

Easter Sunday, April 20

Read Luke 24:1-12

Sunrise service at Hollow Park at 7 a.m.

**Festive Easter worship at WUMC at 10:30 a.m.
with Bell and Chancel Choirs and Praise Band.**

Did you ever look in the wrong place for something?
Of course you did! Me, too! So say we all!

Beginning my eighth decade of life, it happens most often
when I set something down “just for a second” so I can do
something else. (Multi-tasking is so overrated!) I do the
“something else” and then forget where I put the first thing.

Or I have a great place to keep something “safe:” so safe I
can’t find it later.

*“Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and the
other women” (Luke 24:10)* had far better reasons to look in the
wrong place. Their loved one, Jesus, was dead and they were
going to honor him. Yet as is sometimes the case, they missed his
message. He was not to be found among the dead, but among the
living. They were looking in the wrong place!

Today Lent is over and Easter is here! Following these
reflections, my prayer is that you’ve found your faith encouraged,
your spiritual practices refreshed, your experience of the Living
Christ empowered. Most of all, I hope these devotions were the
right place to find God’s magnificent and irresistible love in the
witnesses of your friends and neighbors. Whether you have or
not, the witness of over 2,000 years again declares: *“The Lord is
Risen. He is Risen, indeed!”*

Prayer: Lord God Almighty, early in the morning our song rises to
you. Thank you for your love that has triumphed over evil and
death. May Christ be glorified today in my speech and in my steps,
in my mind and in my heart. May your Holy Spirit enliven your
Church again on this Resurrection Day, to the glory of Christ’s
name. Amen.

Pastor Brian Bodt

A DAILY DEVOTIONAL AND LENTEN WORSHIP SCHEDULE

LENT, 2025

*Written by
members and friends of*

**Woodbury
United Methodist Church
4 Church Street
Woodbury, Connecticut**

www.woodburyumc.net

Dear members and friends of Woodbury U.M. Church,

This Lenten devotional offers the privilege of reading faith reflections of people we all know and love. I trust you will find them a blessing. Please use it daily. May the blessings of Christ be in it for all of us. To God be the glory!

The Rev. Dr. Brian R. Bodt, Pastor

Ash Wednesday, March 5

Read Psalm 51:1-17

Worship today: simple service at 10 a.m.

7 p.m. worship with music by Bell and Chancel Choirs

This psalm is well known to regular attenders of Ash Wednesday worship. Its words are also familiar to anyone experiencing deep remorse for sin.

Since the psalms are the Bible's hymn book, some translations include these words to the song leader: *"A Psalm of David, when the prophet Nathan came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba."* THAT story of murder and adultery is told in salacious detail in Second Samuel, chapters 11 and 12. Read it if you will. As I said, this is a psalm written for deep remorse for sin.

Yet our preoccupation with David's sin diverts us from examining our own. Before his 35 years of sobriety, my late brother Bernie would say that he knew that he didn't have a drinking problem because "Joe" drank more than he did.

Looking at another's transgressions to lessen culpability for our own tempts all of us. But it does nothing to heal us. That comes only with confession. *"Name it and claim it." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me,"* David asks. Confession, accepting our mortality and a hunger for restoration, are the first steps in the Lenten journey.

Today begins the journey of Lent. Let's get right with God. Let's observe a Holy Lent.

Prayer: O Lord, do not cast me away from your presence, nor take your holy spirit from me. May I "take on" as well as "give up" those things that *"restore to me the joy of your salvation."* **Pastor Brian**

Holy Saturday, April 19

Read John 19:31-42

This passage feels so final and so rushed. The scriptures are fulfilled. Jesus is pierced, taken down and buried quickly close by before the Sabbath begins. As of yet, there has been no time to process the heinous things that have happened. Holy Saturday is a liminal space. The worst has happened. Unlike us, Joseph and Nicodemus didn't know what would come next. They could only hope that Jesus would live on in their hearts.

We often skip Holy Saturday. We go through the ritual of Palm Sunday, Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. We know Easter is coming. We more than likely fill Saturday with mindless items on our to do list. But, we all have known Holy Saturday. Many of them. We have received a cancer diagnosis, lost a loved one suddenly or lost our job. We have each had to let go of people or our identity or our security. Each of us has had to live in that liminal space. The worst has happened and, just like Joseph and Nicodemus, we don't know what will happen next.

As you go through Holy Saturday, I encourage you to stop and consider how you are coping with the uncertainties in your life. Where are you experiencing God in this liminal space?

Prayer: Lord, help me to remember that you go with me through the liminal spaces of my life. Because of your Son, I am never alone. Thank you. I can depend on you even when I don't know what comes next. I know this uncertainty will not last forever. Amen.

Meg Temple

Good Friday, April 10

Read John 19:31-42

**Good Friday worship, Valley Cooperative Parish, 7 pm
at Naugatuck United Methodist Church, 208 Meadow Street or
Ecumenical worship at St. Paul's Episcopal Church,
294 Main Street South, Woodbury.**

In my devotional entry on March 6, I wrote about my “thirst” for wellbeing in the midst of a destabilizing time of transition and the discovery of God’s active presence in my life.

Today, on Good Friday, I am asked to reflect upon Jesus’ stated “thirst” and the fulfillment of His mission to establish a “New Covenant,” or relationship between God and humanity. While it seems obvious that Jesus would suffer extreme physical thirst while hanging for hours upon a cross, I believe that He also suffered deep, soulful “thirst” for each one of us.

After all, *this* was the reason for the incarnation—God’s plan to reveal Himself to His children, through Jesus, as a loving, healing, forgiving teacher rather than the Old Testament purveyor of moral codes and condemnation. According to Franciscan priest and author, Richard Rohr, Jesus’ mission was not to change God’s mind about *us* through atonement but to change our minds about God through “at-one-ment”! Indeed, my own understanding of God was changed when upsetting circumstances in my life paved the way to a direct experience of God’s compassionate presence, unconditional love, and desire for transforming relationship.

But we have a choice to make because Jesus’ death also clearly revealed humanity’s penchant for sin via the ego’s self-serving nature and desire for power and control. After all, *this* was the reason Jesus was crucified and His statement of “thirst” met with a sour, diluted response. What will you choose? How will you respond to His “thirst” for you?

Prayer: Dear Lord, thank you for loving us so unconditionally and completely that you would “become flesh” and shed Your own blood to help Your children understand this offer of “new life.” May we choose an abiding relationship with You to give meaning and authenticity to our lives as Christians and make a transformative difference in the lives of others. Amen.

Barb Hunt

Thursday, March 6

Read Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16

Psalm 91 holds deep personal meaning for me as I associate it with the beginning of my personal relationship with God. It is also connected to my seven-word testimony, which I shared during the special “Fifth Sunday” service of worship on September 29: “*During extraordinarily challenging times, He carried me.*” What I’m about to share is another one of those times.

