An abstract painting featuring a central black cross. The background is composed of various colors including blue, yellow, red, and orange, with visible brushstrokes and textures. The cross is formed by thick, dark black paint.

Journey to the Cross

With the Voices of St. Mark

St. Mark by the Sea Lutheran Church

Lent 2026

What's in this Devotional?

In this devotional you'll find a daily devotion each Monday – Friday, written by members of St. Mark by The Sea – your friends, your fellow worshippers, your partners in ministry.

Saturdays are devoted to kids! All with a Lenten focus . . . and targeted to kids of EVERY age!

Sundays focus on 'Spiritual Practices' . . . maybe a practice or 2 that may be new to you . . .

Everything is focused on and pointing to the Risen Christ!

We thank God for the gifts of all those writers who contributed to this devotional, with special thanks to Rick Gibbs for providing all the Sunday 'religious practices' and Sherri Hunter for all the children's sections!

Blessings on your Lenten journey!

Your Devotional Team

Michele Hilton – Chair

Garrett Marinconz

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Sandy Moyer

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Extra-ordinary thanks and gratitude to Cyndi Culpepper:
Artistic Director, Graphic Designer, and Supreme model of patience

Pastor's Message

Dear Beloved Community in Christ,

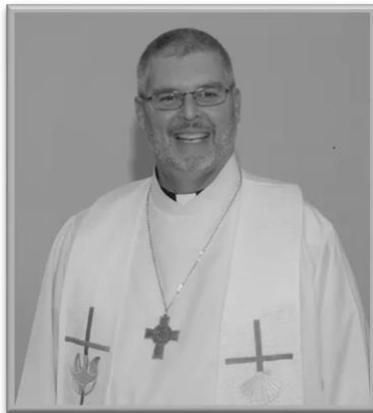
As we prepare to enter the Lenten season, we take this precious time to open our hearts for a period of contemplation and repentance. This moment allows us to pause and reevaluate the core meaning of our existence, presenting an opportunity for significant transformation; a first step at the crossroads in our journey toward becoming the individuals God has intended us to be. I look forward to meeting you at this important juncture as we walk together toward the glorious Resurrection Dawn of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Let us join in prayer:

“Lord Jesus, You embody my righteousness, while I carry Your sin. You embraced what was mine, and in turn, You gifted me with what is Yours. You transformed into what You were not, so that I might become something new.” Amen! — Lent Prayer by Martin Luther

Peace,

~Rev. Vincent R. Iocona, Jr.~



What is Lent?

Lent is a season of invitation. It calls us to step away from the noise of our daily lives and turn our hearts toward God. It is a time of reflection, repentance, and renewal—a journey that leads us to the cross and, beyond it, to the hope of resurrection.

For forty days, we walk with Jesus through the wilderness, through the lessons of his ministry, and finally to the deep sorrow of his suffering. Along the way, we are invited to look inward, to examine our hearts, and to consider what might be drawing us away from God's love. This is not a journey of guilt, but of grace. It is a time to return, to be honest about our need for God, and to trust that God meets us with mercy.

Lent is not just about giving something up—it is about making space for something greater. Whether through prayer, fasting, or acts of kindness, we are called to open ourselves more fully to God's presence. In this season, we remember that God is always at work, shaping us, forgiving us, and leading us into new life.

As we move through these days, may we walk with hearts open to God's transforming love. May we embrace the stillness, the questions, and even the struggles, knowing that Christ walks this road before us and with us. And as we arrive at the empty tomb on Easter morning, may we find our hearts renewed, ready to proclaim the good news: Christ is risen indeed!

Blessings on your Lenten journey,

~Deacon Peggy Aiello~

ASH WEDNESDAY

All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

What does this make us think about?

I feel that Ecclesiastes 3:20 is meant to be a reminder of our shared humanity. No matter our achievements, status, or possessions, we all share a common beginning and an end: dust. It helps us recognize the fleeting nature of earthly concerns and focus on what truly matters. Most importantly, our relationship with God and how we treat others.

This verse offers perspective in moments when pride creeps in or when we are tempted to compare ourselves to others. It gently reminds us that all our earthly being and actions are temporary. What each of us has to offer is our character, our compassion, and the legacy of love we leave behind. Knowing that we “all return to dust” can encourage us to live with greater humility and gratitude, appreciating each day as a gift.

As soon as I read this verse, I immediately thought of the song by The Byrd's written in 1965. Turn, Turn, Turn. As the first two verses go:

*To everything, turn, turn, turn.
There is a season, turn, turn, turn.
And a time to every purpose under heaven
A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep*

We are only here on this earth for a short time; we need to treat people the way we expect to be treated and cherish every bit of joy, love, and happiness we have to offer and can receive. Take time today to reflect on the blessings you have received, knowing they are temporary gifts from God. As we leave tonight, with the ashes that have been placed upon our heads, let Ecclesiastes 3:20 shape the way you see yourself and others, grounding your life in gratitude and humility as you walk through each day. “All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.”

~George Moyer~

Distribution of Ashes 12 pm and 7 pm

Deuteronomy 30:15-16

February 19, 2026

See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.

Moses presents a clear choice: life and good, or death and evil. Though spoken to the Israelites long ago, this message remains deeply relevant today.

Choosing God means walking in His ways—loving Him and loving others. But doing the right thing isn't always the easiest choice.

As a parent, I see how hard it can be for my children to choose honesty, kindness, and generosity. But as adults, we face the same struggles. We sometimes lie to protect ourselves, judge those who see the world differently, and cling to our resources instead of sharing.

Yet God calls us to love. And when we choose love, we find life—full of grace, peace, and blessing.

Faith Practice

Ask yourself this simple question: “*What would Jesus do?*” Let it guide you today to choose what is good, what is right, and what leads to life.

~LeeAnn Pringle~

O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger, or discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are shaking with terror. My soul also is struck with terror, while you, O Lord—how long? Turn, O Lord, save my life; deliver me for the sake of your steadfast love.

Psalm 6 is the first of seven penitential psalms (6, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143) frequently used as part of the Christian church's Lenten observance, starting with Ash Wednesday. The theme of these seven psalms is consistent: the psalmist expresses deep sorrow for his sin, asking God for help and forgiveness.

