – Give the Gift of Presence**Read:** Matthew 25:35-37**Thought for the Day:** *Volunteer & Visit*

So many of our members are home-centered and unable to attend worship in person. We host worship services at The Lodge Rehabilitation facility on the second Sunday of each month. We need more volunteers to help us connect with those in worship. There are several facilities in the area, and member or not, most everyone enjoys a visitor to spend some time chatting or just helping others feel God's love! Sharing the gift of presence means that we go visit someone who is sick or lonely.

Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request forgiveness)

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 22 – Give Meaning

Read: Joshua 4:1-10

Thought for the Day: *Do something that lasts.*

Do something that lasts – create a legacy of purpose/intention. What are we doing now that provides meaning for those who come behind us?

Prayer: Pope John Paul II's 2002 edition of the Roman Missal provides an alternative collect for this Friday:

O God, who in this season
give your Church the grace
to imitate devoutly the Blessed Virgin Mary
in contemplating the Passion of Christ,
grant, we pray, through her intercession,
that we may cling more firmly each day
to your Only Begotten Son
and come at last to the fullness of his grace. Amen.

March 23 – Give Your Heart

Read: Give your whole self; give your everything – Deuteronomy 6:4-5.

Thought for the Day: *“My eyes will be open to the needs of those around me and see how I can help.” (Quote from Belia Thompson)*

Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

End of the Day Reflection:

- Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)
- What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)
- What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request forgiveness)
- What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)



Holy Week

Too often, we are tempted to go from the shouts of Hosannah on Palm Sunday to the joy and glory of the Resurrection on Easter Sunday! It's tempting to avoid the difficult services during Holy Week that remind us of all that Christ suffered; however, we cannot fully appreciate the joys of Easter morning unless we've walked through the darkness and sorrows of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

March 24 – Palm Sunday

Read: Mark 11:1-11

Thought for the Day: *Is the King in my heart?*

Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

Please invite your children, grandchildren, and neighbors to come to the parade of palms. Hosanna!

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request (forgiveness))

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 25-Reflection

Read: John 12:1-11

Thought for the Day: *Give an extravagant gift to the Lord.*

Take time for personal reflection. What are we feeling? How is God speaking to us? Give thanks to Jesus for all he endured on our behalf.

Prayer: Use the Lection Divina to encounter the scripture. Or:

Use the ACTS Method of Prayer

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

March 26 – Choose Light**Read:** John 12:20-36**Thought for the Day:** *Walk in the Light***Prayer:** Use Lectio Divina to encounter the text.**Or****Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer**

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request (forgiveness))

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 27 – Embodied Worship Experience**Read:** Romans 8:31-39**Thought for the Day:** *Nothing can separate us from the love of God.***Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer**

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

Please join us in the Fellowship Hall for an immersive experience of worship, prayer, and connection with our Truine God. This is a come-and-go activity from 10 am to 2 pm. Come by on your lunch break!

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request forgiveness)

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 28 – Maundy Thursday**Read:** John 13:1-17, 31b-35**Thought for the Day:** *Humility***Prayer:** Use the Lectio Divina to contemplate the scripture.**End of the Day Reflection:**

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request forgiveness)

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action.)

March 29 – Good Friday**Read:** John 18:1-19:42**Thought for the Day:** *Sacrificial Love****Please join us at 6:30 pm in the sanctuary for Good Friday service.*****Prayer:** Thank you, Lord. Amen.

March 30 – Holy Saturday

Read: Matthew 27:57-66

Thought for the Day: *The grave could not hold him.*

Prayer: Use the ACTS Method of Prayer

- Adore God.
- Confess our sins.
- Thank God.
- Supplications are requests.

Please invite your children, grandchildren, and neighbors to attend our Children's Egg Hunt from 10 am to 12 pm.

End of the Day Reflection:

Where and how did I experience God today? (Give thanks, and adoration to God)

What good did I do for others today? (Give thanks to God for allowing you to be a channel of God's grace.)

What harm did I cause today? (Confess your sins and request (forgiveness))

What broke my heart today? (Supplication: pray for the needs of others and ask God to help you discern if God is calling you to take action)

March 31 – Easter Sunday

Read: John 20:1-18

Thought for the Day: *He is Risen*

Come experience a joyful worship service to celebrate Jesus' Resurrection! Pay special attention to visitors and new guests. Make sure new faces are connected with pastors and friendly members who will take them to get coffee or cookies, show them around the church, offer children's activity bags if they have small children, make sure first-time visitors receive a gift bag, thank them for coming, and invite them to come again next Sunday.

Prayer: Pray as the Holy Spirit leads you.

HE IS RISEN
Hallelujah!



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Worship Services: Sundays at 8:30 am & 11:00 am