It was 1975. I was a college freshman with high academic performance standards, a rigorous course load, and an established support system that was miles away. I’d also arrived at college with the religious belief that God was “on high,” looking down on sinful humans, and expecting that we “toe the line” in order to earn salvation. I did not inherently feel that God was part of my support system because our relationship was transactional: God didn’t owe me anything during my time on earth; I owed *Him*. As God would have it, I was moved to elect an “Intro to the Bible” course due to my curiosity and opportunity to experience sacred literature with a biblical scholar. I was also moved to attend daily chapel offered by a very gentle-natured, down-to-earth, handsome chaplain, who attracted me to the possibility that God might be as compassionate, comforting (and good-looking!) as he was. And finally, I was moved to attend compline (night prayer) where we sang the psalms accompanied by the chaplain’s gentle guitar strumming. Among them - a personal favorite - was Psalm 91.

The “good news” is that over the course of the semester, my fear was transformed by the knowledge that I was not bereft of a “home” and a means of support! God, like a loving parent, offered shelter, protection, and *relationship* in this new place. All I had to do was elect it!

Prayer: Dear Divine Parent, Teacher, and Shepherd, thank you for Your constant, unconditional love that longs for relationship with Your children and the work of Your Spirit to cultivate that relationship. May we grow in knowledge and faith that You are always present and in solidarity with our suffering—that when we feel overwhelmed and alone, divine love holds us. Amen.

Barb Hunt

Friday, March 7

Read Romans 10:8b-13

This passage ends with *“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”* I’m not an expert on what was going on in Rome at the time, but it seems like Paul was admonishing the Roman church for paying more attention to the laws regarding Jews and Gentiles, than having the *“right spirit within”* be the motivation for their actions. We can get caught up in the rules and miss the real point sometimes.

Being saved is not about following the law. It’s about being right within. Of course we are saved by God’s grace. But we have to have the right spirit within to accept that grace. With the right spirit within, our actions are more likely to align with God’s will.

As the scripture states, there is no difference between Jew and Gentile. What really counts is the desire to know God. This is similar to the invitation to Holy Communion – the table is open to all who love Jesus, repent for their sins, and seek peace with others. It doesn’t matter if you are Catholic or Protestant, able-bodied or disabled, hearing or deaf, male or female, straight or gay, etc. We are all on the journey. Excluding someone gives a false sense of superiority, like trying to cut in line to gain God’s acceptance. That doesn’t work in God’s eyes. The only requirement for salvation is the belief in Christ.

Prayer: Lord, give us eyes to see and ears to hear what you would have us do. Help us to have that right spirit within so that we may do your will. Amen.

Jeff Hunt

Maundy Thursday, April 17

Read John 13:1-17, 31b-35

**Worship tonight at 7 p.m.
Music by Bell and Chancel Choirs**

When we read the story of Jesus washing the feet of the disciples’ we may have a hard time putting it into perspective. After all, when was the last time you went to a gathering and had someone wash your feet (other than a special service at church). In our time and in the places we live it is not something that is done.

Maybe to give it perspective, picture Jesus as the CEO of a company and he comes into the office and cleans the employee bathroom – top to bottom, even the toilets. Maybe not the best analogy, but I think you get the idea. Being head honcho doesn’t mean one is not concerned with the needs of another, even the most basic and perhaps menial needs. At least that’s what Jesus thought. And he washed his disciples’ feet (and I guess would probably clean a bathroom) to drive home that point.

I think this is a message our world, and our country in particular, needs to hear right now. The passage for the day concludes with Jesus telling his disciples to love each other as he has loved them. This love is focused on the other and what they need, not on what I need or want or think I deserve or am entitled to. When we love this way people will know without a doubt that we are followers of Jesus.

Prayer: Gracious and loving God, you are all powerful, and yet, all merciful. Your son Jesus deserved to be served, and yet, he came to serve and did just that. May we be guided by his example and love and serve others as he loves us. Amen.

The Rev. Paul Hibbard

Wednesday of Holy Week, April 16 *Read Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24*

Cynicism is so easy to succumb to when we face the everyday struggles of financial hardships, health concerns, and interpersonal conflicts. We see seemingly endless greed all around us. There are constant calls for our attention from advertisers, social media, and the news of the day. We see so many suffering from hunger, conflict, and injury.

But we know that we can depend on the Lord when hardship comes. We know that the Lord is our salvation, that he will always answer us. We know that we can “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.”

This Psalm is a celebration of God’s endless love. As we prepare for Easter, this Psalm teaches us that our faith can and should be joyful and celebratory. This life and God’s love is a gift. If we remember what an absolutely incredible gift it is, we will be awed by it. When our everyday stresses become too overwhelming, this Psalm can help us remember all that we have to be joyful for and celebrate. *“The Lord has done it this very day; let us rejoice today and be glad!”*

Prayer: O Lord, I am awed by your mercy and grace. I rejoice in your salvation. I remember how you have answered my prayers and never forsaken me. I marvel at and celebrate your forever enduring love.

Elizabeth Styblo

Saturday, March 8

Read Luke 4:1-13

“Giving up” something for Lent comes from Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and resisting the temptations of physical sustenance alone, earthly power and authority, and putting God to the test as described in today’s reading from Luke. I adopted the habit of giving up something for Lent from my Catholic college roommate.

But in 1994 I decided that for me to give up something, like desserts, wasn’t a sacrifice. I took on community service in lieu of giving something up. I found the Hill Neighborhood Tutoring Program, a grass roots organization in New Haven, that aimed to help children by providing educational support. My young student was Kendra. She was a first grader who was bright and inquisitive. Once a week I would guide her through her homework and listen as she did her reading homework. We went on educational field trips, and she would come over and bake cookies.

Kendra and I were a team for 4 or 5 years until the juggling of work and my sons forced me to retire from tutoring. The years that I spend with Kendra were years that I tried to work as Christ did; giving with no expectation of receiving.

I had the unexpected opportunity to meet with Kendra as an adult. It was a joyful reunion! I learned that she worked at Yale-New Haven Hospital as a nurse. I shared with Kendra as an adult what she did not know as a child: that my work with her was my way of trying to be Christ-like during Lent by giving the gift of time, giving without expectations of receiving. As I talked with Kendra I realized that God had blessed me with a gift I didn’t request: a grown-up Kendra, academically and professionally successful. What a joy to see what God can do!

Prayer: *Heavenly Father we give you thanks for the children in our lives: sources of joy, sources of hope, and glimpses of our future. Amen.*

Carol Galloway

Sunday, March 9

LENT I

Tuesday of Holy Week, April 15

Read Acts 10:34-43

Worship at 10:30 a.m.

The sermon "Trust" is a message on that concept in the context of Jesus' temptations, based on Psalm 91 and Luke 4:1-13

Our liturgist will be Elizabeth Styblo.

Our Testimony presenter will be Mollie Bodwell.

Through these verses, Peter realizes God's message of salvation is for all people, not just Jews. This was a turning point in the early church, showing the expansion of God's plan of salvation to all people, regardless of nationality or background.

