

Lenten Devotional Guide 2021

Otterbein United Methodist Church



LENT

Wednesday, February 17

[Luke 18:9-14](#)

The Pharisee and the Tax Collector

“I tell you, this person went down to his home justified rather than the Pharisee.

All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

Luke 18:14

One of Jesus’s favorite themes was humility, and it was usually through the contrasting of a “holier-than-thou” versus a person of low status. What Jesus was always looking for was sincerity compared to hypocrisy. In this example, the Pharisee checked all the blocks of faith. He worshipped faithfully, gave of his wealth faithfully, and made sure everyone knew it. Tax collectors were looked down on and often rightfully so. They were known to demand more than they should as taxes due and pocket the difference. Rather than boast as the Pharisee did, he humbly acknowledged his place as a sinner and asked God for mercy.

When we watch a movie or TV show with the hypocrite versus the lowly downtrodden, we can’t wait to see the hypocrite get his due. When the one deserving mercy receives it, we sit back feeling good. That Jesus detested hypocrisy in so many parables should tell us something. God is looking for hearts! Yes, going through the steps of living our faith like worship, serving, and giving are vital. However, they are tainted if they are not given with a humble heart.

As a pastor, I was always on the lookout for “the humble tax collector.” You know, someone who was faithful, but didn’t realize how pleased God was with their faithful living. These were people to whom a kind word and a recognition of their service to God would mean so much. The “pharisee” was too easy to spot. Jesus’s example notwithstanding, as a pastor and as fellow travelers in God’s world today, we must always be trying as hard to love the hypocrites as the tax collectors. My father used to tell me he didn’t worship that often because there were so many hypocrites in church. I always responded that there was no better place for them to be.

Prayer: *God, thank you for the lessons we have from your Son showing us the importance of a humble heart.*

Help us to practice such humility as we serve you and our fellow travelers. Amen.

Rev. Larry Clark

Thursday, February 18

[Deuteronomy 7:6-11](#)

To me this is a reminder that I am holy because God chose me, and he is holy. When I cultivate a relationship with God, I know I am never alone. By accepting God's love, I am taking the responsibility to keep His commandments in return. This is an investment in myself and my community, and I hope to lead by example and spread my respect and admiration so others may know His love as well.

Camila Maric

Friday, February 19

[John 1:35-42](#)

Seekers

In the Scripture reading for today, John, who just baptized Jesus the day before, announces to his two friends, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” as Jesus walks by. They began to follow him so Jesus turns around and asks them, “What are you looking for?” They respond “Rabbi, where do you live?” This response seems a bit unusual but Jesus replies, “Come and see” and they spend the rest of the day with him. His invitation begins a relationship that opens their lives to whatever experiences God is doing.

We are seekers. People long for identity, for purpose, for meaning, and for healing. We are looking for redemption, for happiness, for love, for life. We go to school to learn, attend Bible studies, read the Bible, go to worship. Seeking makes us open to whatever experiences God would put before us and encourages us to stick around long enough to see what he is doing just as the disciples did. Our searching most often leads to the Divine. We want to be in his presence. So these two friends of John's were eager to go and seek out the teacher's stories!

Upon pondering this scene, I realized my own journey as a seeker. I was baptized at the age of 12 in a small church where I grew up. I was involved in Sunday School and activities there. Throughout my school life, I studied scriptures, attended Christian events, tried to do what I thought was right, and be kind to my fellow man. I had what I thought was a normal life growing up with 3 brothers! In my young married life, I joined this EUB church and attended Sunday School faithfully, but there was a longing to know more about the stories in the scriptures. Yes, I studied on my own, but there was a limit to my understanding. Then at a Lay Witness event November 1973 at our church, I received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. The desire to know more was stronger than ever. So I prayed for some years and in God's timing, I was invited to attend Bible Study Fellowship in our community. My prayers were answered and I am eternally grateful for the knowledge I gained in those 25 years I studied in this faith community. I also became a BSF leader in helping other women to experience the stories in the scriptures. I continue to study in our church Bible study and find it challenging to search beyond the assigned lesson. It is refreshing to study a familiar passage and get new meanings each time. It gives one a renewal for living and a sense of purpose as Jesus

intended in telling his stories. So my prayer is to continue to be a seeker and tell others about the perfect Lamb of God who shed his blood that takes away the sins of the world.

Be seekers and share the good news!

Easter Blessings,
Patsy Liskey

Saturday, February 20

[Titus 3:1-15](#)

The book of Titus is actually a letter written by Paul to Titus, a young man who had travelled with Paul to Jerusalem. Paul then sent Titus to Crete, an island off Greece, where there were some problems among the Christians. Titus was sent to help them because they had only believed in Christ for a short time.

Paul says “...⁴God saved us from our sins. He showed clearly that he is very kind. He showed that he loves all people. ⁵God did not save us because of any good things that we ourselves had done. He saved us because he chose to forgive us. ⁶Jesus Christ died as a sacrifice to save us. ⁷Because God is very kind, he has accepted us as right with himself. As a result, ... we know that we will live with God forever” (Easy English Bible).

Titus was sent to teach the people of Crete to be kind to each other, to stop doing bad things like hating other people, being jealous of others, and arguing about silly things. We should all pay attention to this message on how to be better Christians. Being kind and polite, helping others instead of hating them—these things will go a long way toward making this world a better place.

Prayer: *Dear God, we confess that we haven't been as kind as you expect us to be. Help us to take to heart the words of Paul. Help us to show love to our neighbors, helping them instead of hating them. Give us courage to be the Christians that you want us to be. In Jesus's name we pray, Amen.*

Susan Pollard

Sunday, February 21

[Deuteronomy 8:1-10](#)

Don't forget how the Lord your God has led you through the desert for the past forty years. He wanted to find out if you were truly willing to obey him and depend on him, so he made you go hungry. Then he gave you manna, a kind of food that you and your ancestors had never even heard about. The Lord was teaching you that people need more than food to live—they need every word that the Lord has spoken.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3

In this passage from Deuteronomy, the Israelites are about to enter the Promised Land and end the 40 years of wandering and challenges in the wilderness. God reminds them that God was with them through the challenges and has brought them to this place of newness and blessing. Therefore, they should not forget to praise God for all that was given them.

This past year has felt like wandering in the wilderness in some ways! All of us have struggled as the “norms” of our lives were stripped away. As we slowly begin to emerge from this time of crisis, we are assured that God has been with us and will continue to be with us as we forge a new (and hopefully, better!) life. How can we show our gratitude to the One who has carried us safe thus far, and will continue to carry us in the days ahead? As Micah 6:8 says,

*“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?”*

In *The Faith We Sing*, there is a lovely poem/song that speaks to this idea. Let us pray these words will guide us to be who God has created us to be:

As a fire is meant for burning
with a bright and warming flame,
so the church is meant for mission,
giving glory to God’s name.
Not to preach our creeds or customs,
but to build a bridge of care,
we join hands across the nations,
finding neighbours everywhere.

We are learners; we are teachers;
we are pilgrims on the way.
We are seekers; we are givers;
we are vessels made of clay.
By our gentle, loving actions,

we would show that Christ is light.
In a humble, listening Spirit,
we would live to God’s delight.

As a green bud in the springtime
is the sign of life renewed,
so may we be signs of oneness
’mid earth’s peoples, many hues.
As a rainbow lights the heavens
when a storm is past and gone,
may our lives reflect the radiance
of God’s new and glorious dawn.

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Christy Blagg

Monday, February 22

[Hebrews 2:11-18](#)

Tempted

For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Hebrews 2:18

I have long heard the phrase “God never gives you anything you cannot handle.” I can hear Pastor Adam in my thoughts right now, for his disdain for clichés often misused in place of knowing the deeper truths. But what is the scriptural context that supports the essence of what this cliché seeks to inspire? I have often related this cliché to challenges correlated to overcoming difficult or tumultuous situations. But what about temptation?

Fortunately for us God, has set the conditions for us to overcome our temptations. First, God’s will is revealed to us in Scripture so that we will not be confused about the choices we should make. Additionally, (because knowing the path is not enough) His Holy Spirit dwells within us to give us a proper spiritual attitude in our decisions; this is also the same Holy Spirit that holds us in contempt when we make sinful choices. And so, God *has* set the conditions so that we do not have to yield to temptation.

While this is ideal, the reality is, we fall short and often deflect for various reasons in our brokenness. This leads me to an extremely critical element born out of God’s infinite love for us, and that is His ability to not only understand our human plights, but also to safeguard us even further from temptation through His son Jesus Christ. Born as a human on earth, Jesus amassed experiences that gave Him a profound understanding of our weakness and was tempted in every way imaginable. Jesus knew hunger, anger, loneliness, exhaustion, etc. and yet He was without sin. Jesus ultimately paid the price for our sins on the cross, thereby releasing sin’s domination over us and pioneering our path to salvation. Therefore, He understands our weaknesses and in-turn we receive mercy, grace, and even prevenient grace to restore our relationship with God. Place your trust in He who understands us, knows what we need, and is our source of strength, so that we may be salt and light to the world.

Yours in Christ,
Kevin Andrade, Sr.

Tuesday, February 23

[Hebrews 3:1-11](#)

A Confident Faith

Moses was faithful in God's house as a servant, and he spoke of the things that God would say in the future. But Christ is faithful as the Son in charge of God's house. We are his house if we keep up our courage and our confidence in what we hope for.