David's confession before God is anchored in his confidence that God will forgive. He calls out for God's deliverance, convinced that God will hear and answer because of God's steadfast love. In spite of the situation in which David finds himself, he knows that he will not permanently abide in terror and distress because of God's unfailing love.

Faith Practice

Be an example of God's forgiveness

~Rev Leigh Boelkins Van Kempen (adapted)~

ALL ARE WELCOME . . . there is a seat for you!

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OR

our Heritage Service at 11 am

Coffee & connecting in Fellowship Hall between services

Each day I will pray

I will give alms by

I will fast by

My Bible Verse to memorize

Sundays are little Easters.
I will celebrate by

Ash Wednesday

(space for God or room for God)

Exodus 20:5 Tells us that part of the first commandment is that God is a jealous God that thou shalt not bow down thyself to idols, nor serve them. God is also, jealous of our time and relationships if they come before our relationship with Him or the time we spend with Him.

Remember Jesus' visit to Martha and Mary's? Luke 10:38-42: *Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house. And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. But Martha was cumbered about much serving, and came to him, and said, Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me.*

And Jesus answered and said unto her, Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things. But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken from her.

Both Martha and Mary made room for God but only Mary spent time with him. Mary was more interested in her relationship with Christ. Martha was more interested in the hospitality and feeding the body.

Jesus is more interested in feeding our souls, thus the bread and wine, and having a relationship with us.

This Lent let us do more than make room for God. Tempus cum Deo (time with God). Let us spend time with him and build our relationship.

~Rick Gibbs~

‘When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

This passage emphasizes the importance of caring for the needs of others, as it reflects one's true actions towards Jesus.

Yes, these verses always caught my attention when I read them... it's like, they summarized the whole gospel in a few words... to care for our neighbor.

A neighbor is the person that happens to be sitting next to you in church or close to you in a train, plane or just your neighbor down the street and I treat them with respect... at this time of Lent, when we're reflecting about our lives, our Christian lives, perhaps we realize we haven't been as good as Jesus would have liked us to be to our neighbor.... Then I think, time to mend.

I haven't been good in making an effort to visit our church members when they are sick or send a text or an email or a card to show her/him somebody is caring about their illness... or make some chicken and veggies and bring it to them, that will put a smile on their faces. As I said, time to mend . . . I have sent a few emails, and I am making food for a woman who coming from the hospital.

~Nellie L Brawn~

THE OFFERTORY

Create in me a pure heart, O God; and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me.

The offertory sung every Sunday at Bethany Evangelical Lutheran Church in South Bend, Indiana always began “Create in me a clean Heart, O God,” from the old red 1958 edition of the Lutheran Service and Hymnal. Growing up as a member of that church, I never knew the words were a psalm.

But what do the words mean? What exactly is a steadfast spirit? Oftentimes, my natural laziness kicks in when asked to help with something. I force myself to ask myself, “What is the right thing to do for everyone?” Once I figure that out, that is what I do. To my chagrin, the answer usually isn’t “Sit in my recliner.”

Faith Practice

What worship memories from your youth do you have? How do you cultivate them?

~John Sheneman~

*What are you waiting for? Return to your Lord!
Commit yourself in love, in justice!
Wait for your God, and don't give up on him—ever!*

Waiting . . . waiting is hard. Whether it's a child waiting for a birthday, a teenager waiting for a college acceptance letter, or an adult waiting for a job offer, waiting is just hard. As Christians, we earnestly pray to God daily. We absolutely believe that our prayers will be answered. But . . . waiting for God's answer is difficult. We become impatient. When we pray for an end to war and violence, hunger, and injustice, we despair when our prayers don't seem to be answered. "Where is God?" we ask. "Why has He deserted us?" We may be tempted to turn away from God and look elsewhere for answers. But as Hosea told the Israelites who had strayed from God, "What are you waiting for? Return to your Lord! Commit yourself in love, in justice! Wait for your God, and don't give up on him—ever!"

During this Lenten season as we contemplate the profound depth of God's love and forgiveness, evidenced by Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross for our sins, and as we anticipate the glorious, oh glorious day of his resurrection, let's practice patience, let's wait for God, knowing that God will never give up on us and we should never give up on Him.

~Sandy Phillips~

*Join us tonight for a brief Lenten service at 6 pm,
followed by soup, sandwiches and group reflection.*

For surely you know the plans, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

I remember having a discussion with my fellow church bell choir friends. I don't know how it came up but we started talking about how some of us had left the church for a while but came back. One in our group asked me what brought me back. I didn't have an immediate response. "I'm not entirely sure" was my first response, followed by "I was missing something in my life".

There was a dark time in my life and that is when I stopped going to church. I remember I started feeling empty and lost and I blamed it on the things going on in my life at the time. I'm not sure why I found myself back in church but, I believe the Holy Spirit opened a small crack in a door and beckoned me to open it. I believe that the sadness, emptiness, and loneliness was me losing faith, hope, and trust in God. Things still get hard sometimes, but I know that not having God and church in my life leaves me feeling empty. It is comforting to know there is a plan for me, even if I don't recognize it.

Heavenly Father, thank you for believing in me and opening that door. Please help others who need help finding their way back to you. Help them to feel your presence and have faith and trust in you. Help us stay strong when we are weak. In your name we pray. Amen.

~Darla Allison~

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

When I think about this verse, I'm amazed at how much God loves us. He gave His only Son so that we could have life that never ends. That's not a small thing—it's the greatest gift ever given. Lent is a good time to stop and think about that love and what it means for how I live. Am I showing love to others the way God has loved me?

God's love reaches right into the parts of my life that need help and healing. When I remember how deeply I'm loved, it makes me want to share that same love with others. Even small acts of kindness can show the world a little bit of who Jesus is.

Faith Practice

Do one small thing today to show love to someone—say a kind word, forgive someone, or lend a helping hand.

~Kathie Garguilo~

ALL ARE WELCOME . . . there is a seat for you!