The message of inclusion, hope, and forgiveness through Jesus Christ is very timely and relevant today. As I meet new friends, classmates, and others, I realize the common needs we all have are to feel loved and to feel like we belong. It is important for us to remember that salvation is for all, not just the people who think like I do or look like I look – for all regardless of nationality or background.

I've heard people share their concerns about organized religions because they don't want to feel judged or think that they are constantly falling short of living as God would want them to live. This reading reminds me that all of us have sinned, but God forgives us and offers salvation to all of us, not just one group of people who are thought to be closer to God.

Prayer: Lord, please help us to create a community where all are welcome, where all of our unique gifts can be shared, where all of us can be forgiven and loved. Let us remember that you created each of us the way we are and help us to find that sense of belonging that is sometimes missing. Amen.

Liam McGrath

Monday of Holy Week, April 14

Read I Corinthians 15:19-26

These verses stress the significance of the resurrection and implications for Christian hope. Paul emphasizes the certainty and importance of the resurrection. Without the resurrection, Christian faith would be empty and meaningless; however, the resurrection guarantees the future resurrection of believers, victory over death, and eventual triumph of God's kingdom.

This reading reminds me to think beyond the excitement of Easter morning – the resurrection is the foundation of hope for all Christians, which is even more powerful than the miracle of Jesus' resurrection on Easter morning. This is a message of hope and assurance for Christians, reinforcing that Christ's death and resurrection are the foundation of our hope for eternal life. This passage has been comforting to me when I've experienced the loss of loved ones in my life. The belief that death is not the end, but I will be reunited with loved ones in eternity offers great comfort during difficult times of loss.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for your promise and gift of eternal life. Thank you for giving me hope and for comforting me in times of loss. Please help me live every day for you. Amen.

Toby McGrath

Monday, March 10

Read Genesis 15:1-6

In our Ash Wednesday devotion, Pastor Brian encouraged us: "May we get right with God." Our reading today shines light on a straight path to that goal. The Living Bible translation of Verse 6: "*And Abram believed God; then God considered him righteous on account of his faith.*" In this interaction of revelation, request, and response, Abram believed God's promises that he would "*have a son coming from your own body*" to be his heir (Verse 4, NIV) and that the number of his descendants will be like the number of stars he can see – "*too many to count!*" (Verse 5, TLB.)

Believe God, believe His promises, be righteous in His reckoning. The whole story of Abram (God changes his name to Abraham in Chapter 17) is filled with these encounters. Highlights are recorded in Hebrews 11. Most important note: Abraham acted on what he believed – he obeyed.

The line of Abraham's promised descendants leads to Jesus. Paul writes: "*For no matter how many promises God has made, they are "Yes" in Christ. ... He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts....*" (2nd Corinthians 1:20-22)

Maybe you are like me. Yes, God has fulfilled all His "big" promises in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. But I need the Holy Spirit speaking directly or through a fellow traveler to help me believe a specific promise/call for me so I will act on it and be righteous in His eyes.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have promised "*...when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth.*" (John 16:12-15) May we be encouraged today that the Holy Spirit dwells in us, guiding us along the path of righteousness for your Name's sake. Amen.

Jon Ossewaarde

Tuesday, March 11

Read Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

**“Lent on the Road” tonight at United Church of Church, Southbury
283 Main Street North, Southbury
6 p.m. Soup Supper, 7 p.m. Worship**

Paul reminds us to keep our eyes fixed on those role models who best reflect God’s love.

But, quite honestly, we are all (called to be) role models. Each of us influences others by the way we speak and act, the way we think and respond. So, we need to ask, *“Have I been a positive influence?” “Have I more often reflected the example of Christ or the values of this world?”*

Lent provides the opportunity for such an important self-assessment. Important because what’s on the inside is what gets reflected on the outside... even if we don’t recognize it. It’s how others see us. As the old saying goes, *“What’s down in the well will come up in the bucket.”*

Today, let us identify one “god” in our life that prevents us from having more “God” in our life. In so doing, we begin to be transformed into better role models.

Likewise, today, let us identify and thank (or pray for) someone we look to as a model of Christian living... someone who demonstrates the gifts and grace we need to lean into a little more.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for sending your Son, Jesus, the perfect model of your love. Forgive me for so easily and so often looking elsewhere for role models and recognition. Instead, during this time of Lenten reflection, give me the courage to look inward and admit my weakness; and give me the humility to look heavenward and accept your grace...which is my strength. Amen.

Bud Behlman

Palm Sunday, April 13

**Worship at 10:30 a.m.
Music by Bell and Chancel Choirs**

Traditional procession of palms

***The message “Just Suppose” is
a first-person drama
from the perspective
of the centurion at Calvary.***

***The scriptures are Matthew 21:1-11 with
Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29 and Philippians 2:5-11.***

Our liturgist will be Sandy Purdy.

Saturday, April 12

Read Luke 19:28-40

Jesus on his way towards Jerusalem tells two of his disciples to go on to the next village where they will find a donkey on which no has ridden and take it. He tells them that if anyone asks why, to say *“the Lord needs it.”* The disciples find such a donkey and, when questioned, tell the donkey’s owners, *“The Lord needs it.”* No further questions were asked, which was amazing considering the value and importance of a donkey in those times.

“The Lord needs it.” Those simple words were all it took, but when one thinks about this phrase it’s not quite so simple. This contradicts our understanding of God as one who needs nothing. Jesus had need of an unbroken, ordinary, donkey, an animal known to be stubborn, obstinate, and simple: truly unworthy to carry the king of the people. Why would the Lord need something unworthy and so ordinary as a donkey to carry him? Today we wonder what need the Lord could have of mortals so ordinary and unworthy as ourselves. What do we have to offer of significance?

St. Teresa of Avila famously said, *“Chris has no body now but yours. No hands, no feet on earth, but yours. Of significance we can offer ourselves.”* Through us the Lord can continue his bodily mission on earth. Through our voices we can tell and teach his story. Through our hearts and minds we can spread his love. Through our hands we can feed the hungry and care for the sick with compassion. We can use our feet to stand for justice. Through our actions we can promote peace. We can mirror his humility in our approach to others so that they too may open their hearts and minds to let Jesus, our Lord in.

Prayer: Lord, I answer your call. Work through me. Help me be your hands and feet on earth. Help me carry your compassion and care in my heart to pour onto others. Help me approach others with humility and love so that they too may open their hearts and minds to you, Lord. Amen.

Catherine (surname omitted)

Wednesday, March 12

Read Psalm 27

- ⁷ Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.
⁸ My heart says of you, “Seek his face!”
Your face, Lord, I will seek.
⁹ Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.

I’m getting discouraged. It feels like God is hiding his face, or worse, has turned away in anger. If you want to hear a long list of complaints, talk to me.

Yet, even in these dark troubling times, the sun can burst through as it did one Sunday during the children’s sermon when Pastor Brian asked my granddaughter, Lily, if she knew who loved her. She should know, because we just sang, “Jesus Loves Me”.

But Lily looked right at Carolyn and said, “I know you love me.” I will forever treasure the memory of the sweet five-year-old smiling face brimming with love for her “Abuela”. That’s what the Psalmist was talking about.