Hebrews 3:5-6 (Good News Translation)

While reviewing the scriptures assigned to me for a devotional, I decided to select the one from Hebrews because of the two verses above. The Epistle to the Hebrews was traditionally attributed to Paul, but the author is now thought to be unknown. Some scholars consider Hebrews to be a masterpiece and more eloquent than any other book in the New Testament.

After reading Hebrews 3:1-11 several times in 4 or 5 translations, I especially noted verses 5 and 6 above as being a comparison of faith and I thought about what constitutes faith. This particular section of Hebrews relates to the superiority of Christ as High Priest, but I decided to think more about the act of being faithful. How do we exhibit faith outwardly? It's a bit more difficult to do with social distancing, but even encouraging words to someone struggling or a regular donation to a worthy cause can show that we have faith and confidence in God.

Later in Hebrews, Chapter 11 begins with an uplifting statement about faith: *"To have faith is to be sure of the things we hope for, to be certain of the things we cannot see"* (GNT). What an eloquent and confident expression! This chapter goes on to identify and discuss several faithful Bible figures, for example Abraham and Moses. Browse through Chapter 11 to get an overview of faith portrayals. These figures proved their faith through actions such as the ark built by Noah.

As we prepare ourselves during this season of Lent, let us become more faithful and confident in spiritual matters such as worship, prayer, reflection, and also through acts of service and support for others. As a prayer, read or sing the first verse of the familiar hymn *My Faith Looks Up to Thee*:

*My faith looks up to thee, thou Lamb of Calvary, Savior divine:
now hear me while I pray, take all my guilt away,
O let me from this day be wholly thine. Amen.*

Judy Richardson

Wednesday, February 24

[Hebrews 3:12-19](#)

See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.

Hebrews 3:12-14

In today's scripture, we're given two instructions to help us in our Christian journey. The first one is that we need to be mindful of our hearts to be sure that we don't turn to the deceit of sin, which will pull us away from God. In some ways, it sounds like an easy task. If we know we belong to God, why would we ever want to sin? We've been warned so many times and in so many ways that that road does not lead to a place we want to go. Clearly what God has to offer is a much better option. Yet we all still struggle.

The second instruction is that we're supposed to encourage one another so that no one else falls into sin's deceitfulness either. Wait a minute...so I'm not only supposed to be keeping myself on track but I should be looking out for others to be sure they stay on track, too? That sounds like a lot of responsibility! The interesting thing about encouragement, though, is that while we're focused on someone else and helping them, aren't we also gaining some of the same benefits for ourselves? Take for example a friend who might be struggling with their self-worth because they just got laid off from their dream job. While we're offering them words of support and reassurance, we might find those same words working to heal some hurting areas in our lives as well. It's also difficult to offer words of encouragement that we don't believe ourselves. The words just come off sounding empty.

In this same way, our encouragement of others to keep them from turning to sin's deceitfulness can actually help us stay on our own path with the same goal. What we see in others can help make us aware of areas in our own lives where we may be going astray. We just have to be mindful not to let it turn into a "speck in your eye, plank in mine" (Matthew 7:3-5) scenario where we're pointing out all of their sins while ignoring our own. We still need to stay on track and keep ourselves accountable. Just as we're encouraging others to help them stay away from sin, we will likely find others that are doing the same for us. It's important to be aware of these people in our lives and to be receptive of the guidance they're trying to offer us.

All of this sounds like a lot of work and no, it is not an easy task. It takes a conscious effort to keep our own heart from turning away from God and it is also a big responsibility to play a role in keeping someone else away from sin. If we look at verse 14, however, it brings everything together and serves as encouragement for us to work hard to complete our given task: "*We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the confidence we had at first.*" The note in my bible describes "to share in Christ" as "to belong to him and participate in the blessings he gives." Isn't that what we all desire? Doesn't this one relationship give meaning to everything else in our lives? If that isn't the best motivation we could ever

have, I'm not sure what is. So yes, the instructions given to us in this passage will challenge us, but when you feel defeated and not up to the task, keep in mind the whole reason for why it's so important. Let that serve as the best encouragement you could ever receive.

Melissa Miller

Thursday, February 25

[John 3:16-21](#)

God so loved the world that He gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him won't perish but will have eternal life. God didn't send his Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him isn't judged; whoever doesn't believe in him is already judged, because they don't believe in the name of God's only Son. This is the basis for judgement: The light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions are evil. All who do wicked things hate the light and don't come to the light for fear that their actions will be exposed to the light. Whoever does the truth comes to the light so that it can be seen that their actions were done in God.

John 3:16-21 (CEB)

Here we are, in the middle of a pandemic, struggling to find the truth about so many things. Over 440,000 Americans have died from this virus, millions of people around the world. Health care systems are over-whelmed with critically ill patients. The healthcare professionals are exhausted. Teachers, students and parents are frustrated with the efforts to continue education in the midst of this pandemic. Millions of people have lost their jobs or their businesses. More and more folks have no idea where their next meal will come from, or how they will pay rent or utilities. Conspiracy theories swirl around about stolen elections and the COVID-19 virus. Fear, suspicion, and hatred are destroying relationships. Armed guards are standing watch over the nation's Capitol. Persons who claim to be Christians are advocating and even participating in violence. Where in all this darkness and wilderness can we find/see the light of God's love for the WHOLE world?

The journey of Lent takes us through the darkness and wilderness to the light. Sometimes we must sit in the darkness to realize that God's love is always with us. He loves the world so much that he sent Jesus to be born as human, grow as human, suffer and die as human. And yet, Jesus' resurrection reminds us that we are loved beyond measure and God's good intention is to redeem ALL His creation. We are invited to come into the light and share the light with all people. God's love and grace demand that each of us who claim to be followers of Jesus, act with mercy and love toward everyone, no exclusions. Let us proclaim the truth of God's grace and live with generosity to all people.

Prayer: *Loving and gracious God, your steadfast love calls us to speak truth, love generously, and through acts of mercy, bring justice and healing to all those in need. Remind us in days of darkness to be light to others so that they may recognize the gift of your grace. In the wondrous name of Jesus we pray, amen.*

Pat Wingert

Friday, February 26

[John 3:22-36](#)

To accept His witness is the attest that God speaks the truth, for He whom God sent utters the words of God, so measureless is God's gift of the Spirit.

John 3:33-34

It seems we just finished celebrating Advent and the anticipation, hope, joy, love, and peace that Christmas brings. The excitement of the birth of Jesus, the shepherds, angels, the wise men, the beautiful light that comes into our lives. A welcoming revisiting each year. Especially this very different Christmas of 2020. It lingers still.

Now, we move into Lent, a time of seeing Jesus as an adult, relearning from His ministry. His witnessing, His teaching. All that helps to build our faith. Faith defined in Hebrews 11:1: *"Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen."*

During the continuing strife in our country, I have thought a lot about my faith, the foundation being added to by Jesus' three years of teaching as He traveled the countryside. I know my foundation is built on the solid ground of love and trust. Love that Jesus showed for all people. Trust that He is always present in my life.

So, in this Lenten season I bring the hope, peace, joy, and love that advent gives to the journey of Jesus' ministry that gives us a blueprint for how to treat others, those we love, those we disagree with, those who are angry. It shows me that God loves us all and He will carry us through our days if we rely on the faith that we have built with Him.

Prayer: *Dear heavenly Father, thank you for your earthly journey that connects us to the power and comfort of faith. Amen.*

Anna Steele

Saturday, February 27

[John 4:1-26](#)

Jesus Talks to a Woman at the Well

Whenever I read this passage in the Bible, my mind immediately goes back to a summer day in 1978 when my husband and I were visiting the Holy Land. It was a bare-bones, no frills trip, but we got to see something visitors from other countries have not often seen. Our Arab guide arranged for us to visit Jacob's Well, definitely not on our itinerary. The Arab caretaker at Jacob's Well was obviously not happy to see us, and made that clear, although the men had worn long pants as required and the women had our

arms covered. At that time this was just a simple, uncovered well near the dirt road on which we had traveled. I suppose that by now that well has been covered with some kind of shelter.

Often Jews traveling north would bypass Samaria, adding miles to their journey. They saw the Samaritans as an impure race, as many of them had intermarried with the Assyrians who had moved in when the northern kingdom was overtaken. However, Jesus knew that in Samaria he would encounter a woman who very much needed His message. So, leaving Judea and heading for Galilee, He went through Samaria. Jesus knew that this woman would be coming to draw water at noon, a time in the heat of the day when other women would not be there. The whole town knew her reputation for loose living and didn't want to associate with her. She came in the heat of the day to avoid them.

He sent the disciples into a nearby town to buy food, but also so that He could have a private audience with the Samaritan woman. As to their customs, no "respectable" Jewish man would talk to a woman outside of family, let alone a Samaritan woman. But Jesus knew what this woman needed and ministered to her. He gave her "living water" which changed her life completely. She immediately ran back to town to share her good news and "*many of the Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman's testimony.*"

Jesus showed understanding and acceptance to this woman and introduced her to love and forgiveness, as He does to each of us. May He guide us in receiving His "living water" and sharing it with others.

Rosalie Bailey

Sunday, February 28

[Jeremiah 1:1-10](#), [Mark 3:31-4:9](#), [1 Corinthians 3:11-23](#)

I read and re-read the above scriptures that were assigned. Then after pulling almost all of my hair out (really short now), after my temper tantrum and the tears ceased, I decided I would simply ask for a refund... why not!