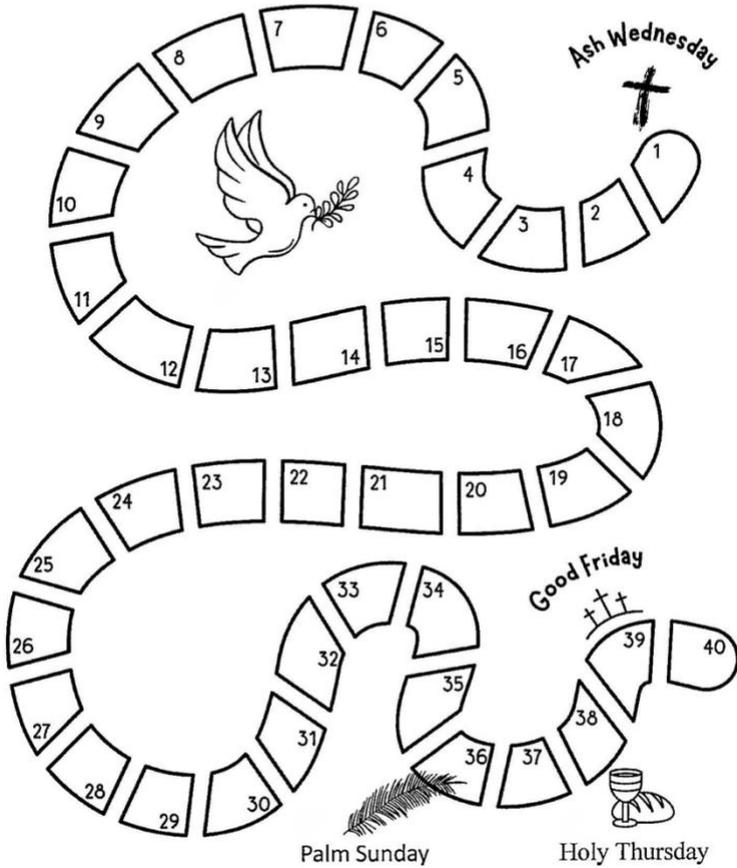
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OR

our Heritage Service at 11 am

Coffee & connecting in Fellowship Hall between services

my Lent Tracker



I think, perhaps a lot of people may have never heard of this before. The concept started with Origen in 185-232 who put forth the idea of reading to discover a deeper meaning or finding a hidden message of God.

Later around 1150 Guigo systematized the idea into the four steps or moments: reading meditation, prayer and contemplation, “the Monks Ladder”.

Luther’s perspective was to continually lead one back to the word by prayer, temptation. To turn self-seeking men back to the word, thus back to God himself. Psalm 25:14 says, “The secret of the Lord is with those who fear Him, and He will show them His covenant.”

So, where does this leave us? What is our motivation to seek a “hidden message or deeper meaning”? Are we Reading the Devine Word of God, (looking for enlightenment and understanding of God) or Devine Reading (looking for new revelation)?

The Bible is complete and needs nothing additional. God did not forget to tell us something. Therefore, we should read to become one with the Word. That is, we know Christ is the incarnate Word and we should read with the intent to become one with Christ. When reading the Bible, pray first for the understanding and enlightenment and ask the questions that you don’t understand. Seek God’s understanding not our own. Then pray again that the Holy Spirit would remind you what was revealed.

Lord, teach us to love You with all our hearts, minds, souls and strength and your word as yourself.

~Rick Gibbs~

But you are not to be called “Rabbi”, for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. And do not call anyone on earth “father,” for you have one Father, and he is in Heaven. Nor are you to be called “teacher,” for you have one Teacher, the Christ. The greatest among you will be your servant. For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

There is a warning here to not seek titles which simply foster pride. We are all brothers and should be Christ-like, not seeking to be better than anyone else. Christ-like means to share his love with all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10).

Let not the sin of pride sneak into your heart. Jesus washed his disciple’s feet, imagine that! Although we don’t wash the sand from people’s feet now-a-days, we can still humble ourselves and do one nice thing a day, regardless of if a stranger or friend . . . this is a good faith practice.

Perhaps you are shy to speak to someone you don’t know, so you can wear a cross necklace every day. It will surprise you at how many people will question your “silent witness”: grocery store cashiers, passers-by on the street, etc.

Remember, we have only one Father in Heaven, we never will be orphans!! He is Father of all and loves all. Learning from Christ, you can show people proof of that love.

~Kari Shisler~

This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who depends on flesh for his strength and whose heart turns away from the Lord. He will be like a bush in the wastelands; he will not see prosperity when it comes. He will dwell in the parched places of the desert, in a salt land where no one lives. But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.”

Here, Jeremiah is repeating the lesson from the words in Psalm 1. What it comes down to is the contrast of putting our trust in man or in God.

In our current world, there is a lot of division; a lot of hate; good vs. evil. If we don't trust in God, we are easily misled by people who rely totally on their own interpretation and misguided intentions. It is easy to fall into the trap of believing people who are authority figures, and their seemingly convincing protocol. This is exacerbated by the conditions that promote conflict. Thus man vs. man. Hurt. Anger. Division. No stability.

On the other hand, if we honor our faith in God, and trust in Him, the truth will prevail. We will see right win vs. wrong; good over evil. Man cannot win trusting in fallible man. Man can only win trusting in God.

So, the next time someone confronts you or challenges you with their “truth”, ask God to interpret it for you. Then you will know how He expects you to honor your truth. Jesus said, “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.”

What more do you need?

~Sheri Lewis~

“Truly I tell you,” He continued, “no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah’s time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.”

All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, to throw him off the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Reflection

Jesus had left home and was coming back. Word had reached the folks in Nazareth that Jesus was being hailed as a miracle worker. Standing in his hometown synagogue, Jesus spoke. At first the people were amazed and said to one another, “isn’t this Joseph’s son, isn’t his brothers and sisters still living among us?” Then they were outraged as Jesus spoke to their prejudice against anyone outside the Jewish faith. He reminded them that God used Elijah to help the widow in Zarephath and worse God used Elisha to cure Naaman the Syrian. What was Jesus up to reminding the hometown crowd that God hates prejudice. He is the God of and for all people. He even loves those we ignore or are suspicious of. Aren’t all people our brothers and sisters?