Prayer:

*“Open my eyes that I may see glimpses of truth thou hast for me:
Place in my hands the wonderful key that shall unclasp and set me
free.*

Silently now I wait for thee, ready my God, Thy will to see.

Open my eyes, illumine me, Spirit divine.”

Clara Scott, 1895

Christopher Shay

Thursday, March 13

Read Philippians 3:17 – 4:1

This passage is so timely in America now. Paul calls us to imitate him – a prisoner – and Christ who suffered and died for us. Christ put aside his glory and his privilege to suffer *with* us and *as one of* us. As Christians, God expects our relationship to a world in need to be similar. We can't control the world and the things it values, but we can model Christ-like behavior. In today's world of "me first," greed and vengeance, it is truly countercultural to model a life that is loving, grace-filled, forgiving and content in all circumstances – a way of living that de-centers ourselves and where we live in constant gratitude for all of God's gifts.

I continuously ask myself: *"Do I respond to the sadness, vitriol and hatred in the world in a way that might, in its example, lead to the transformation of others around me?"* When I think of Jesus and Paul and even the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., I wonder if my actions are even worthy. We all need a model. I have a few inspirations in my life when it becomes more difficult to remember my dual citizenship. I am reminded of my father's grace in hard situations and his unfailing kindness to others. I am also reminded of the late Fred Rogers who believed everyone was his neighbor, encouraged people to turn the other cheek and not feel helpless by being a helper. How are you exercising your dual citizenship?

Prayer: Lord, let my actions today reflect your glory. Help me to continue to show grace and love and forgiveness as a citizen of your kingdom no matter the circumstance. May others see this and be moved to follow you. Amen.

Meg Temple

Friday, April 11

Read Philippians 2:5-11

"O Lord, it's hard to be humble, when you're perfect in every way", is the opening line to a humorous song by Mac Davis. Humorous, yes; but also relatable when we think about the times in our own lives that we fall short of reflecting true humility in our service to and our relationship with others.

In this excerpt from Philippians, Paul describes the humility of Christ Jesus this way: *"He made himself nothing. He became a servant. He was obedient (even to death)."* Yes, as Christians we are called to do the same.

But Paul does not simply say we should do as Jesus does. No, even more so, he encourages us to have the same "mindset" as Christ. That sets the spiritual bar a little higher. Changing *what* we do is one thing but changing *how* we do it (our attitude) is quite another.

During this season of Lent we are called to adopt spiritual practices. Acts of mercy that are outward disciplines serving to change the lives of others; and acts of piety that are inward disciplines serving to change our own lives... our hearts and our minds.

One such act of piety and humility is to bow our knees and confess with our tongues confess that Jesus Christ is our Lord!

Prayer: O Lord, it's hard to be humble.... when I'm *imperfect* in so many ways. Yet, I know your grace is sufficient: sufficient to change my mindset, replacing my judgment with empathy, my impatience with forbearance, and my arrogance with humility. Especially on this day, help me to restore or sustain my relationship with the persons I lift before you now (*names*). Amen.

Bud Behlman

Thursday, April 10

Read Isaiah 50:4-9a

One of the most profound questions we ask is, “*What is the meaning of suffering?*” In today’s scripture reading, we hear Isaiah try to make sense of the painful situation he is in of being in exile in Babylonia around 587 B.C.

This scripture reminds God’s followers of the cost involved in being a disciple. This is sometimes called “*righteous suffering.*”

One of the prophet’s main concerns is their calling. The Lord’s vindication is the other theme here.

The “*tongue*” of God’s faithful servant is used to help encourage the weary followers in exile. The “*ear*” of God’s servant needs to be open to both the Lord and the people that he/she is prophesying to. The importance of the faithfulness of God’s servant is stressed here.

We see examples of this human suffering all through history, often at the hands of the rich and powerful, even today. Isaiah’s message here is that, in being faithful and following God’s teachings, we will face trials, tribulation, suffering, but God’s sustaining help is the source of our confidence, strength and hope in the midst of suffering.

This scripture, near the beginning of Holy Week, provides us with insight into Jesus’s journey through suffering on the cross to His resurrection.

Prayer: Oh Lord, you are our strength and our song. Let us use this sacred time of Lent to draw closer to you. Even though we too, face trials and suffering, help us to remain faithful and lead us to resurrection gladness.

Carolyn Shay

Friday, March 14

Read Genesis 15:1-6

“*After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, Your very great reward.*”

The Covenant: God approached Abram in this dream, telling him that his son would be the heir to God’s great reward. Since he did not have a son, he answered that his servant would be the heir. God assured him that he would have his own son. He was confused when God promises Abram descendants as numerous as the stars and the land of Canaan. But Abram believes God, and God counts this as righteousness. God, then, makes a covenant (agreement) with Abram giving him the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates River.

When I am faced with a situation that seems impossible for me to resolve, I know that all things are possible with God – that my faith in Him will lead me to people and places that will situate me in a place of peace and serenity. I believe that Scripture shows me the way. My closeness to God begins every morning as I kneel in prayer, asking Him to keep me close and guide me during the day. This prayer is reinforced through daily meditations, prayer and seeking God in the people with whom I associate in church and other spiritual groups – as well as ordinary people I encounter during my day.

Prayer: Dear Lord, help me to remember that I am on a journey - my destination is to grow closer to you each day. Remind me that this is both personal journey to be savored and, at the same time, it must be shared with other travelers in order to keep it. With gratitude for my many blessings, your faithful and trusting child.

Sherry Swanhall

Saturday, March 15

Read Luke 13:31-35

Jerusalem, the place where the covenant promises between God and Israel are fulfilled. A city that Jesus loves. It is on the journey to this city where he is warned not to enter as Herod wanted to kill him. Warned by those that typically were not his friends.

But Jesus, always faithful and obedient to God defies their warning and continues towards Jerusalem. He knew the work that he still had to do, and he longed to gather the people to care for, love and protect them, as a mother hen would do with her chicks. Sadly, the people were unwilling to accept what Jesus was offering.

As we begin or continue our journey, we are challenged to consider the work to which God has called us and our response. Are we trusting and obedient? Are we fearful? Are we so caught up in our own lives that we risk having a house that is desolate? *Am I willing to accept what Jesus is offering?*

Prayer: Lord, your love is beyond our understanding. Help us to embrace this gift and to trust in your word. This is not easy for us. Sometimes life is so distracting that we lose sight of what you have offered us. We ask for strength and courage to heed your guidance on our journey. Amen.

Jo Ann Behlman

Wednesday, April 9

Read Psalm 31:9-16

In this Psalm, David is in great danger, as enemies conspire against him and plot to take his life. He is terrified, weak, sorrowful, anxious, and broken. Despite his suffering, David trusts in the Lord. He prays to God for protection from his enemies. Because God has rescued him in the past, David chooses to trust in the Lord, even in this time of great danger. He lets go of his worries and anxiety and trusts in God's care.