Would you believe at that moment, I was called into God's Principal Office. Yes! Have you ever been called into a principal's office? God's? Wow!

He said, "What seems to be your problem?" (He already knew... he knows everything, but He wanted to hear it from me), so I let it all out. He responded, "When I created you, I gave you a brain – put it to use. What do these three scriptures have in common? Think!"

So, I thought and thought as it was my brain's off-day. Then came the lightbulb. I would make an outline of each Scripture and then compare them for common ground.

The Word of God and the Foundation built on His Word and how they were spoken through ordinary people to others. Our Lord Jesus Christ also spoke God's words through parables.

When we cannot find our words to speak His words, our Lord places them on our lips to speak. This was true with Jeremiah.

“The book of Jeremiah is one of the greatest books in the Bible; and Jeremiah was one of the greatest men in the Old Testament. Jeremiah reveals to us more of his life and thoughts than we have of any Biblical figure... except Jesus and Paul. We find ways of strengthening our own walk with God from his example.” All the while building our spiritual foundation on the word of God.

By his example, we can see how a person can be faithful (foundation) to God in trying times (our world today) ...just day-to-day life.

As Christians, we do not get a free pass through life. We have pain, suffering, sorrow... the list continues. But, we can overcome because we know that our God will not abandon us nor forsake us during our trials. He walks beside us every step. Our foundation (God’s word) keeps us from crashing down, and our Lord Jesus Christ is the cornerstone.

“God never calls any of us to a task and then walks away. He gives us the message and promise that His protective presence will always be with us.” His word was true yesterday, is today, and will be tomorrow.

“God urges us to count the cost before we actually serve Him. The rewards are great. The difficulties are great as well. God’s ultimates are to sow and build a firm foundation in which the cornerstone is our Lord Jesus Christ who died for our sins, arose, and gives us hope of eternal life.”

Prayer: *Gracious Lord, help us to hear your voice as you speak for us through the words of others, even as we seek to allow you to speak through us to others. Amen.*

Marylee Huffman

Monday, March 1

[Jeremiah 1:11-19](#)

After completing a video chat with our daughter and young grandsons who live in Pennsylvania, I sat down to work on my Lenten Devotional. Reading through the three scripture selections, my heart was immediately drawn to this passage from Jeremiah. Perhaps it was because little two-year-old Russell had just “read” to me from one of his favorite books, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill Martin, Jr. Although Russell can name the letters of the alphabet, he cannot actually read. He’s like other children. He learns as a result of everything he sees and hears. He listens to the story over and over, remembers the words read to him by his mommy and daddy, associates the words with the pictures, and then “appears” to be reading the fun, sing-songy story. If you are not familiar with the book it begins this way: “Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see?” “I see a red bird looking at me.”

Now, read Jeremiah, verse 11. God asks Jeremiah, “What do you see?” His reply, “I see the branch of an almond tree.” As the passage continues Jeremiah sees a boiling pot, and also a fortified city, an iron pillar, and a bronze wall. The almond tree, a harbinger of spring, is known as the “watching tree.” It

symbolizes that God is in charge and sees all. The overflowing, boiling pot signifies the destruction that would rain down on the people of Jerusalem and the nation of Judah as a result of their wickedness and sinful ways. The protected city, complete with iron pillar and bronze wall, symbolizes the promise of God's power to fortify us as we strive to live according to His Word.

Russell is loved, nurtured, and guided by his parents as he matures, learns to read, and gains life-skills. As children of God, we are guided by the teachings of Jesus Christ, the love of our Heavenly Father, and the assurance that He is ever-present with us.

Lent is a time of preparation, self-reflection, and repentance. Quiet time spent reading the Bible, praying, and patiently waiting can still our minds and hearts to receive God's messages and instruction. Sometimes, "getting ready" involves quietly watching, listening, and being receptive to God's divine prompts.

Open your eyes, your ears, and your heart to God. What do you see, hear, and feel? How will you respond?

Carole Gaines

Tuesday, March 2

[John 4:43-54](#)

In John, 4:43-54, Jesus heals a government official's son. The boy is sick and is going to die. The boy's father comes to Jesus and asks him to heal his son. Jesus replied that his son will live and the man believes him. Much like modern life, we all get hurt or have health issues. Especially in these tough times with COVID going on around the world. Although there are some hard times when it comes to sickness, we must have faith in God that he will get us through it and heal us the way he healed the man's son. It's difficult to have faith in those times of pain because we will always wonder why we are having the problems that we are having. God has a plan for each and every one of us, and will always do what he says is best. We all have loved ones who have passed from sickness or bad health and it's always hard. God does what is right for us in those times and while we might not understand, he's making the best decision. Being sick is not fun and no likes to feel ill. But even in our sick and hard times, we have to be faithful to God and believe that he will heal us and do what he says is best. Jesus has healed each and every one of us at some point whether the condition was serious or not. He has helped us overcome surgeries, colds, and even simple things such as splinters. He always helps us through it in the way that best serves his plan. It's important to not take anything for granted and be thankful that we have a savior who heals and helps us each and every day.

Prayer: *God, help us to remain faithful to you in times of illness and please heal our broken bodies. Amen.*

Christian Joiner

Wednesday, March 3

[John 5:1-18](#)

Jesus Heals a Lame Man by a Pool

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be made well?”

John 5:6

Jesus takes notice of a man sitting by a healing pool. On approach, Jesus had identified this man as being in a hopeless situation, and if he were not paralyzed, was intending to make entry into the healing pool to cure his ailments. Jesus approached and asked him a simple question, “Do you want to be made well?” The man had been stricken with infirmity for the last thirty-eight years. Having been this way for some time, and no one willing to assist him, this had become his way of life. All hope of ever being healed had slowly eroded from his spirit. This left the man spiritually ill in addition to his paralyzed condition.

So, why did Jesus ask the question? The man’s initial response in the scripture echoes the despair that Jesus had already identified. Jesus then heals the man and disappears into the crowd. The man had no idea who was responsible for his restorative miracle, where he had regained his capacity to walk. Jesus later found and approached him in the temple, saying, “See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you.” The man departed and was then able to proclaim that it was Jesus who had made him well.

From this miracle, we can understand that regardless of our hardship, we are to never lose hope and not give up our faith in God. The question earlier - why Jesus asked the question is still not answered. At least not in the way we want it in a perfect illustration of words and an easy to follow narrative. The answer to this question is unique to each of us and requires us to observe within ourselves. Every time we go to church, we are at a healing pool. Is our response to Jesus, “yes I want to be made well,” or do we choose to allow sin and hardship paralyze our relationship with God? This scripture calls on us to reflect and focus on our relationship with God, regardless of our sufferings and hardships. While I do pray that all are well in our Otterbein family this day, let this be a part of our self-examination towards our journey during this season of Lent, and draw closer to God.

Peace be with you –
Bonnie Andrade

Thursday, March 4

[Romans 2:12-24](#)

Sometimes it is easy for me to be so focused on what everyone else is doing that I end up forgetting about my own agenda. Whether it’s bossing Micah around and making sure he does his chores, or worrying about the choices my friends are making. Although it is good to look out for others, sometimes

we get lost in the world of everyone else. It can become hurtful to ourselves and the people around us. We really shouldn't be judging others, especially if we're judging them for things we do as well. It is God's job to look out for everyone, not ours. *"If you have persuaded yourself that you are: a guide for the blind; a light to those who are in darkness; an educator of the foolish; a teacher of infants, then why don't you teach yourself also"* (Romans 2: 19-21). We must do what we push others to do. Think about the life you want your loved ones to have, one full of faith, love, and kindness? We must work to have our life be full of those things. If we can be a teacher to others, we can be taught. Let God guide you to live the life you want for others.

Prayer: *Dear God, help me remember that even if I am carrying a light for others, I don't have to walk in darkness. Be with me as I work for the life of faith you gave me. Amen.*

Lena Blagg

Friday, March 5

[Jeremiah 5:1-9](#)

These verses show the total degradation in Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah. The Lord saw the true wicked character of the people through all their disguises. Rejection of God and descending into immorality go hand in hand. What can be expected but acts of darkness from people who do not know and seek God? As God's children, all of us have sinned. The Lord wants our repentance, but in the passage above it says, *"they have made their faces harder than rock; they have refused to return."* God loves all of His children whether they believe in Him or not. Even if we do believe in Him, we sin at many points throughout our lives. It is our nature and the Bible says in Romans *"for ALL have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* As Christians, we can help each other and encourage one another to know that God is for you and not against you. You can trust Him to still love you and have faith in you. In verse 4 this passage states, *"For they do not know the way of the Lord, the judgment of your God."* However, God still loves them for who they are because they were created by Him. In 2 Peter 3:9 it says, *"the Lord is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance."* I encourage all of you as we go through this Lenten season to remember that God loves everyone whether they are followers of Him or not and that He loves you no matter what. During this time in preparation of Easter, look for the many ways God is trying to bring you back to Him and take advantage of those opportunities to repent.

Prayer: *Father, thank you for always loving us dearly. Thank you for forgiving us for all the things we have done against you. I pray that you will help us throughout this season to repent and grow in you. May we help others to know you and to follow you and receive your grace and mercy. We love you Father, and we pray this in Jesus' wonderful name. Amen.*

Elisabeth Williams

Saturday, March 6

[John 7:1-13](#)

This chapter of John is the beginning of the last six months of Jesus' human life of earth. It also contains some information on Jesus' half-brothers with the hint of some sibling rivalry.