Faith Practice

Ask yourself, ‘do I harbor prejudice in my heart’? Pray for God to guide you to live without prejudice.

~Robert Pooley~

*Join us tonight for a brief Lenten service at 6 pm,
followed by soup, sandwiches and group reflection.*

Shepherd your people with your staff, the flock that belongs to you, which lives alone in a forest in the midst of a garden land; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead as in the days of old. As in the days when you came out of the land of Egypt, show us marvelous things.

Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of his possession? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in showing steadfast love. He will again have compassion upon us; he will tread our iniquities under foot.

You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our ancestors from the days of old.

Lent calls us into a season of confession and repentance, but Micah reminds us that repentance is not about despair but hope. God does not withhold mercy; God delights in showing it. Just as God once led God's people through the waters of the Red Sea, God leads us through the waters of baptism. We are cleansed, renewed, and set free.

Micah's words assure us that God's mercy runs deeper than our sins, casting them into the sea forever. This is grace! Our failures and regrets no longer define us; God's mercy does. As we journey through Lent, we are invited to rest in that mercy and trust the God who restores and renews us daily.

Faith Practice

Write your burdens, sins, or regrets on a small slip of paper. Pray Micah 7:18–19 aloud, then place the paper in water, remembering your sins are gone, and you are free in Christ.

~Pastor Brenda Piper~

Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed the crowd again, but they kept shouting “Crucify Him, Crucify Him.” A third time he said to them “Why, what evil has He done? I have found in Him no ground for the sentence of death.” But they kept urgently demanding with loud shouts that He should be crucified, and their voices prevailed.

Reflection

Jesus walked the loneliest road to His death. Was I there? Was I there in the crowd, with the burden of my sins, as He dragged His heavy cross? Was I there as a witness and a contributor to His misery? Did I mock Him as I was driven by my sins? Did my sinful nature cause me to laugh at His misfortune? Did the weight of my sins cause Him to fall? Did I jeer Him with the crowd as He accepted the piercing nails? Did I cause worse pain to Him than I could ever imagine?

Faith Practice

Were you there? Can you place yourself in those painful moments as Jesus walked the loneliest road for you? Will you leave your sins at the foot of His cross and accept the salvation Jesus offers with His deep love?

~Jenny Hanger~

ALL ARE WELCOME . . . there is a seat for you!

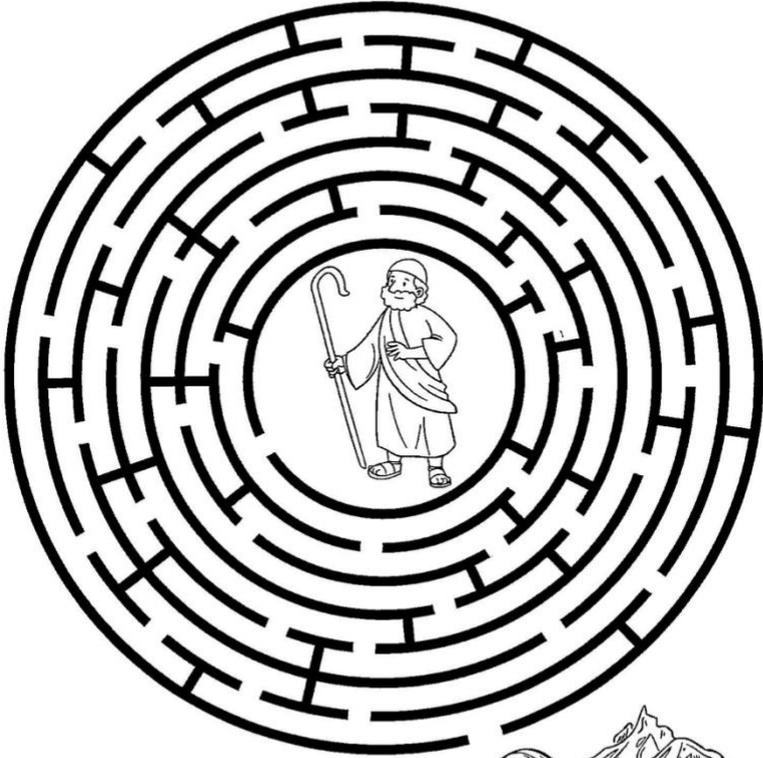
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maze



"He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness; he encircled him, he cared for him, he kept him as the apple of his eye.

Deuteronomy 32: 10

The Bible talks of fasting some 16 times. Six in conjunction with prayer and five in connection to repentance in sackcloth and ashes. Even some Jewish Kings fasted. King Darius fasted while Daniel was in the lion's den. The king of Nineva called for a national fast after hearing Johan's prophecy of impending destruction.

The act of fasting removes the common distraction of eating and meal preparation in order to devote our focus and attention on God and prayer to him.

Meal preparation in biblical times was much more involved than our current pulling food from a refrigerator or pantry. As compared to our current prep, cooking and eating in one hours' time. Thus, it provided significant time to spend with the Lord.

The sackcloth and ashes were a deep down in the soul remorse for a sin and strong desire to communicate that regret to God.

I've heard of people giving up pastries or chocolate for lent. The purpose of this has always been unclear for me but that is hardly a fast. What if we gave up the time spent on our electronic devices or TV, or both?

Afterall during Lent we are not expecting an impending disaster as the Ninevites, but forgiveness and a resurrection crafted by the almighty hand of God.

~Rick Gibbs~

But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. He prayed to the Lord, “Isn’t this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

But the Lord replied, “Is it right for you to be angry?”

Our observance of Lent goes back to Ninevah and Jonah, after the whale.

Jonah encouraged the people of Ninevah to fast, wear a sack cloth, sprinkle themselves and their animals with ashes and pray for God’s grace.

Much in the same way we spend the observance of Lent, acknowledging our need to get closer to God and remembering the sacrifice of Jesus and his resurrection.