If we think about this Psalm from Carrie Underwood's view, we might sing,

*"Jesus take the wheel, Take it from my hands,
'Cause I can't do this on my own, I'm letting go!
So give me one more chance and save me from this road I'm on...
Jesus take the wheel."*

During challenging times in my life, my mom would often give me a hand-written scripture note in an attempt to comfort me. I still keep these notes on my dresser, as they bring me solace in times of need. I feel incredibly blessed that she passed on some of her spiritual nature to me. This Psalm reminded me of not only my mom's never-ending loving care, but also God's never-ending loving care.

Prayer: Dear God, in times of distress, we turn to You for refuge and strength. Hear our prayers and remind us that our lives are in Your hands. When we feel overwhelmed, help us to trust in Your love and care. Fill us with hope and faith that there is a light at the end of every tunnel. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Cathy Riefenhauser

Tuesday, April 8

Read Philippians 2:5-11

**“Lent on the Road” tonight at Woodbury United Methodist Church
4 Church Street, Woodbury (co-hosted with North Congregational)
Additional parking at 11 Main Street North, Woodbury
6 p.m. Soup Supper, 7 p.m. Worship**

When folks say they want to sing the “old hymns” what is sometimes meant is “old to them.” *“How Great Thou Art”* is frequently mentioned, though it was written in 1953 and made popular by George Beverly Shea in the Billy Graham evangelistic crusades of that era.

But Philippians 2:5-11? Now *that* is an old hymn, over 2,000 years old and one of the earliest Christian hymns. It finds contemporary expression with 19th century lyrics set to a 20th century tune in the hymn *“At the Name of Jesus,”* #168 in our hymnal.

The words, as well as the tune, are important. The Rev. John Wesley counseled anyone who sings: *“Above all sing spiritually...attend strictly to the sense of **what** you sing...”* (“Directions for Singing,” UMH page vii, emphasis mine).

In this passage, that “sense” is clear: that Jesus, of all people, (being in the form of God) could have made his life and ministry about himself. Here, as with his temptations in Luke 4 Jesus makes it about serving others, emptying himself, being a servant *“even unto death.”*

As Palm Sunday approaches with Jesus’ triumphal entry into the Holy City, let us never forget where that earthly triumph lands him: death on a cross. It is in making himself *“the man for others”* that *“God has highly exalted him.”* Let **that** be **our** song!

Prayer: Almighty God, you sent your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ, to be among us as one who serves. Let us not shrink from the shadow of the cross, but take it up in obedience and faithfulness and with the glorious promise of your resurrection. Amen.

Pastor Brian Bodt

Sunday, March 16

LENT II

**Worship at 10:30 a.m.
Music by Bell and Chancel Choirs**

**The sermon *“Convicted”* is
Based on Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18,
Philippians 3:17- 4:1 and
Luke 13:31-35**

Our liturgist will be Liam McGrath.

Monday, March 17

Read Luke 13:1-9

What a timely passage. In a time when the news is always filled with catastrophic floods, fires, earthquakes and wars, these verses remind me that our world has always been unpredictable and disasters have always happened.

Jesus reminds us that the people affected are not any different from you and I, these things happen through no fault of their own.

We live in a capricious world and instead of asking why, or blaming the victims, or feeling self satisfied that we're safe and cozy, we need to accept that our earthly lives are not guaranteed. Neither is our heavenly reward. Unless we repent, we too will perish.

This doesn't mean God will send a punishment to us if we remain unrepentant, it means that we need to be prepared to meet him at any moment and must repent in order to receive everlasting life.

I empathize with the fig tree that wasn't bearing fruit. The tree probably thought it had plenty of time, and could get to work next season. The gardener is giving the tree every chance to be productive, and the tree had better get serious about bearing fruit. God wants us to live righteous lives; he gives us everything we need. We had better repent and get to work!

Prayer: ^[1]_[SEP] Lord, please help me to live every day the way you would have me live it. Help me to prioritize your work over my desires. Thank you for today's reading that reminds me that even in this crazy world I have what I need so that I don't perish. I just need to repent and start bearing fruit.

Christine Shupenis

Monday, April 7

Read Luke 19:28-40

The reading describes Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Jesus presented Himself as the King of the Jews, challenging His followers, the religious leaders, and the many celebrants to choose whether to accept or reject Him. However, Jesus didn't come as the king everyone desired. The crowd expected a Messiah that would be a "conquering king."

Instead, Jesus came as a humble servant. He arrived riding on a colt, which symbolizes humility. Yet, the multitude of followers recognized Him for what He was, having witnessed His ministry, and they praised Him. When the Pharisees called for Him to rebuke the crowd, Jesus said that even if the crowd was silent, the "stones would immediately cry out." In other words, it was plain to see who He was, even if the Pharisees were blind to it.

Luke made it clear that Jesus was in control of the events leading up to His crucifixion. Everything went according to the God's plan as foretold in prophecies made hundreds of years earlier. God did not suffer by accident or unwillingly. God uses all things to serve his purposes.

Throughout His ministry, Jesus modeled a life of humility, love, and sacrifice, and He ministered to the lowly, the needy, and the oppressed. God sees all people, loves all people, and came to offer forgiveness and eternal salvation to all those who place their faith in Him. Christians are called to follow His example of humility, love, and sacrificial service as a witness to those who may be seeking God.

Prayer: Lord, thank for your Son, Jesus Christ, who came to earth to fulfill your plan of salvation. Thank you for counting us among those who believe in Him. Help us to follow His example of humility, love, and sacrificial service as a witness to your love.

Mark Davis

Sunday, April 6

LENT V

Worship at 10:30 a.m.

Celebration of the Lord's Supper (Setting IV)

**The sermon "Racing"
addresses the "why?" and "toward what end?"
of our seemingly constant motion.**

**The scriptures are Psalm 126, Isaiah 43:16-21
and Philippians 3:4b-14.**

**Our liturgist and Communion assistant
will be Joann King.**

**Our fourth "Testimony" speaker will present
their testimony.**

**We will receive Woodbury Food Bank donations
and gifts to the Pastor's Discretionary Fund.**

**After worship, free blood pressure screenings
will be offered in the Assembly Room by
Andrew Styblo, EMT**

Tuesday, March 18

Read Isaiah 55:1-9

**"Lent on the Road" tonight at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Woodbury
294 Main Street South, Woodbury
(co-hosted with Church of the Epiphany, Southbury)
6 p.m. Soup Supper, 7 p.m. Worship**

Isaiah is filled with stories of Israel's sin and rebellion and warnings of coming judgment. But Isaiah also offers a message of hope. Isaiah was written ~700 years before Jesus, yet he is one of the most well-known biblical prophets because of his predictions of the coming Messiah, which are fulfilled by Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

Today's reading is a powerful invitation from God to seek forgiveness and freely receive His abundant blessings. It reflects God's willingness to restore relationships with all who turn to Him, rather than away from Him.

We are free to choose: disobedience, which has natural consequences, or a close relationship with God and a naturally abundant life. The last two verses in this reading reflect that we may not immediately recognize these blessings. *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways... My ways are higher than your ways..."* He asks us to trust Him, even if we cannot understand His methods or timing.