Unless you were an only child, you probably experienced periods of sibling rivalry. Maybe even you and your siblings ganged up on one sibling because of some conceived special treatment. The oldest child may have had more freedoms and more early opportunities due to being that first child. The youngest may have continued long past babyhood to be the baby of the family with special treatment. Those siblings in the middle could have become lost in the middle or may have had special talents in athletics, the arts, or academics which meant they required additional opportunities for developing their talents in terms of classes, equipment, travel, and parental involvement. Think of those endless music recitals, sporting events, and summer camps that parents provide for their talented children. We would all like to say that we shared in the glory of our siblings and praised them to others, but did we ever take that time when they were not at the top of their game and involve ourselves in a little sarcasm?

What would it have been like to have been a sibling of Jesus? He was the oldest, but He was also special. As a child, His talents could not be explained to his siblings for fear of danger to Jesus and His family. As an adult in Chapter 7 of John, Jesus is coming from a period of time in Capernaum where many followers turned away from Him. He was content to stay in Galilee and speak there, but His brothers saw a weak spot and tempted Jesus to continue on to Judea and speak to the people there. Here was His chance to perform before His disciples and the important men of the day during the Feast of the Tabernacles. When faced with a challenge to perform from our siblings we may be tempted to either rise to the situation or to bombast them and argue that we do not need to prove ourselves to them. In this situation, Jesus did not rise to their challenge or reprimand them. He listened calmly, said it was not His time to go to Judea, but told them to go on and enjoy the festival.

Jesus was not your average sibling, out to prove himself. Instead, he worked for His Heavenly Father. He treated His siblings kindly, but chose to wait for that exact time that His father had chosen for Him to go to Judea rather than go with his siblings and offer the proof they were seeking. When the Father's time table was right, he did go into Judea.

The challenge to us is to be patient and wait for our Heavenly Father to respond, but to also be kind and treat fairly those around us while we wait.

Mary Sue Wenger

Sunday, March 7

[Mark 5:1-20](#)

Mark tells the story of Jesus being approached by the man possessed by demons in the region of Gerasenes. The man lived alone among the tombs and spent night and day crying out and cutting himself with stones. As Jesus approached, the man recognized him as the Son of the Most High God. At the man's pleading, Jesus commanded the evil spirit to leave this man. The evil spirits came out of the man and went into a large herd of pigs nearby who ran into a lake and drowned, thus freeing the man from his demon-possessed existence. Jesus commanded the man to go and tell his friends of this miracle and what Jesus had done for his life.

During this season of Lent, we contemplate and prepare for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross to free us from our demons that can possess us. The man in the story was possessed by thousands of demons, which seems to be an extreme. Certainly as followers of Christ, we are not tortured by "thousands" of demons – or are we? The many influences and experiences in today's life can easily separate us from the love of God if we are not vigilant in following Christ's example. We, like the man in the story, can be free from all of those evil influences if we ask Christ to free us as we recognize his power as the Son of God and our Savior.

As we prepare to celebrate the holiest days of our Christian faith, we need to remember that like the man in the story, if we recognize Christ and ask for our freedom from sin, he alone can deliver that to us. But, then it is our obligation to go and tell our family, friends, and acquaintances what the Lord has done for us and how he had mercy on us through Christ's resurrection.

Prayer: *Thank you, Jesus, for freeing us from a life possessed by evil influences and sin. Amen.*

Mike and Bev Earman

Monday, March 8

[Jeremiah 7:1-15](#)

As I think of the beginning of the Lenten season, I think back to just two months ago – Christmas. What joy comes with Christmas: Christ's birth, the long-awaited Savior. Christmas brings happiness, gift-giving, and family togetherness. Many times I was asked, "Ann, are you ready for Christmas?" My answer often was, "not quite; got a couple things yet to do."

Lent is a solemn, religious observance beginning on Ash Wednesday and ending on Easter Sunday. It is a time for preparation for Jesus' death and resurrection. It is a time for reflection, for redirection, and spiritual growth.

Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem; Maundy Thursday, his last meal with his disciples, and then Good Friday, the day of his crucifixion and burial, the day he gave his life for our sins. Easter Sunday, as he predicted, he arose from his tomb.

In one of my references (Jeremiah 7:1-15), God told Jeremiah to go to the Temple of the Lord and give his message to the people. They are to stop their evil ways, their wicked thoughts and deeds. God gave his Son to die for our sins. He wants in return our faith, our obedience, and our love.

Am I ready for Christmas? Am I ready for Easter? Am I ready?

Ann Dellinger

Tuesday, March 9

[Jeremiah 7:21-34](#)

Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in obedience to all I command you, that it may go well with you... But they did not listen to me or pay attention. They were stiff-necked and did more evil than their ancestors.

Jeremiah 7:23 & 26

Most of us have experienced a stiff neck at one time or another. A kink develops in our neck, and it's painful to move it from one side to the other. (Although my pain is usually farther down in my lower back.) As the discomfort and immobility increase, we become irritable. Eventually the heating pad and rest relieve the pain OR we have to seek professional help.

In the Jeremiah reading today, God wanted the Israelite people to obey him, but they became stiff-necked. They understood the term well. In Old Testament times oxen were yoked together and used to cultivate crops. The owner would use an ox goad (a light pole with an iron spike attached) and prick the oxen on the neck when he wanted them to move or straighten their course. If the oxen were hard to control, they were called stiff-necked. Like the oxen, the children of Israel were stubborn, inflexible, obstinate and unwilling to obey.

The Israelites' thinking was distorted, and their behavior increasingly despicable as they headed towards death and destruction. Seemingly harmless religious practices progressed to unspeakable atrocities because they did not bother to attend to the voice of God.

Are we any different today? How do you feel when you have to work with a fellow church member who is pigheaded, always right, and unwilling to listen to anyone else? Not only is it an unpleasant experience, but we wonder about their relationship with Jesus Christ. *Hopefully we are not this person who is always right and not willing to listen to others.*

I may not feel stiff-necked, but I defiantly get stuck-in-a-rut sometimes. I can become entrenched in the comfort of my own thinking, particularly during this past year of Covid isolation. Believe it or not, I am an introvert. So staying home and exploring my genealogy and knitting has been just fine with me. It is easy to stay in my own little world and not search out the deeper thoughts about God and how he wants

me to spend my time.

Then in the New Testament, we read John 7:37-44.

... Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, "Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, ... rivers of living water will flow from within them."

John 7:36-37

This powerful invitation is met with doubt and disbelief by the people, as they question whether Jesus could be the Messiah. This passage reminds me that reserving judgment and welcoming those who may be different from us may lead to deeper understanding and a greater faith.

When we commit to drinking the "living water" and following Jesus, we often follow a Jesus of our own creation — a white, middle-class, American male. We need to learn the many facets of Jesus by listening to Christians from different cultural, ethnic, and social backgrounds than ourselves.

Lent is a time of reflection and self-examination. It calls us to courageously ask ourselves and God Himself if we are stiff-necked. If the answer is yes, then the Lord bids us come to him, to humble ourselves, and to place our stubborn will in His capable hands. Then His healing hands will begin to work out the kinks that have bound us and kept us from being all He wants us to be.

The following prayer was used by Park View Mennonite Church January 24, 2021:

Prayer: *Gracious God, our sins are too heavy to carry, too real to hide, and too deep to undo. Forgive what our lips tremble to name, what our hearts can no longer bear, and what has become for us a consuming fire of judgment. Set us free from a past that we cannot change; open us to a future in which we can be changed; and grant us grace to grow more and more in your likeness and image; through Jesus Christ, the light of the world. Amen.*

Linda Conrad

Wednesday, March 10

[Romans 5:1-11](#)

This passage has several good Christian keywords: faith, peace, grace, hope, and glory. It also has some harder words like suffering and endurance. We all need hope; when we lose hope we are generally in a state of despair. We all need to remember we are promised a share of God's glory, through His grace. When we talk about enduring and suffering do we rejoice? Probably not. Know that if we rejoice in sufferings, the end result is the building of our character. This gives us hope. God is refining us! Paul also wants us to understand for whom Christ died: they were powerless, ungodly, enemies of God. Jesus came and died for us. God showed us His love by sending His Beloved Son to die for us while we were still sinners. So take some time to think about some good and bad situations and know that God loves us and is building us!

LJ Joiner

Thursday, March 11

[Romans 5:12-21](#)

Many times throughout life we are required to declare our status. We might list our status on a tax return as married or single. On a college application we can declare to be applying as in-state or out-of-state. Perhaps on a job resume we might indicate we are employed or unemployed. Status can refer to the official classification given to a person, country, or organization which determines their rights or responsibilities. The word's origin is from a Latin legal term literally meaning "standing." In today's world of social media, we often think of one's status in a slightly different way. A status update or posting describes a user's current situation, state of mind, feeling, or opinion about something. On Facebook or Twitter, we might update our status to say we are "feeling excited" about something to share our mood, "going to the gym" to tell others what we are doing, or simply post we've "checked in" to a restaurant or store so people know where we are.

Romans 5:12-21 tells us our status has changed. We used to be "in Adam," but now we are "in Christ." In this passage Paul contrasts the love of God against the sin of man. The man of sin, Adam, is contrasted to the God of love, Jesus. The comparison is made of how Adam brings death while Jesus brings eternal life. All of us have been under sin because of one man. The consequence of sin is death. All of us have sinned and we are all found guilty because of our sin. The law did not cause sin, it revealed sin. The negative effects of Adam's sin are here mainly to help us see the positive effects of Christ's righteousness.