~Dick & Carol Hewett~

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

Few words are as impactful or complex as Love. Christian artist, Lauren Daigle asks, What have I done to deserve "Love like This"? God's profound love, Agape, is unconditional, bigger than ourselves, a boundless compassion, an infinite empathy. It is pure, free from desires and expectations, given regardless of our flaws and shortcomings. It is a love that accepts, forgives, and believes. In this scripture, Jesus shares the greatest commandment. For Christ alone loved God with all His heart and soul and mind and strength. He alone loved his neighbor as Himself. In fact, Jesus most fully loved God and his neighbors (including us) by giving up his life on the cross. In that one act, Jesus showed perfect love to God by submitting His will fully to His Father's will and He loved us even more than He loved himself, by laying down His life for our sins. How blessed that, as undeserving as we are, God's love never ends!

Faith Practice

May our Lenten reflections radiate the abundant love of God to all we meet.

~Cindy Iocona~

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: “Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’ But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled.”

The tax collector stood at a distance declaring: “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” As I read this scripture, a song immediately comes to mind:

Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord;
Humble thyself in the sight of the Lord;
And He will lift you up, higher and higher;
And He will lift you up.
—*Maranatha! Singers*

How might we thus humble ourselves?

In Acts 9, we learn about how Saul, a killer of Christians, became humbled quite dramatically on the road to Damascus. I learned recently that the name Paul means “small” or “humble” as he became transformed from Saul to Paul.

What is your faith story? Like the tax collector, we ask for mercy and direction so that we might humble ourselves in the sight of the Lord.

Faith Practice

Ponder your Faith Story.

~Ann Hill Duin~

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*My son, if your heart is wise,
My heart too will be glad.
My soul will rejoice
When your lips speak what is right.
Let not your heart envy sinners,
But continue in the fear of the Lord
all the day.
Surely there is a future,
And your hope will not be cut off.*

These verses are reminiscent of the song "Happy Heart" recorded by Andy Williams and also Petula Clark, obviously meant for lovers, but also applicable to being happy for our kids if their hearts are wise...and especially to our relationship to the Lord, "you have changed my life so completely." We are glad when our kids and all those we love use common sense and God-given wisdom, lighting up our own souls. That is all that is needed, nothing more, and we can be, and should be, content, counting our blessings, not coveting what others have, not looking for "greener grass." Our hope for the future is looking to the Lord, learning to "let go, let God"!

Faith Practice

Are you giving up chocolate or beer for Lent? No! How about giving up what really matters? Judging others? Wanting more instead of being satisfied with what we have? Not treating others as we'd like to be treated? How about trying for 40 days, then 40 weeks, and finally 40 years!

~Dale & Peach Hench~

Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.

Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

Do you want to be healed?

Jesus encountered a man who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. The unfolds, not a bus stop, but a pool —a healing pool. A pool where people gather to be healed, much like we might gather at clinics, hospitals, or urgent care centers today. It is here that Jesus asks the penetrating question, “Do you want to get well?”

A man had been coming to the pool where an angel stirred up the water, and people showed up. As they entered the water, they became healed. The man in this encounter with Jesus had been coming to the well for thirty-eight years. Every time someone jumped into the pool before him. Jesus asked the man the penetrating question, “Do you want to be healed?”

Jesus' question, “Do you want to be healed?” fits well with our Lenten journey. I often think about how frequently I fall short in my efforts to be my best, whole self. Like the man who encountered Jesus at the well, I let someone, or something, interfere with me living my best life. I want to be the best person I can be, but too often I allow something or someone to get in the way. I want to be a loving spouse, but I allow a bad day at work to get in the way. I want to be a healthy parent to my children, but I allow a distracted driver to get in the way. I want to be a great neighbor, but I disagree with my neighbor's politics. I allow the evening news to get in my way. Jesus' question, “Do you want to get well? Do you want to be made whole?” is a penetrating question. This is a Lenten question I carry with me today in anticipation of an Easter resurrection where, despite the distractions, the world is made whole.

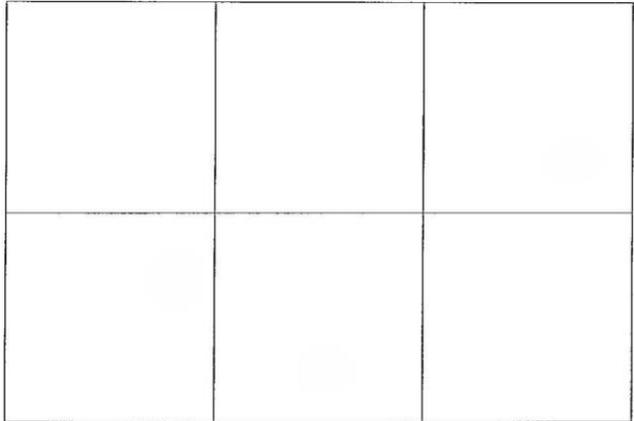
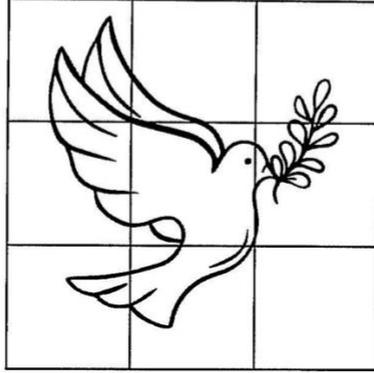
~Rev Kelly Chatman~

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OR
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Genesis 6: 1

Let's Draw

Use grid to draw picture



Jesus explains how to give alms in Matthew 6:1-4. *“Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise, you have no reward from your Father in heaven.”*

Seems to be about our motivation to give and placing what men think of us rather than God. It also indicates that we need to go to God seeking his advice on the giving in the first place. We know that God blesses obedience, so if there is no reward in heaven, we are not in his will to begin with.

Verse 2 is *“Therefore, when you do a charitable deed, do not sound a trumpet before you as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory from men.”*

Can you imagine the organist playing a trumpet ballad and a procession of givers placing gifts at the altar? Yet some organizations do this by classifying donors by the amount they give.

Verses 3 and 4: *“But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, that your charitable deed may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will Himself reward you openly.”*

Simple enough, keep your charities between you and God.

~Rick Gibbs~

In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David."

At first glance, we might think this story, the Annunciation, belongs to Advent. However, the church has historically celebrated Gabriel's visit to Mary in March, nine months before the celebration of Christ's birth.