When I was a young adult, I turned away from God, not intentionally, but through neglect and pursuit of worldly goals. I was not a bad person, and I did not suffer terrible hardship. Yet, I was often unhappy, lonely, and anxious despite outward appearances that I was successful and had many friends. With age comes wisdom. Now that I focus much more frequently on my relationship with God, I live a much happier and fulfilling life.

Prayer: Lord, help us recognize that many of the hardships that we face in life are the natural outcomes of going our own way and neglecting our relationship with you. Help us to turn back to you and enjoy the abundance of life that you have promised to those who seek and obey you.

Mark Davis

Wednesday, March 19

Read Psalm 63:1-8

How like David we must feel, at times, seeking God in “*a dry and weary land.*” David probably wrote this psalm when he was seeking refuge during his son Absalom’s rebellion, when Absalom betrayed his father.

David states that he has “*beheld (God’s) power and glory*” and he thinks of Him “*through the night*” because God is his “*help*”, his soul clings to Him as God’s right hand “*upholds him.*”

David’s words are a reminder to us that even in these dark, divisive and chaotic times, God is with us; we are not alone! More than ever, we need to pray constantly, to ask for God’s guidance and believe that God’s love and justice will prevail.

Prayer: Faithful and loving Lord, help us not only during this time of Lent, but going forward to trust in your unfailing love, to walk day by day, knowing that you are with us, taking care of us. May we meet you in daily prayer, seeking your guidance and direction in all we do. Amen.

Carolyn Shay

Saturday, April 5

Read John 12:1-8

This scripture is a tough one for me, because I agree with Judas! Just think of all the good that could have been done with the money earned selling that perfume. What a waste to pour it on someone’s feet.

Martha, always busy with her chores and practicality, probably would have agreed with me, too. It is Mary who knows that something extravagant is needed. She shows her extravagant love for Jesus, and he allows it. He predicts his death is coming soon, that they will not always have him. Mary, using the oil that would have anointed him at his burial, foreshadows what is coming. But just as Lazarus’ death wasn’t his end, neither will Jesus’ death be his ending.

We all need extravagant love for Jesus in our lives, and we shouldn’t be afraid for others to see it. Of course we should help the poor, and take care of our family and friends, but that shouldn’t stop us from loving Jesus with our full hearts.

Prayer: ^[SEP]Jesus I know that even though I don’t have you walking physically beside me, I will always have you by my side. I pray that my practicality doesn’t get in the way of my love for you. Please continue to show me the ways I can love you extravagantly.

Christine Shupenis

Friday, April 4

Read Philippians 3:4b-14

In our reading today, Paul shares with the Philippians his background – describing himself as “a Hebrew of Hebrews”, “in regard to the law, a Pharisee”, the one who has been tormenting and killing the followers of Christ.

Paul is the same person that Jesus calls out to from the heavens asking Paul why he is persecuting the believers. After this experience, Paul is a changed man and a committed follower of Jesus.

There is an intimacy in our relationship with Christ. He is the only one that knows where we have been, the thoughts we have had, words we have spoken and actions we have taken. We are offered that same “Paul-like” conversion. We’re reminded not to dwell on who we were but instead to come to know Jesus and the love and new life that he offers.

The season of Lent is a time for us to reflect on both who we are and who we can fully become in Christ. Pastor Tony Evans puts it this way, *“But as followers of Christ, we follow a different path and have a different agenda. We experience the joy that comes from serving others and responding to our challenges with a Christ-like attitude.”*

Let us *“press on to the goal to win the prize for which God has called....”* The choice is ours to make.

Prayer: Father, thank you for your love and forgiveness. Thank you for your continued call to be in our lives. Help us to be open to your call and to respond with courage to live a life dedicated and faithful to you. Amen.

Jo Ann Behlman

Thursday, March 20

Read Luke 13:1-9

Luke 13 is, of course, a chapter from the book of Luke in the New Testament, and in this chapter, in verses 1-9, Jesus highlights the importance of repentance in the lives of those who seek forgiveness for their sins, as repentance is key for salvation.

Jesus opens up by confronting those who were talking about the death of multiple Galileans, and the common folk believe that the death came because they were worse sinners than everyone else. Jesus comes in to really state that these accidents happen and anybody can die at any time. He urges these people to repent so when the day comes that they perish, they will have repented for the day that they see God in heaven.

Between verses 1-6, Jesus repeats the phrase *“But unless you repent, you too will all perish”* and on this repentance is his highlighting of the importance of repentance, as if they can be forgiven of their sins, then they will perish, or in other words, be eternally separated from God and his kingdom.

Between verses 6-9, Jesus brings up a parable, about a tree not producing fruit, and as the man wanted to cut it down, the gardener said to wait one more year, and that relates to us as we are not all perfect, but given more time and more focus, we can inch closer to that ever far goal of perfection as seen in the eyes of God so when the day comes, we will have repented, just as Jesus said in the Bible, we will be welcomed into heaven for acknowledging our wrongdoings and changing over time for the better, allowing for our sins to be forgiven.

Prayer: Dear God, we thank you that you are a God of second (and third and fourth) chances! Help us to be gracious as you are gracious, and use those chances to produce the fruits of love. Amen.

James Levario

Friday, March 21

Read I Corinthians 10:1-13

In this scripture, Paul reminds us of God's faithfulness. When we face challenges in life, we often feel alone. But God is always with us. No matter how overwhelmed we feel in our struggles, we can always rely on God, and His love will guide us through our trials.

In my life's journey, prayer and music have always guided me, especially during difficult times. My favorite song that reminds me of God's love is, "*Who Am I?*" by Casting Crowns.

Who am I, that the Lord of all the earth, would care to know my name? Would care to feel my hurt?

Who am I, that the bright and morning star would choose to light my way, for my ever-wandering heart?

Not because of who I am, but because of what You've done, Not because of what I've done, but because of who You are!

I am, a flower quickly fading. Here today and gone tomorrow.

A wave tossed in the ocean. A vapor in the wind.

Still, You hear me when I'm calling,

Lord, You catch me when I'm falling,

And you've told me who I am, I am Yours.

Prayer: God, help us find strength in faithfulness and prayer. May our hearts be open to hearing Your voice. Thank you for the gift of music, which draws us closer to You. Let the songs we sing be an expression of our love for You, and a reminder of your never-ending grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Cathy Riefenhauser

Thursday, April 3

Read Isaiah 43:16-21

**A one-evening adult study, "*What Was the Sin of the Golden Calf?*", 7 p.m. at B'nai Israel, 444 Main Street North, Southbury
Co-taught by Rabbi Polokoff, Rev. Abigail Johnson of St. James Lutheran and Pastor Brian**

Behold, I am doing a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? For I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself that they might declare my praise. **Isaiah 43:19-21**

God might be doing a new thing, but just now, I'm feeling like an old thing. I've been wandering around in the desert looking for water for 40 years, and I'm getting old. However, I have confidence in Isaiah, and if he said God would give drink to his chosen people, I believe it.