As we find our sin in the first Adam, we find our salvation in the second Adam who came to redeem and restore and reconcile us. Death is inescapable, but the remedy for sin is God's gift of righteousness. God's gift is far greater than Adam's sin. Jesus is our perfect, sinless representative. Jesus' one righteous act and His obedience to his Father cleared the way forward for our acquittal and everlasting life with God. If you haven't received the gift that God has offered you, you are still in Adam. You can receive the free gift by trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God's grace can and will empower you to live for Him.

All who come from Adam are in need of the second Adam. That is you, me, and every other person born on earth. God has revealed to us the diagnosis of our sin and He has revealed to us the remedy. Will you remain in Adam and die, or will you believe in Jesus and live? We must each make a choice to follow Adam or Jesus. How will you declare your status? Are you in Adam, or are you in Christ? This Lenten season may we be ever grateful that we can update our status from "in Adam" to "in Christ" because of the redeeming love of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Sandy Schaefer

Friday, March 12

[Romans 6:1-11](#)

When Christ died for our sins, our sinful nature was shattered. Our evil desires were nailed to the cross with Him. The part of us that loves to sin was crushed so that our sin-loving body is no longer under sin's control and no longer needs to be a slave to sin. We need to give ourselves completely to God, every part of us. If we can do that, believe and trust in God through our faith in Christ, we can have peace with God and be set free from the power of sin by His Spirit.

No one said it would be easy. We, as humans, are not perfect. We should pray to God, asking him to give us strength in wanting to live a new life in fellowship with Him.

Take time this Easter season to choose Jesus each day, being humble enough to acknowledge our sinfulness and bold enough to ask Jesus to make us whole. Allow ourselves to follow in His steps.

Prayer: *Thank you Lord, for the sacrifices you made. Help us to remember the price you paid for your people and the victory it has brought us. Amen.*

Jo Ann Liskey

Saturday, March 13

[John 8:47-59](#)

Sometimes I feel like no one understands me. In this passage I can get how Jesus would be upset, He is telling the Jews that they are not truly of God and they say he has a demon. It feels really bad when you try to tell someone something that is obvious to you but they say you are a liar and accuse you of terrible things. I feel like when we reject God's love or ignore it, we are like the Jews and are ridiculing him when he tries to make us understand. We have to be able to not reject God and to accept his love, because when we don't, it is like we are the Jews calling Jesus a demon. The Jews had to see to believe and they didn't have enough proof that this man was really God's son. We need to believe in faith and not just what we see.

Prayer: *Dear God, help me understand that we don't need to see to believe and that you are always going to be with us. Help us not see you as a demon and as God. Amen.*

Micah Blagg

Sunday, March 14

[Mark 8:11-21](#)

The Pharisees demand a sign and the disciples are blind to the signs that Jesus has shown them. How often do we fall into the trap of not seeing what is so close to us? Through the season of Lent, I think it is a good thing for us to reexamine the things we might overlook from time to time. Some of that examination is hard. We start the Lenten journey with Ash Wednesday, and if engaged fully, it asks us to acknowledge that we are all subject to death. Whether that be our physical death, or the death that sin imposes on us spiritually. Not something we necessarily want to ponder on a regular basis, although it has the potential to renew our spirits and move us into a deeper relationship with God. Lent also encourages us to renew the practice of spiritual disciplines. It is hopeful that we engage in this throughout the year, but Lent is a focused reminder of what we should be doing and a chance to come back around to practices that might have been neglected over time. Lent gives us the opportunity to engage them in the right spirit as well, knowing that our practices move us closer to God's intent for our lives.

The text for today is a fair warning of what not to do. The Pharisees simply want Jesus to do something to prove he is someone worth listening to. They are not interested in reforming their practices or changing how they relate to God; instead they want proof, "show us a sign." Jesus has no use for their cries and simply leaves. His disciples, on the other hand, don't seem to see the signs before them. He instructs them not to fall into the trap of the Pharisees and reminds them of what he has already done. Feeding the 5,000 seems like a pretty obvious "sign." God has provided for us through Jesus all the resources we need to thrive in this world; Lent gives us the chance to reconnect to those resources and renew our spirit to continue the journey of being better disciples.

Rev. Adam Blagg

Monday, March 15

[Jeremiah 16:10-21](#)

Watch closely now. I'm going to teach these wrongheaded people.

Starting right now, I'm going to teach them

Who I am and what I do,

teach them the meaning of my name, GOD—"I AM."

Jeremiah 16:21 (The Message)

I think that it was United Methodist Bishop and theologian William Willimon who said that the church is to 'be a sign and a signal to the world that Jesus Christ is Lord.' For most of the time I hear that and believe that followers of the Way of Jesus are 'signs and signals' through acts of extravagant generosity, unbridled compassion, and selfless service to others no matter who they are. There are times

though, and the prophets remind us, that a people, even the church, can go so off track and be so out of line with God's intentions that something more drastic is required to bring them back; to awaken them again to the awesome power and majesty of God. Jeremiah was singled out by God to be such a 'sign and signal' to the very people, God's chosen, who were supposed to be the light to the nations. They turned their collective back on God. They chose 'other' gods to follow. Something had to happen. Something so undeniably big was required to shake the people up and turn their hearts back to God. Jeremiah was it. In the verses before us Jeremiah's very life is the living sign of God. It was hard for him. It cost him dearly.

Several years ago I had a cancerous tumor removed from my body. The surgery itself left me weakened but I recovered quickly. The ensuing chemotherapy was, as I recorded in my journal, brutal. I knew it was necessary to fully rid my body of the murderous cells. The end result was restoration and healing. Scripture, as I read it, reveals that healing and restoration are two words that describes God's intention for all of creation, including us.

There may come a time when we, who struggle to follow the Way of Jesus, will be called upon to be a 'sign and signal that Jesus Christ is Lord' and it will be costly. It too could be brutal. Because of Jesus we have each other, the Body of Christ and the assurance of the Holy Spirit with us. We do not, and maybe even we must not, ever come to the conclusion that we are alone. It is our collective mission to be signs and signals of the Lordship of Jesus.

In this season of Lent, we are given reminders as we follow along with Jesus to Jerusalem and pay attention to all that Jesus endures there, that God's good intention is to have us no matter what. It was and continues to be very costly. In watching Jesus, we can come to the full realization **of the meaning of my name, God – I AM.**

Prayer: *Gracious God, make me sensitive to all the evidence of your goodness; and may I, trusting in you, free myself of the terror of death, and feel free to live intensely and happily the life you have given me. Amen.*
(Ruben Alves, Brazil. From the UM Hymnal #360)

Rev. Jim Wingert

Tuesday, March 16

[John 6:16-27](#)

*Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life
which the Son of man will give you. On Him God the Father has placed His seal of approval.*

John 6:27

As I have gotten older my priorities have changed. What used to take first place is now down the line and not as important to get done. I know that God has given each of us time on earth and choices to choose what we will do with the time He has given. We are called to bring those that do not know Jesus

to him. I think that every day in some way we could share with someone His good news. This has been a very difficult year for many people with challenges we never expected. We never know when the opportunity will come to tell another person how Jesus saved us or brought us through a very hard day. We need to be ready and willing to love Him enough to share what He has done for us and will do for them if they open their hearts to Him.

Prayer: *Lord Jesus open our eyes and hearts to the needs of those around us. Help us to share your good news with someone that needs your love and compassion. Amen.*

Linda Ridder

Wednesday, March 17

[Romans 8:1-11](#)

Lent asks us to renew our relationship with God by acknowledging our brokenness and human frailty; worthwhile tasks in the midst of Lent and even outside of this season of preparation. Our text today reminds us that at times our Lenten discipline should also turn our attention to the possibility that exists in each of us to really do what God calls us to. As we work on the discipline of Lent, it might make you question your ability to actually affect change in your own life. Growing into a better disciple is daunting and, at times, potentially frustrating. Knowing where to engage and being able to effectively do so can be worlds apart. In the midst of that potential frustration it is good to hear the text for today from Romans. Paul is optimistic about the power of relating to God. Lent can cause us to look a little too closely at our failures and forget that we are children of God, capable of much.

Paul reminds us that we are not children of flesh but children of the spirit. Our identity is firmly rooted in our relationship with God. That does not mean that the work of discipleship is easy, but it does mean that it is attainable. We are filled with the Spirit and able to accomplish much. Our practice of spiritual disciplines should remind us of this, not be a stumbling block to overcome. I hope that as you are moving through this Lenten season, you are finding life-giving practices that are helping you realize the fullness that God is calling you to. I hope these words from Paul remind us of our potential in Christ instead of focusing on our challenges.

Rev. Adam Blagg

Thursday, March 18

[John 6:41-51](#)

People were talking behind Jesus' back because he said that he was the bread that came down from heaven. They were confused about how he came down from heaven when they knew who his mother and father were. He had heard them and told them to stop. Jesus said that people cannot be drawn to him unless the Father who sent him draws them to him. He will raise them on the last day and prophets wrote that everyone will be taught by God. Anyone who hears or learns from him will go to Jesus. It doesn't

mean that anyone has seen the Father. Jesus, who the Father sent, is the only one who has seen him. Whoever believes in him has eternal life. He is the bread of life. Our ancestors ate manna in the desert, but they died. The bread that comes down from heaven is the kind that whoever eats it will not die. He is the living bread that came down from heaven. The bread is his flesh that he gave the world so we may live. To me, this means that you shouldn't talk about someone behind their back, and ask them in person to explain if you are confused. He explains himself using bread and it is easier to understand that way. Jesus gave his life for us so we need to appreciate it and believe in him so we can live and worship him forever.