How astonished Mary must have been! Her response was to ponder—to give deep thought to Gabriel's message. The child Mary was promised would one day become the man who carried the cross.

In Lent, we are invited to pause and ponder this mystery—how God's promise of new life was fulfilled through suffering, love, and the cross. The song, "What Child Is This" bridges the seasons: *Nails, spear shall pierce Him through, the cross be borne for me, for you. Hail, hail the Word made flesh, the babe, the son of Mary.*

Faith Practice

With gratitude, ponder over God's wonderful gift of salvation.

~Gary and Patsy Snodgrass~

This is a trustworthy saying, and everyone should accept it: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them all. But God had mercy on me so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in Him and receive eternal life. All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.

This scripture reminds me that no one is perfect. But God accepts us as we are and always walks beside us. We are reminded to praise God not only when we need him but always. God is using us to show others that no one is without fault. We see this especially during Lent when we need to reflect on how perfectly imperfect, we truly are.

This scripture reminds me of the song Amazing Grace. “Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I was once was lost but now am found, was blind but now I see.”

Faith Practice

Pray for God to give us all the wisdom to always be a good Christian and live the way Jesus did, having empathy for those who are not like us.

~Theresa Pisano~

Nicodemus, who had gone to Jesus before, and who was one of them, asked, our law does not judge people without first giving them a hearing to find out what they are doing, does it? ²They replied, 'Surely you are not also from Galilee, are you? Search and you will see that no prophet is to arise from Galilee.'

These verses from John reflect how Nicodemus, a respected, educated and moral man, is striving to have the council accept Jesus Christ as the Messiah, but they don't believe that a prophet can come from Galilee. There are many differing opinions and confusion about Jesus' identity as the Messiah. They are simply judging Jesus because he is from Galilee, where no prophet has ever hailed. This is an unfair stereotype, but Nicodemus is driven to have them give Jesus his due process, to fully hear Him out before fully dismissing Him.

Faith Practice

I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me.

~Rich & Jane Mason~



*Join us tonight for a brief Lenten service at 6 pm,
followed by soup, sandwiches and group reflection.*

“Under a mastic tree,” he answered. “Your fine lie has cost you your head,” said Daniel; “for the angel of God has already received the sentence from God and shall split you in two.”

Putting him to one side, he ordered the other one to be brought. “Offspring of Canaan, not of Judah,” Daniel said to him, “beauty has seduced you; lust has perverted your heart.

The whole assembly cried aloud, blessing God who saves those who hope in him. They rose up against the two old men, for by their own words Daniel had convicted them of bearing false witness. They condemned them to the fate they had planned for their neighbor: in accordance with the law of Moses, they put them to death. Thus, innocent blood was spared that day.

God hears the cries of the innocent and defends the truth even when it seems all hope is lost; He is willing to forgive those who turn away from sin. Do not believe lies without seeking the truth. We see people being treated unfairly or hear lies being spread about others. Like Daniel, we are called to stand up for truth and justice, allowing God to work through him to reveal the truth and what is right. We should consider our own sins and seek mercy. This speaks loudly to me for self-reflection, growing closer to God, treating others with kindness, and acting with compassion. God, as we journey through Lent, open our eyes to injustice and our hearts to your truth.

During the Lenten season, let us ask ourselves: Are we attentive to the cries of the vulnerable? Do we stand up for what is right, even when it is difficult? Lent calls for us to align our hearts with God’s justice and mercy.

Song: *Glory, Laud, and Honor*

~Sandy Moyer~

*The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases;
His mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is Your faithfulness.*

This message of enduring hope tells us that God's faithfulness provides strength daily, even during times of sorrow and suffering. Each sunrise provides an opportunity for us to experience God's grace yet again. This assurance brings peace and helps to get us through our day-to-day lives with confidence in His faithfulness.

Faith Practice

We are up every morning by 5:30, looking forward, optimistically, to the sunrise and the start of a new day through God's grace.

~Barbara and Dieter Eveleth~

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Coffee & connecting in Fellowship Hall between services



5 Top reasons to avoid Bible Study

- It's boring
- I don't like getting 'called on'
- It's not relevant
- It's never at a good time for me
- I get all I need from the Sunday sermon

5 Top reasons you may want to participate in a Bible Study

- Strengthened faith
- Seeking direction
- Helps you know the 'why' of what you believe
- To remind us of God's power
- It can change your life

AND

5 ways to participate in Bible Study at St Mark by the Sea

- WELCA – any and all women are invited –
2nd Monday of every month – Fellowship Hall 9:30 – 11
 - Advent & Lent Wednesday evenings – 6 pm
- Brief service followed by soup, sandwiches and reflections
- Adult sessions offered in the fall
 - Adult sessions offered in the spring
 - Host a home study at your house

~Michele Hilton~

*You will eat bread by the sweat of your brow until you
return to the ground, since you were taken from it.
For you are dust and will return to dust.*

In the late sixties there was a book written titled “I heard the owl call my name.” It’s the story about a Christian missionary who goes to an Indian village in British Columbia to teach the Christian faith. Along the way he learns their native beliefs about life and mortality. Their belief about death is that you will know when your time comes when you hear an owl call your name.

In the late nineties we moved to western Pennsylvania to help Kim’s mom care for her dad who had a terminal illness. They lived on the edge of the Allegheny National Forest which was full of wildlife which included several species of owls that would “hoot” us to sleep just after sundown.

Her dad passed away at about 7 a.m. on June 8, 1998. Kim and I were sitting outside comforting each other when the forest erupted with several owls “hooting” in unison. It was the first time in our memories that they had been so vocal this early in the morning. We have always said that we have learned more about God and his kingdom from nature than we have from humans. We believed that it was God’s way of telling us that her dad was safe and resting comfortably in the arms of our Savior. Even if it was born in native Indian folklore, it had great spiritual meaning to us.

Faith Practice

Pastor Vince told me about a quote that is commonly attributed to Saint Francis of Assisi. “Preach the gospel at all times and, if necessary, use words”. Put your faith into action. Too many of us leave our faith at the church door as we are leaving. In order to be a true Christian, you have to carry it with you at all times. ENGAGE IN RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS. This is something you can start doing during Lent and then make it a part of your everyday life.