My next question is, "How do you get to be God's chosen people?" I'm inclined to believe that the solution is to be found in the conclusion: "That they might declare my praise." I think Isaiah's point here is that the way to see the new thing that springs forth, the way to the water in the wilderness, to the rivers in the desert, the way to become God's chosen people, whom he formed for himself, is to declare his praise.

The idea that praising God is a transformative process rings true. There was a time when I put this idea in practice and as I remember, it worked. But praising God takes practice much the same as the playing the piano takes practice, and like the piano, it's a skill that quickly atrophies.

The other thing that occurs to me just now is that wandering through the desert in the dark is dangerous. Apathy can be deadly, and that's exactly what I'm feeling in these dark times. But we've been in dark places before and we pulled together. We need each other, especially now.

Prayer: Dear Lord, remind us to lift our eyes and lift our voices, particularly when we feel lost in the desert. Remind us to sing your praise when we don't feel like singing. Show us how your light shines in the darkness. In the name of Jesus who knew suffering, and is worthy of praise. Amen. ***Christopher Shay***

Wednesday, April 2

Read Philippians 3:4b-14

Okay, if you are willing, please read Luke 18:9-14 also. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Luke wrote both his Gospel and Acts, presumably AFTER he had travelled with Paul on missionary journeys. I imagine the possibility of Luke sitting down with Paul one day and saying, *“Have I shared with you about the time Jesus spoke ‘to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous’ and told the parable about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector?”*

We hear the echoes of that parable in Paul’s resume (4b-6) and his transformation into a person who has righteousness *“that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith.”* (7-9) A true descendant of Abraham! Paul is talking about putting to death our false (and sinful) self-righteousness. This is how we share in the sufferings of Christ *“by becoming like him in his death.”* (10) Jesus obeyed the will of His Father by dying on the Cross to atone for all of our sinful self-righteous thoughts, words, and deeds. Luke recorded the words of Jesus, *“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me.”* (9:23)

My cross, and yours, is to “kill self” (and yes, that involves suffering) and live in God’s righteous will for each of our lives.

Prayer: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* Amen.

Paul, Romans 12:1-2

Jon Ossewaarde

Saturday, March 22

Read Isaiah 55:1-9

I don’t run the way I used to. A couple (more) neck surgeries in 2023, 20 (or so) extra pounds, a retirement schedule stamped “failed:” lots of “reasons,” says he. Maybe writing this reflection will break the logjam of excuses.

Whether it does or not, the six marathons, even more half-marathons and innumerable 10k’s and 5k’s in my running history are a reservoir of knowledge about running and the hydration and fueling needed to sustain it. In that knowledge is this: *“Drink before you’re thirsty. Fuel before you’re hungry.”*

Isaiah calls not only Israel but **“everyone who thirsts”** to come to the waters and to *“you who have no money, come, buy and eat.”* (NRSV) If we’re thirsty and hungry this is a gracious offer. If we don’t know we’re thirsty and hungry, it’s a reminder that life will deplete us quickly if we don’t attend to physical and spiritual sustenance before we need it. Isaiah goes on to ask *“Why do you spend your money...and your labor on that which does not satisfy?”* Why, indeed?

Some readers know the story of my situational depression over 30 years ago after my first neck surgery sidelined my running regimen. I expressed this to the Rev. (now Bishop) Jane Allen Middleton. After expressing sympathy she asked, *“How’s your prayer life?”* and I confessed *“Not very good.”* Wisely she persisted, *“When do you pray?”* and I answered, *“When I run.”* (long pause followed) Ding! On goes the light! I had to learn new prayer disciplines that anticipated my spiritual thirst and hunger.

We are about one-third of the way through Lent. What mid-flight changes might you need to make to, as the ancient liturgy directs, *“observe a holy Lent?”* Perhaps more importantly, what unaddressed spiritual thirsts and hungers are hobbling you in the long journey we call life? Whatever the answer *“incline your ear”* to the One who sustains both body and soul. Come!

Prayer: Lord, our thoughts are not your thoughts. Help us to remember that your invitation is to come to you and live. Amen.

Pastor Brian Bodt

Sunday, March 23

LENT III

Worship at 10:30 a.m.

**The sermon "*Call*" is on the ways
God summons us to ministry and service.**

**The scriptures are Psalm 63,
Isaiah 55:1-9 and Luke 13:1-9.**

Our liturgist will be David Hunt.

**Our Testimony presenter will be Jon
Ossewaarde.**

Tuesday, April 1 *Read Psalm 126, New International Version*

**"Lent on the Road" tonight at South Britain Congregational Church
693 South Britain Road, Southbury
6 p.m. Soup Supper, 7 p.m. Worship**

There are times in our lives... perhaps your life right now... that we feel scattered and exiled from God... distant from the relationship we once knew.

But the good news is this: God is still the God who makes dreams come true. Dreams that are the longings of the heart... our needs and desires shared with God in prayer... dreams of restored health, relationship, spirit, and faith.

So, let us use this period of Lenten reflection to prepare for both the sorrows and the joys that accompany every life and each relationship. With God's grace, may they be opportunities to be restored to a place of greater trust in God.

Do not despair in the uncertainty of the moment; rather, celebrate the certainty of the future that belongs to those who claim the power and victory of an empty cross and a vacant tomb. Captured so well by the familiar hymn, we are reminded that:

*"When weeping's over, He will bid us welcome,
We shall come rejoicing, bringing in the sheaves."*

Knowles Shaw, 1874

Prayer: Dear God, we call upon you when our hearts are filled with hurt and our eyes are filled with tears. We call on you and you and trust that in your perfect time you will heal those hurts and dry those tears, replacing them with healing and joy. Lord of grace and mercy, restore in us that great fortune that is a deeper relationship with you, through Jesus our Redeemer. Amen.

Bud Behlman

Monday, March 31

Read Isaiah 43:16-21

This passage starts out recalling the past and how God has helped through times of trial – namely, the crossing of the Red Sea. God helped the Israelites (and us) several times in the past. But we shouldn't get stuck there. We should use those experiences as a basis for confidence in moving forward with other ventures. After all, I don't think we'll need to cross the Red Sea again.

"I am doing a new thing!" That's scary! It makes me want to stay with the known problems, or even revert to a former time when I thought things were as good as they could be. But God provides what is needed to move forward, even among some seemingly impossible challenges – *"water in the wilderness"* and *"streams in the wasteland"*.

We are embarking on some new things at WUMC, which I'm sure some people will view as scary – a Helping Hands ministry and Testimony. With Helping Hands, we will be helping people in the community with small projects, rides, meals, etc. – a little risky doing things for people we might not know. And with testimonies, we will be sharing how God has been present in our individual lives. These are some of the activities of the original church in Acts, so really, not so new. But for WUMC, they are new. We need to have faith that God will provide assistance and guide us through these new ventures.