Prayer: *Thank you, God, for sending your son to us so that we can live and worship you eternally. Thank you, Jesus, for sacrificing yourself so we could be forgiven and for giving us the bread of life. Amen.*

Chelsea Joiner

Friday, March 19

[Jeremiah 23:1-8](#)

Jellyfish larva, tiny as plankton that can barely be seen with the naked eye, have no tentacles to protect them. They drift without control over their destination and just keep floating until they find something to hold on to. This is how I imagine the common, everyday people of the Old Testament to be. These nameless individuals go about trying to eke out a living, while subjected to the whims of unfaithful shepherds or kings, powerless to affect positive change in their society.

Thankfully for us, Jesus was sent to become the rock we cling to, and he challenged us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Following his lead, we take Christ's mission seriously to feed the hungry, clothe the needy, shelter the homeless, and remember the sick and imprisoned. Otterbein operates or supports services to help in meeting these needs. We are pretty adept at being Good Samaritans. Year after year we continue these missions of mercy. As I ponder our good works, a Martin Luther King, Jr. quote comes to mind. Dr. King was talking to Andrew Young, who later became the U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations.

Dr. King lamented, "... Andy, I think the Good Samaritan is a great individual. I of course, like and respect the Good Samaritan... but I don't want to be a Good Samaritan." Dr. King continued, "... you see Andy, I am tired of picking up people along the Jericho Road. I am tired of seeing people battered and bruised and bloody, injured and jumped on, along the Jericho Roads of life. This road is dangerous. I don't want to pick up anyone else, along this Jericho Road; I want to fix... the Jericho Road. I want to pave the Jericho Road, add street lights to the Jericho Road; make the Jericho Road safe (for passage) by everybody..."

Repairing the Jericho Road is a daunting task. It's difficult to imagine where to begin making systematic changes in our society. One tool available to us in the United States is political action, but unfortunately it is an instrument we are often reluctant to employ. Carol Barton, Executive for Community Action with the United Methodist Women's national office, notes that people frequently don't work for justice through the political process because of apathy, complacency, partisan behavior, divisive issues,

and the slow process of making change. Politics seems too messy, and we often just don't want to lower ourselves to participate in an activity that seems somehow un-Christ-like. It is important to remember that Jesus challenged the social order of his day and that early Methodists boldly worked to change society through their opposition to slave trade, smuggling, and cruel treatment of prisoners.

Fortunately, opportunities and guidance for our involvement in local and statewide social justice issues already exist. Faith in Action is addressing the issue of affordable housing in Harrisonburg and Rockingham County. For many years, the UMW has sponsored United Methodist Day at the General Assembly allowing citizens the opportunity to explore and advocate for legislation that addresses and promotes the ability for all people of our Commonwealth to thrive, and The Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (virginiainterfaithcenter.org) provides specific information and methods of supporting social justice issues currently before the Virginia General Assembly.

We are blessed as the ordinary, everyday people of our time not to drift helplessly, but to have the ability to navigate the currents of society to bring about positive change and the opportunity for all people to flourish.

Barb German

Saturday, March 20

[John 6:60-71](#)

In January 2006, a Christian-based research firm known as the Barna group released a staggering survey detailing the priorities of everyday Christians. The survey found that out of a nationally-represented sample of Christians in the United States, only 15% of Christians placed their faith in God at the top of their priority list. At first glance, this statistic surprised me. However, after thinking about the amount of people in our culture who claim to be Christians, yet live lives full of sin, this statistic did not surprise me anymore.

In this passage of scripture, Jesus is explaining that the only way to achieve eternal life and avoid the ramifications of sin is through Him. He says,

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died.

This is the bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh. (John 6:48-51)

The scripture passage states that many of Jesus's disciples turned away from Him and discontinued following Him. This act is very symbolic of a significant problem in our culture today. Many Christians grow up in the tradition of attending church every Sunday with their families, yet don't truly embody the significance and meaning of being a Christian. It can be easy to grow up in a Christian setting, but fail to fully take on the responsibilities and callings of being a disciple of Christ.

Our faith should be the driving factor of the decisions we make throughout our time on earth. Way too often, we view God as a last resort when hope seems lost rather than a primary foundation that we can go to in distressing times. We each have to decide which one of these types of disciples we will be: one

who walks away, or one who remains loyal. With the emergence of new technology and media in our culture, it has become difficult to keep our faith at the forefront of our lives. However, we must continue to dedicate ourselves to God's work and fulfill the callings He has granted us.

Jonathan Williams

Sunday, March 21

[Mark 8:31-9:1](#)

He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."

Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul? If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

And he said to them, "Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see that the kingdom of God has come with power."

Mark 8:31-9:1

In the preceding verses 29 and 30, Peter answered "You are the Messiah" to Jesus' question, "But who do you say that I am?" Here Jesus sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

It is from verse 31 to chapter 9:1 that Jesus foretells his death and resurrection – that he must undergo great suffering, be rejected by those in authority, be killed, and after three days will rise again. We can relate with Peter as he recoiled in horror to what Jesus said. With our human thinking, no one would want that for Jesus. Here Jesus is telling them to set their minds on divine things not human things.

The disciples had taken the first step in realizing that Jesus is the Messiah. They had witnessed the feeding of the five thousand, Jesus walking on water, healing the sick, performing miracles, and outsmarting the Pharisees. Jesus was telling his disciples of the second step, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me." It is that second step that involves a lifelong journey of saying "yes" to Jesus as our Savior and living our best to a life of service for his Kingdom. We live in the **here and now** to promote the good, the mercy, and the love of Christ to all.

Jesus prepared his disciples of the coming Passion by warning them three times (8:31, 9:31, 10:33) in the gospel of Mark. The authorities did their best to get rid of Jesus, to crucify Him and his ideas. But God

had other plans. Death was no match for Him. Jesus knew the "**and then...**", the rest of the story. He fulfilled the resurrection promise just as He said to his disciples.

Each of us are on our own "**and then...**" path in our discipleship. We have doubts, stumble, backup, and try again. Each of us in our unique way share and persevere for the love of Christ and His Kingdom.

Liz Lawson

Monday, March 22

[John 9:1-17](#)

2020 has truly been a trying time for many...feelings of fear and uncertainty from violence, economic decline, racial injustices, and political controversies are only amplified by the current pandemic of Covid-19. Especially during these frightening times and perpetual periods of darkness, it is crucial to not lose sight of God in our lives. While blessings and miracles surround us, they can easily become unseen in the presence of negativity and loss of hope.

In John chapter 9, Jesus performs an incredible miracle of restoring the sight of a blind man. The blind man remained steadfast in his hope for healing and therefore readily obeyed Jesus' instructions to wash the mud from his face in the Pool of Siloam. The darkness that plagued him vanished, and he willingly proclaimed the miracle to others.

Miracles continue to be present in our lives as God guides us through the darkness we face. It may come in the form of healing from an ailment, receiving a helping hand from others, a long-awaited answer to a prayer, or even a phone call from a friend. These moments help keep our faith and hope alive, and remind us that we are not alone. God knows our struggles and has a plan for each of us. We just need to remain faithful and follow his guidance to escape the darkness until we reach eternal light.

Prayer: *Dear God, please help us to appreciate all the miracles you have bestowed upon us. Assist us to not lose sight of your love and deliver us from the darkness. Amen.*

Emily Joiner

Tuesday, March 23

[Romans 10:1-13](#)

For if you tell others with your own mouth that Jesus Christ is your Lord, and believe in your own heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is by believing in his heart that a man becomes right with God; and with his mouth he tells others of his faith, confirming his salvation.

Romans 10:9-10 (TLBP)

This evening I was reading my devotions from *15 Minutes Alone with God* by Emilie Barnes. The scripture was from Psalm 71:16, "Even when I am old and gray, do not forsake me, O God, till I declare your power to the next generation, your might to all who are to come." A list of scriptures were listed with this devotional to gain God's revelations for salvation and Romans 10:9-10 was on the list. Ms. Barnes says not

to wait until we are old and gray-haired (although a lot of us at Otterbein already meet these qualifications). Begin today sharing the message of Jesus Christ with the whole world.

In today's scripture, we find Israel thinking only of righteous works because the people did not understand the kind of righteousness God wanted or how to get it.

Paul makes it very clear how we can be saved through righteousness – by faith. It is as near as our own heart and mouth. If we want to be saved, we must believe in our own hearts that Jesus Christ is our Lord and that God raised Him from the dead. Then with our own mouths we must show our faith by telling others. The secret to salvation is having faith and sharing it with others. We do well believing in our own hearts, but we fall short sharing our faith with others. We must let our faith speak louder than our fear.

The scripture says, "*Whosoever believes in Him shall not be disappointed.*" Whosoever means everyone believing because we all have the same Lord who is available to all who turn to Him in faith. "*For anyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved*" (Romans 10:13).

Prayer: *Dear God, open our hearts to receive and believe in Your word and equip us to share our faith with others. We ask this in Jesus name. Amen.*

Wilma Mitchell

Wednesday, March 24

[John 10:1-18](#)

I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and go in and out and find pasture.