Leave a bigger tip than is customary for services rendered, help an elderly person or a handicapped person load their groceries into their car if it appears they need help, etc. By doing this I guarantee that you will gain more than you give. Walk the talk.

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

Let's be honest: life can be full of so much noise—so many distractions, so much busyness—and the temptation for many can be to just get swept away by all of it. There are meetings to be at, functions to attend, demands to be met, and if we're not careful, we can be in danger of drifting away from our Lord. Though we live in a society that seems to continually clamor in both speed and noise, our passage today reminds us of a bygone era when the pace was a bit slower and the noise was a bit less. The psalmist's words invoke an image of peace, rest, and tranquility taken next to a stream of quiet beauty—an image that has resonated with souls over millennia.

Faith Practice

Be encouraged, in this season of Lent, to take a moment today and ask God to lead your spirit next to a place of green pastures and quiet waters.

~Rev. John Boyer (adapted)~

*“Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me;
yet not my will but yours be done.”*

Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength.



On a work exchange to Australia, we met an artist from our congregation, and we purchased one of her prints. In the print she imagined Jesus on the Mount of Olives. There are three distinct images. -at the top is an angel with outstretched arms. -in the center of the print is Jesus praying. -at the bottom the disciples are asleep in their grief. This Lenten season I find myself drawn to the disciples. I love that God is present even when I “fall asleep on the job” of being a disciple. Question: How have you felt or experienced God’s amazing grace and presence in your life?

~Pastor Doug Duin~

*Join us tonight for a brief Lenten service at 6 pm,
followed by soup, sandwiches and group reflection.*

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.



Lent reminds us that baptism joins us to Christ in both life and in death. That may sound heavy, but it is also hopeful. In baptism we die to the power of sin and rise into newness of life.

I often think of it like a seed buried in the soil. It looks hidden, even gone, but something new is already stirring. That's the same way God is always working in us, turning endings into beginnings, sadness into hope, and death into life.

During this season, we practice that rhythm of dying and rising. We let go of what holds us back from love, and we rise to forgiveness, courage, and joy. Even in Lent's wilderness, new life is breaking through, because Christ is alive and with us.

Prayer: Gracious God, thank you for the gift of baptism. Help us to let go of what needs to die in us, and to rise into the newness of life that you give us so freely. Amen.

~Deacon Peggy Aiello~

You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in Heaven.

This scripture is letting us know to let it be known of God's Grace!! Your faith cannot be hidden. Shout it out loud and let it be known of the goodness of God. Also, followers of Jesus are meant to be a positive and visible influence in the world through their good deeds.

There is a song that this verse reminds me of. "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, all around the world, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine let it shine, let it shine."

Faith Practice

Focus on the goodness of God. Show kindness to those in need without judgement.

~Theresa Pisano~

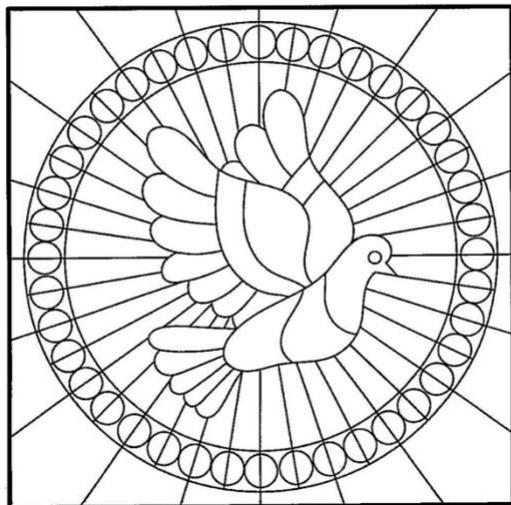
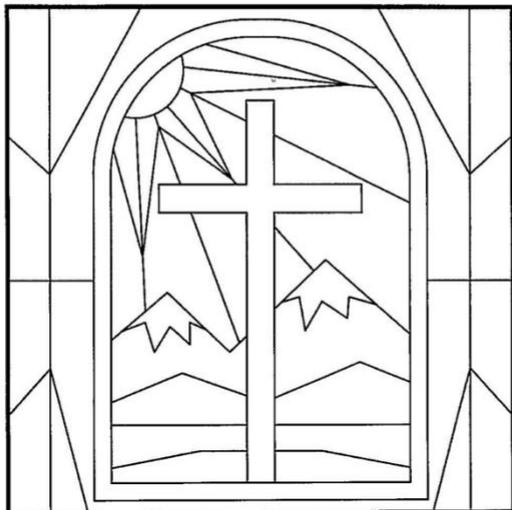
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But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.

As Jesus explained to “the woman at the well” God is spirit and must be worshiped in spirit and truth.

The problem is mankind is born spiritually dead, and as Jesus told Nicodemus we need to be born again spiritually (by water and the spirit). Sounds like our baptism, doesn't it? Well, that is just the start.

The start of our relationship with God and our worship of Him. The start of receiving the fullness of his unconditional love.

But we must also worship God in truth. (John 1:12-14,17) *“but as many as receive Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”. ... For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*

Jesus Christ is the truth because he is the Holy Word of God. Therefore, we need to worship through him by surrendering our thoughts and wills to him. The more we surrender to him the more we experience the fullness of his unconditional love which frees us to love and worship him more.

~Rick Gibbs~

I love you, Lord, my strength. The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

One commentary I read suggested that David says, “I love You” to the God who delivered him, not only for rescuing him from his trial, but for all God did in and through the trials to make him what he was. David wasn’t bitter against God, as if he said, “Well, it’s about time You delivered me.” Instead, he was grateful that the years of trouble had done something good and necessary in his life.

God has always been my rock – my refuge –especially in times of troubles. Troubles like we all have....and I have always been thankful for that gift of faith that builds my personal relationship with God. But I never thought to thank God for my trials. I love these ah-ha moments...and the fact God continues to move and shape me with scripture...even scripture that is about 3,000 years old!

Faith Practice

Take a moment to see how God has used your hard times to shape you!