Prayer: God, please be with us in these new ventures. Help us not to be discouraged when we run into obstacles and to be aware of the help that's actually there when we need it. Amen.

Jeff Hunt

Monday, March 24

Read Joshua 5:9-12

This passage brings to mind the self-determined teenager or young adult in the cross-generational struggle to break away from the control of well-meaning parents. The young one stomps their foot exclaiming, *"I'm going to do whatever I want! I'm old enough not to need someone running my life. Soon, I'm going to be old enough and break away from here and make my own way. I'll be fine. I'll make it!"*

Concern pours forth from the parent's conscience and heart. *"I love you, young one, so much. I know you have so much to learn. I don't want to watch you fall. I love you so much. Won't you hear me?"*

The young one's confidence springs forth, *"Trust me, I got it. I can do it all on my own. Here I go!"* The parent's heart aches, *"Well, you're going to do what you're going to do. Just know even when you're far away, in mind or distance, that my love is with you. I'll always love you. My love and lifelong care goes with you."*

The young one stumbles and loses their way exclaiming, *"I failed miserably. I thought I knew it all, that I could make it by myself, that I didn't need you by my side to give me love and care. I really did need you. How can I face you? How can I look you in the eye?"* The parent calls out, *"Just come home. I love you now and always. You never left my heart. I forgive you and welcome you back into my arms."*

God, as the parent does, loves us always even when He needs to let us go on our own. When we fall, He will welcome us home with forgiveness.

Prayer: Dear Lord, there will be times when we, your people, resist you. Help us feel the outpouring of your love and care. Help us to feel You aside us. Let us rejoice in your promise of forgiveness. Amen.

Catherine (surname omitted)

Tuesday, March 25

Read Psalm 32

**“Lent on the Road” tonight at St. James Lutheran Church
111 Peter Road, Southbury
6 p.m. Soup Supper, 7 p.m. Worship**

This reading is a powerful expression of forgiveness, repentance, and the blessing of living with God. Hidden, unrepentant sins cause guilt, shame, and grief that can become unbearable, consuming our souls. Highlighting the gift of forgiveness through confession, Psalm 32 conveys the idea that confessing sins and receiving forgiveness from God can lead to a new life of joy and freedom. It offers a solution and relief for those who feel the weight of their sins, and instructs us to confess, pray, and trust in God.

Psalm 32 emphasizes the liberation and peace found in confession, repentance, and God’s forgiveness. It invites us and all believers to experience the joy of forgiveness, the relief of confession, and the security of God’s protection and guidance. Through this Psalm, we are encouraged to seek God’s mercy and to trust in His unfailing love.

Actively practicing regular confession of our sins to God, seeking His forgiveness, and trusting His guidance creates open communication with God and enables me to embrace His grace and peace that is a result of being forgiven of sin.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, there are times when I have failed to follow You and have used bad judgment and have sinned. Thank you for accepting my confession and forgiving my sins and giving me a fresh start. Help me to grow and mature in faithfulness and become closer to You. Amen.

Toby McGrath

Sunday, March 30

LENT IV

Worship at 10:30 a.m.

A 30 minute worship service will be followed by service in our community, returning for a 1:30 p.m. light lunch to share our experiences.

Details for these service opportunities will be provided in the weekly bulletin and “*Living Through Grace*” weekly e-newsletter.

The message “Celebration” will be based on Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

We will receive a special offering for The United Methodist Committee on Relief.

Our liturgist will be Rynn Naylor.

Saturday, March 29

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

Both parables, The Lost Sheep and The Prodigal Son, are about individuals who strayed from God and family.

When such individuals turn to wickedness and gluttony, God doesn't forsake them. These sinners will continue in this course of action until they realize that they can no longer persist on in this path of destruction. God gives them a way back; they repent of their sins and all of heaven rejoices for their return. God reveals there is great happiness for the one returned of this one sinner, even more than all the righteous persons who do not need to repent.

In both parables, each was lost. The Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son were missing to their families. Each was found and rejoicing and celebrating were done because each was alive and the lost found.

"For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost and is found."

Prayer: O God, thank you for your gracious persistence when we stray from the path of wholeness and holiness. Thank you for seeking and finding us. You make a way for us to return to you. May this Lent, and these devotions, strengthen us in that journey. Amen.

Christine Smith

Wednesday, March 26

Read II Corinthians 5:16-21

This passage focuses on fundamental changes that come with being in Christ, the restoration of our relationship with God, and the mission we now have as ambassadors of Christ's message of reconciliation.

This verse is a hopeful, transformational reading, highlighting the depth of God's love and the responsibility of believers to share that love with the world. It also highlights the profound change that we can expect with salvation.

This reading reminds me to actively demonstrate love, forgiveness, and compassion toward everybody. This is the way that I can spread God's love to people in my life.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank you for giving me the ability to spread hope and love. Thank you for forgiving me so that I can forgive others as I strive to share your gifts with all the people in my life. Amen.

Liam McGrath

Thursday, March 27

Read Luke 15:1-3, 11-32

It can be easy to think that as “good Christians” we deserve grace and rewards more than those who don’t live as virtuously as we do. But, this passage is a reminder that just as our sins do not make us unworthy of God’s love, our good deeds do not make us any more worthy.

God’s love is not conditional. He loves ALL his children. In God’s eyes, our good deeds do not make us any better than anyone else. Upon first reading that might seem unfair. But I believe we should be grateful for this - there will always be those more holy and good than ourselves. None of us are completely without sin. If God ranked us based on goodness, how many of us would truly want to see how we measured up?

This passage calls on us to humble ourselves and welcome those it would be easy to exclude in our family, our workplace, or in wider society - to love the outcasts and marginalized just as God loves them.

Prayer: O Lord, help me extend grace to those I struggle to forgive. Help me remember I myself am not without sin. Help my love be full and unconditional. Help me celebrate the lost that are found. Amen.

Elizabeth Styblo

Friday, March 28

Read II Corinthians 5:16-21

One of the definitions for the word “reconcile” in Webster’s Dictionary is: *to restore to friendship or harmony*. In this passage from the apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Corinth he reminds his readers, and us, that restoring the world (people) to harmony with God was the work that Jesus undertook. *“For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.” (v. 21)*

Now the world had once been in harmony with God in the Garden of Eden, but we know what happened there. And ever since then we have been trying to reconnect with God. Our efforts are often focused on being better and doing better but try as we might we often find as Paul did that *“everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard.” (Romans 3:23)*

So, Paul reminds us that we can’t find harmony with God on our own. We need Jesus. But perhaps surprisingly Paul also tells us that we play a role in this work of reconciliation. We can’t be Jesus, but we can point others to him. Paul calls us *Christ’s ambassadors*. We are his ambassadors when we tell his story and how it has impacted us, and when we live day in and day out as one who has been made new.

When people see this, they may want we have – harmony with God.

Prayer: O Lord, thank you for your desire to have us find harmony with you and giving us the way to do this in Jesus. Help us to understand how to be Christ’s ambassadors in the world so others may find the way back to you. Amen.

The Rev. Paul Hibbard