John 10:9

And I have other sheep, that are not part of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will head my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10:16

I was raised just outside of Charleston, WV in a small, tight-knit community. My high school enrolled about 65% White and 35% Black students. Even though we went to school together, the communities were geographically separated and that meant our lives were separated as well. I knew well very few of the Black students in my class. This was not an active avoidance on my part, it was just part of how life evolved during that time and in that space. We associated most closely with those in our immediate neighborhoods.

Looking back on that time in my life, I realize that there were subtle clues regarding with whom we should be associating – it was not as innocent as I thought at the time! I think the scriptures above ask us to be more aware of the subtleties and make efforts to be more embracing of ALL God's peoples.

As we head toward the crucifixion and the glorious resurrection of Jesus, may we remember that He is our salvation and the salvation of all humankind. We are the chosen ones – as are all the other

chosen ones, regardless of church denomination, race, color, nationality, living conditions, etc. We should actively practice loving our neighbors as ourselves. We need to be better at living as He wants us to and working harder to accept that each and every person can be part of His flock.

Prayer: *Lord, help us to be more aware of the subtle, and not-so-subtle, ways we do not accept others as worthy of our time and friendship. Let us remember that we are all part of the same flock, with the same shepherd, and act accordingly.*

Janet Gloeckner

Thursday, March 25

[Jeremiah 26:1-16](#)

For in truth the Lord has sent me to you to speak all these words in your hearing.

Jeremiah 26:15

Usually if I am asked to select from Bible verses either in the Old or New Testament, I will almost always choose the New Testament. This time, though, something kept pulling me toward this passage in Jeremiah. Jeremiah the prophet was told by God to preach in the court of the Lord's house where all could hear, even his enemies, and tell them of their evil ways and how they should listen to God and follow His law. Jeremiah knew he may be in danger for saying these things, but he left nothing out.

Have there been times in your life when you wanted to say something about your faith and what Jesus means to you, but you pull back and think twice? I know this has happened to me. I tell myself that I will let my actions speak more than my words. What I am really thinking is, can I be convincing and say what God wants me to say? I wouldn't be in danger as Jeremiah was, but I may be embarrassed or asked a question I don't know the answer to.

During this Lenten season, reflect on the rejection Jeremiah faced and all he had to endure. Could we face a similar rejection in the world today? Could you go in front of one of the protestors or someone who thinks differently from you and talk to them about Jesus? Could you tell them how we should all learn to live together and love one another? You may or may not come to some harm, but you will also know that Jesus is with you and God will provide you with the words to say; just as He did with Jeremiah. I'm not sure I could, but maybe God isn't calling me to do something on that big of a scale. Maybe God is just calling me to speak to one friend or family member. The cost of rejection from one of them may not be as serious as losing my life, but it could be just as hard to bear. I may lose a friend or a family member may not want to speak to me ever again. This is the time when I need to rely on God even more, just as Jeremiah did.

Margaret Clark

Friday, March 26

[Romans 11:13-24](#)

I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this, for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them. For since their rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, their acceptance will be even more wonderful. It will be life for those who were dead! And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their descendants will also be holy – just as the entire batch of dough is holy because the portion given as an offering is holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.

But some of these branches from Abraham's tree – some of the people of Israel – have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree. But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

“Well,” you may say, “those branches were broken off to make room for me.” Yes, but remember – those branches were broken off because they didn't believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So, don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. For if God did not spare the original branches, he won't spare you either.

Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off. And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree. You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So, if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.

Romans 11:13-24

Rejection seems like a natural part of the Christian walk. I think this is because of how Christians choose to live their life. There is a lot of darkness in this world that, sadly, a lot of people simply don't recognize, since the darkness is actually seen as “normal.” Because of this, Christians face so much rejection that they unfortunately become used to it, and therefore, it is seen as the “normal” for them.

Fortunately for Christians, they are never alone; the scripture above talks about God uniting the Jews to follow him in the Christian faith with the help of Paul, who is one of God's disciples. God faced so much rejection that it seemed as though almost everyone turned against him, but he also offered love in return for the darkness. God's olive tree serves as a great example in the scripture. Every branch represents a Christian follower in the tree, while the broken branches represent individuals who choose to not follow Christ. Even though Christians face a lot of rejection from time to time, God reminds us that we still need to be loving and caring to those who don't follow Christ. In doing so, Christians will be able to spread God's love to everyone, and unity will be present.

Dylan Andrade

Saturday, March 27

[Romans 11:25-36](#)

Forgiveness to All

The three Scriptures I am given never make sense. Jeremiah 31:27-34, Romans 11:25-36, and John 11:28-42 gave me many ideas for the Resurrection Promise and the redemptive works of God that await on Easter, but actual Lent was harder. Lately, God has been putting on my mind when I randomly wake up to use those times to find the matching Scripture and see what He has to say. Between that and "The Grudge," a YouVersion app devotional, "I" settled on Romans 11. 11:36 was just as powerful in John; Lazarus's resurrection makes for a great emotional lift after the sorrows of Lent and the wounds of the pandemic, but let's not get ahead of ourselves. The scene of Luke 23:32-34 has to be remembered, where Jesus asks "*Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.*" Lent is a season of repentance, remembering in humility our own weaknesses and mortality. Luke is a reminder we are to forgive others as Jesus did for us (you do remember your sins put Jesus there as well, right?). More importantly, though, we have to forgive ourselves or we will never learn to forgive others.

In Romans 11 Paul proposes maybe Israel got confused about the Messiah to give the Gentiles a chance. He reminds the Gentiles as well there is no replacement for the chosen people of God, for all of us were astray before Jesus came. If "all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23) what place is there to develop a superior attitude? Even one of us being the worst of all sinners?" Maybe some of the best lessons for others are in our fallible nature which needs correction from time to time? We cannot love ourselves if we don't first love others and vice versa. The Greatest Commandment is a two-fold focus on love, not judging, God and our neighbor. If Jesus enacted the Golden Rule on us for how we treat others and ourselves wouldn't Hell be overflowing most days? Romans 15:7 further reminds us to "accept others as Christ has accepted us." Like His knowledge, God's grace has no bounds, nor can we grasp His judgments as He is pure love (v33.). We are only Jesus' when we act like Him so maybe we should ease up on ourselves so we can ease up on others. Yes, we still need to take a daily inventory so we do not become like the Gentiles in this passage, but we need to do so in love.

Prayer: *Heavenly Daddy, help us to forgive ourselves so that we may forgive others. Help us to see ourselves as fallible but loveable. Help us to do the hard work of self-reflection and see where we need to improve to honor you in thought, word, and deed. Remind us daily that "For of [You], and through [You] and to [You, not us] are all things, to whom be the glory forever. Amen" (v.36)*

Tara Eckenroad

Sunday, March 28

[Matthew 21:12-17](#)

Make Room

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them.

Matthew 21:14

I remember clearly the first few weeks after Covid-19 arrived in Harrisonburg. It brought with it a steep learning curve as we all had to make major changes to our daily routines. In my household, one of the major adjustments was figuring out how to do church at home. Watching church online was a new thing for all of us. Sometimes I would make a big breakfast and we would eat together while listening to the service. Other times, I would play worship music and we would sing and make music before the Lord. Early on, Sarah Grace and I discovered that we loved to twirl and dance before the Lord in worship. Since my living room isn't all that big, in order for this to happen, we had to push back all the furniture to *make room* for our worship.

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. Genesis 50:20

I love this Scripture! For me it points to how God's grace can be experienced even in the most difficult circumstances. Sometimes it takes many years to discover God's grace in hardship, other times it becomes clear right away. What I know to be true in my life is that if I look for God's grace in the rubble of destruction, I will always find it. His love always speaks a better word. He is greater and more powerful than any evil we might experience.

As I reflect on the grace of God in the midst of Covid, I am reminded of how Sarah Grace and I rearranged the furniture in the living room to *make room* for worshipping God. Sometimes a gift that comes from hardship can be an opportunity to reflect on our priorities and rearrange things that have gotten out of order. Sometimes this looks like pushing back the comfortable routines in our lives to *make room* for the new and intimate ways God wants to reveal Himself to us. Perhaps God's grace during Covid came in the invitation to *make room* for Him in our hearts once again and experience His breathtaking love in more intimate ways – even in our own living rooms.

When we consider the Scripture above, we can see that Jesus cleared away the things that didn't belong in the temple *in order to make room for people to be healed*. I see this as an invitation to ask ourselves a question. What needs to be cleared away in our hearts and in our church to *make room* for the healing power of Jesus to be experienced?

And then more questions emerge. Do you want Otterbein to be a place of healing where people can come and encounter Jesus? Do you want Jesus to heal you? As we begin to meet again in person, what do we need to rearrange within our structure of worship so that we can make more room for the healing power of Jesus to be experienced? I invite you to reflect on these questions as we enter into Holy Week.

Let's not just go through the motions. Let's ask the Lord what NEW thing He is doing in His Church and let's *make room* for the full manifestation of His glory to be known in our hearts and at Otterbein UMC.

Rev. Faith Fowler

Monday, March 29

[Jeremiah 12:1-16](#)

I would like to believe that everyone has felt as Jeremiah did here, to some degree. We ask God why those who deny Him or pretend to love Him prosper, while we suffer? Every challenge we face serves an important role in our lives, and prepares us for the next challenge. We must learn to trust God and draw on His strength when we need it, rather than question His methods. If when we are faced with a challenge, we spend our time complaining instead of learning and growing, how are we to improve? When God tests us, we may be tempted to reject him, but this is when it is MOST important to listen to Him, let Him renew us, and understand that He is filled with compassion and love that we may draw on whenever we need.