~Michele Hilton~

*At an acceptable time, I have listened to you
and on a day of salvation, I have helped you,
See now is the acceptable time; see now is the day of salvation!*

Ben Franklin wrote “Never put off tomorrow what you can do today.” It seems that the Apostle Paul gave similar advice some 1700 years prior, as he implored believers to act without delay. The "now" emphasizes the urgency of the present moment to accept God's grace, hear His voice, and turn to Him. For believers, this means living actively and intentionally, motivated by the grace already received. How?

- **Daily surrender:** Each morning is an opportunity to re-affirm one's commitment and trust in Christ for guidance and strength.
- **Prayer and thankfulness:** The "now" encourages a constant posture of thankfulness for God's present-day mercies and provisions, and a reliance on the Spirit for help.
- **Embracing today:** The past cannot be changed, and the future is not guaranteed. The "now" in 2 Corinthians 6:2 means using the present moment intentionally, living as a witness to God's love and transformative power.

Faith Practice

Consider there is no time like the present! Say a prayer of intentional gratitude and surrender to accepting God's grace, today.

~Sherri Hunter~

*For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to
the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life,
and I will raise him up at the last day.*

Many of us have periods of struggle with faith, belief in the Bible, and our eternal destiny after this life. God knows this and has planned for these struggles by sending his Son to reclaim us if we have fallen away from Him; His eternal purpose is to reclaim us. There is and was always a plan to keep us united to and with God for all eternity. We simply need to believe and have faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ. He is with us always, even when we don't know it. And all this while here on this earth. Imagine how much more wondrous it will be in Heaven with our God.

The lyrics in a favorite song, "I Can Only Imagine", composed by Bart Millard, explores the wonder of being in God's presence in Heaven. Every time we listen to the song, we can imagine ourselves standing before Him. What a glorious day that will be . . .

*"I can only imagine
What it will be like
When I walk by Your side
I can only imagine
What my eyes will see
When Your face is before me"*

Faith Practice

As we journey through Holy Week, we can ask ourselves are we willing to let Holy Week touch the deepest part of our hearts and souls to strengthen our faith in Jesus Christ? What will we do to help this happen?

~Donna Cobos~

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

My favorite Sunday Gospel reading is the Sunday after Easter when we hear the words of John read in this passage. For me it is the essence of our faith, that we believe in our Savior with our whole heart and mind, even though we have yet to touch His hand or look into His eyes, we know that He is always with us, no matter what is occurring in our lives.

It is this steadfast thought that provides the strength to persevere through overwhelming events, and we ask, 'Why Lord?' I am reminded that God is always with us! God is in control. He chooses our path, not necessarily one that is straightforward; one perhaps with twists and turns...His path.

Faith Practice

When you see a beautiful sunset, a bird in flight, a dolphin frolicking, fish jumping, sunshine, blue skies . . . Be still and know that I am God. *Psalm 46:10*. It is a neon sign that we have an amazing God, even though we have not seen, we believe!

~Donna Marie Calvani~

Maundy Thursday Worship - 7 pm

GOOD FRIDAY

Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers, for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.

It seems that in the course of history, we need to be reminded over and over again to stop worrying about people who do bad things. David reminds us that there is something more important than worrying about the prosperity of the wicked, and that is focusing on the everlasting faithfulness of God. The psalm weaves back and forth between the action of trusting and waiting for God to act in God's time and the justice that God will serve toward the actions of the wicked. In the end, patiently doing what God calls us to do and finding refuge in following God's ways leads to security and hope in the future.

Lent is a season of waiting and refocusing on God's ways. In this psalm, David reminds us that our words and deeds make a difference. So, set aside worry. Refrain from negative, destructive emotions like anger and envy. Be satisfied with what you have, for it is enough. Trust that God will provide you with eternal security, even if you feel threatened by the evil around you. Care for the weak and helpless and give to those in need, because it helps everyone. Basically, keep calm and carry on speaking words of justice, seeking peace, and following the righteousness of God.

Faith Practice

Make a list of 10 blessings God has showered you with.

~Chaplain Lisa Hansen-Tice (adapted)~

Good Friday Observance - 7 pm

Easter



CHRIST
CRUCIFIXION
PARADE
REBORN



CHRISTIANITY
FASTING
PASSEOVER

HE IS RISEN! HIS IS RISEN INDEED! ALELUIA!

Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. . . So teach us to count our days that we may gain a wise heart.

The writer of this psalm makes us aware of the brevity of life, something we are reminded of every time we pass a mortuary or cemetery. And yet, with our consumptive behavior, we often live as if there is no end to our days. Lent is a perfect time to reconsider our lifestyle and belief systems. It is a call for not only penitence (abstaining), but also repentance (changing). Christ makes us aware of our pursuits and what is essential with these words: “What will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life?” (Matthew 16:26). The psalmist reminds us that our very life is from God (v. 1), and later in the Psalms, we are reminded of the reality of life’s brevity: “*As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field; for the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place knows it no more*” (Psalm 103:15).

The psalmist then gives us a word for our Lenten thought in this transitory life in verse 12, “So teach us to count our days that we might gain a wise heart.” In order to reach this place in our lives with conviction and success, it will take time in reflection, prayer, and perhaps even fasting, which is what the Lenten experience is all about.

Faith Practice

Spend 15 minutes perusing your Bible and spend just a few wherever the Spirit moves you to dwell.

~Rev Richard Huls (adapted)~

He is Risen!

Join us at 10 am for Easter Sunday Service



Join us – All are Welcome!

Wednesday, February 18, 2026 Ash Wednesday
Noon and 7 pm

Sunday Worship Each week at 9:00 am and 11 am

Wednesday Evening Soup, Sandwiches, and Devotions
February 25, March 4, March 11, March 18, March 25
Fellowship Hall
6:00 pm

Thursday, April 2, 2026 Maundy Thursday
7:00 pm

Friday, April 3, 2026 Good Friday
7:00 pm

Sunday, April 5, 2026 Easter Sunday
10:00 am

ST MARK BY THE SEA LUTHERAN CHURCH

303 Palm Coast Parkway NE

Palm Coast, FL 32137