Camila Maric

Tuesday, March 30

[Jeremiah 15:10-21](#)

Jeremiah, the Enduring Prophet of God

A good way to describe the prophet Jeremiah is that he possessed endurance. There are some people who lack the ability to demonstrate long-term commitment care. But not Jeremiah. Jeremiah was a prophet who endured. He endured those who ignored his message, he endured threats on his life, he endured kings who ignored his warnings, he endured being severely persecuted. Through all of this, Jeremiah had to depend on God's love and God's word.

In the Bible passage today, Jeremiah is angry with God. He accuses God of not helping him when he really needs it. Jeremiah has taken his eyes off God's purposes and is feeling sorry for himself. It is obvious from Jeremiah's words in the text that he is angry, hurt, and afraid.

Beginning in verse 19, do you notice God's reaction to Jeremiah's words? God does not get angry with Jeremiah. Instead, God answers by reorienting Jeremiah's priorities. Jeremiah was God's spokesperson and as such he was to influence people, not let them influence him.

For us, as people of God, there are three important "take-aways" from today's scripture passage:

- In prayer, we can reveal our deepest thoughts to God,
- God expects us to trust him, no matter what, and
- We are here to influence others for God.

Prayer: *Loving, patient God, we praise your name and ask for the endurance of Jeremiah as we move through this life. Truly make us your disciples as we seek to demonstrate our love and concern through you for others. In the name of the Risen Christ, Amen.*

Bill Pollard

Wednesday, March 31

[Philippians 4:1-13](#)

Contentment

A man once went from being wealthy to poor, losing his business, his home, and his job. When he was at the height of his success and at the bottom he said, “It’s all God.” The smile on his face and brightness of his eyes revealed he truly believed it. What is the secret of this kind of thinking and what did he know that so many of us strive for?

The Apostle Paul knew the secret as he wrote this passage: *“I rejoiced greatly in the Lord that at last you renewed your concern for me. Indeed, you were concerned, but you had no opportunity to show it. I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned to be content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength”* (vs. 10-13).

The dictionary defines “contentment” as being in a state of satisfaction or fulfillment. Are you content? It is kind of difficult now during a pandemic but even so, we have such an abundance in this country. I have known people who have everything but are unhappy and those who have very little and are very happy. Paul was in prison when he wrote this and, despite his circumstances, he had learned to be content. His secret to this was not in himself, but the secret was Jesus. The strength you need to find contentment is through Jesus. He died and rose again so that we may all experience him and have everlasting life.

Prayer: *Dear Jesus, thank you so much for everything you give us and do for us. Help us to accept it with a grateful heart. Thank you for dying on a cross for us. Amen.*

Kathy Billhimer

Thursday, April 1

[John 17:1-26](#) (The subtitle for this Chapter in my Bible is ‘Jesus Prays for His Disciples.’ I encourage you to read and contemplate the prayer).

Maundy Thursday

The word Maundy is derived from the Latin word for ‘mandate’ or command and, in this context, sends us to John 13:34,35 when Jesus, after washing the disciple’s feet tells them, **“I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

Even though the disciples did not know the full impact of such a command (Do you? Do we?), they were soon to find out. Their commitment to continue, against all odds, to be followers of the Way of Jesus is foreshadowed in the prayer we have before us in John 17. **“I pray for these followers, but I am also praying for all those who will believe in me because of their teaching. Father, I pray that they can be one. As you are in me and I am in you, I pray that they can also be one in us. Then the world will believe that you sent me. AND, Father, you are the One who is good. The world does not know you, but I know you, and these people know you sent me. I showed them what you are like, and I will show them again. Then they will have the same love that you have for me, and I will live in them”** (New Century Version).

Living the new command is hard work for any who take seriously the struggles of living the Way of Jesus. There are so many distractions and outright lies that entice us to follow false teachers and false doctrine. Witness the prominent display of Jesus banners at the insurrection and coup attempt in our nation’s Capitol on January 6th. Christian nationalism in no way represents Jesus’ command nor the values of the present and coming in fullness Kingdom of God inaugurated in the life and teachings, the suffering and death, and glorious resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Jesus is the very One sent to us to show us the ultimate power of God’s steadfast love that never fails. **That they can be one** is not a call to be of the same opinion on every matter, but a command to be of one heart and mind in loyalty to Jesus our Savior. This command is not always easy.

Thankfully in this season of Lent we are invited to reorient our lives. Perhaps sometime today or this evening you will receive the loving and gracious invitation to the Table of the Lord where no one is excluded. In the midst of that Thanksgiving you will hear again the familiar words *Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here and on these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ that we may be for the world the body of Christ redeemed by his blood* (United Methodist Hymnal). In that kind of life, we continue to be living answers to Jesus’ loving prayer for us.

As a closing prayer, open your heart and mind and listen to Jesus pray for you as you re-read John 17.

Rev. Jim Wingert

Friday, April 2

[Genesis 22:1-14](#), [John 12:37-50; 13:27-38](#), [1 Peter 1:10-20](#)

The three Scriptures suggested here seem to be taking us in a lightning course through the life span of each one of us. Abraham is challenged in believing God by going through the excruciating fire of sacrificing his son, Isaac; this illustrates the range of choices that each one of us faces in life. We are asked to sacrifice our possessions, our loves, and our very selves in order to be his followers... A terrifying choice for anyone.

The second Scripture selection, Gospel of John 12 and 13, brings up the example of Jesus who became the substitute lamb that is sacrificed. We still have to leave and follow Him, if need be. But He

does the dying, He does the interceding for us, and He opens the door for us to go in to our heavenly father.

The third Scripture, in First Peter, describes our part in the contract between God and each one of us. Having faced the key issue, we now live a life of self-discipline, completely sacrificed to Grace. We then are able to live the holy life Jesus has asked us to live

In a few words, the Christian good news is displayed before us. May we continue to follow the steps that have brought us to this day, a willingness to live a holy life as He is holy.

Rev. Samuel J. Espinoza

Saturday, April 3

[Romans 8:1-11](#)

In this passage we see the promise that God will give us the ability to live for Him through the power of His Holy Spirit living within us. *“Those who live according to the sinful nature have their mind set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires”* (Romans 8:5).

Paul tells us to keep our mind set on the Spirit. He divides people into two categories: those who live based on their own wants (sinful nature) and those who focus on God’s plan for their life. I don’t know about you, but with life so busy and bombarded by the world around us, it is hard to keep a focus on God throughout the day. Thank goodness we are not expected to do it on our own as God promised to send a helper, a spirit that actually dwells in us. *“You however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you”* (Romans 8: 9). How do we know the Spirit is with us? I think of this familiar hymn, *He Lives*, written by Alfred Ackley:

I serve a risen Savior, he’s in the world today;
I know that he is living, whatever men may say.
I see his hand of mercy, I hear his voice of cheer,
and just the time I need him, he’s always near.

In all the world around me I see his loving care,
and though my heart grows weary,

I never will despair.

I know that he is leading
through all the stormy blast.

the day of his appearing will come at last.

Rejoice, rejoice, O Christian, lift up your voice sing
eternal hallelujahs to Jesus Christ the King!

The hope of all who seek him,
the help of all who find;
none other is so loving, so good and kind.

Chorus

He lives, he lives, Christ Jesus lives today!

He walks with me and talks with me
along life’s narrow way.

He lives, he lives, salvation to impart!

You ask me how I know he lives?

He lives within my heart.

Betty Redmond

Sunday, April 4

[Luke 24:13-35](#)

If you happened to hear my Ash Wednesday reflection, you will recall that we began our Lenten journey with Jesus embarking towards Jerusalem (Luke 9: 51-62). It is fitting that we come to the close of Lent and begin our Easter celebration with Jesus taking another walk with friends. Jesus began this season with his disciples and encountered much on the way. Now as we come to Easter he concludes his time with two disciples explaining to them all that had taken place. During this Lenten season we have each had our own journey, lived out in a variety of ways, but the constant has been the presence of the Spirit with us. Much changes in the Christian narrative between Ash Wednesday and Easter Sunday. Jesus' journey involves a royal procession, confrontation with Jewish leaders, a final meal with friends, a trial, state violence, death on a cross, and ultimately resurrection. Through all of this, Jesus endures much, teaches much, and loves with abandon, ultimately giving his life for all of creation. It is a powerful narrative and one that brings hope anew each time we come to it.

As we come to the conclusion of it all, we seek meaning for our own journey and I think the scripture for today reminds us of two simple ways we can continue in this narrative. Besides walking, which I strongly endorse but is not the point I make today, Jesus does two simple things: he talks about scripture and he sits down for a meal. Sometimes we make the Christian journey more complicated than necessary. We get bogged down in important details and significant tasks and lose sight of the simplicity of this key story in our tradition. We need to regularly attend to the Word. Open the Bible, talk about what you read, study as much as you can, converse with others, be challenged by the living Word of God. We need to share meals together. I know the past year has made that not always possible, but when it does become a safe option again, we need to sit around the table and eat together. We have some catching up to do. There, of course, is the element of gathering as a congregation and breaking the sacramental bread as well; both of these types of meals need to be something we truly make a focus again in our shared lives together.

Easter is a joyous time, we proclaim a victory over death and are assured that Christ is alive! In the midst of that proclamation, let us remember this text and the simple instructions it provides for our ongoing celebration.

Happy Easter!

Rev. Adam Blagg