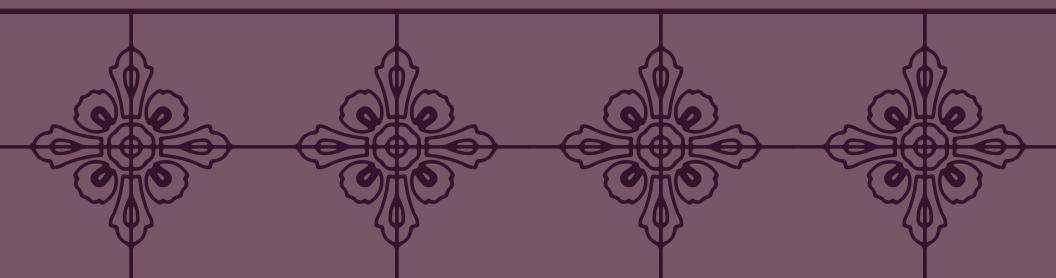


2026

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL

THE APPALACHIAN DEANERY



Brothers and sisters,

In your hands is a set of Lenten reflections, poetry, and artwork composed by members of the Appalachian Deanery. Though parishes are spread across three different states, this devotional offers the opportunity to walk together through the season of Lent. We hope that this collection is encouraging to you during this season, as we fast and journey together through the wilderness, to the cross, and through to the resurrection.

Devotionals here are intended to be read Monday–Friday during this season, and they are divided by weeks. We pray that the variety of offerings here resonates with you and provides the Holy Spirit a tender channel to your soul.

As we together listen to Christ and follow him through the wilderness, may we ever grow to be more dependent upon Christ. May our fasts clear the ground for the work of the Gardener, may our failures remind us of his grace, and may we grow ever more childlike in our faith and dependence upon him.

Ashes of Love

“Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

GENESIS 2:7

There was love in the dust
That poured from His hands
When creation began
With the forming of man

But we didn't trust
The love in the dust
We tried our own way
And lost our mainstay

We kept trying to climb home
To reach heaven on our own
We were met with our brokenness
Our selfishness, our aloneness

We smeared ashes on our foreheads
We fasted with faithfulness
We kept trying to earn our way
Back into loves' graces

But then Love came down to us
In the same form of dust
Living the beautiful life
That had been intended for us

Yet we wouldn't have it
We still thought we knew best
So with nails and gashes
Holy dust turned to ashes

And that would have been the end
If love had an end
But up out from the tomb
New life found its bloom

So on Ash Wednesday we still
Paint the ash on our foreheads
Remembering we are dust
And to dust we shall return

And yet, the lover of our life
Our King, Jesus Christ
Comes kissing our foreheads

Our sin dissolving into His lips
And we remember that
love is a phoenix
These ashes of love embody rebirth
For when we label our-
selves with death
Jesus invites us into resurrection life

For there has always been
love in the dust

*Breanna Lowman,
Member, Grace Anglican Church,
Louisville, KY*



Weight of Light

*Original Artwork by Brittany Williams,
Member, Hope Church, Charleston, WV*

Psalm 6

*For the director of music. With
stringed instruments. According
to sheminith. A psalm of David.*

¹ Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger
or discipline me in your wrath.

² Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint;
heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.

³ My soul is in deep anguish.
How long, Lord, how long?

⁴ Turn, Lord, and deliver me;
save me because of your unfailing love.

⁵ Among the dead no one proclaims your name.
Who praises you from the grave?

⁶ I am worn out from my groaning.

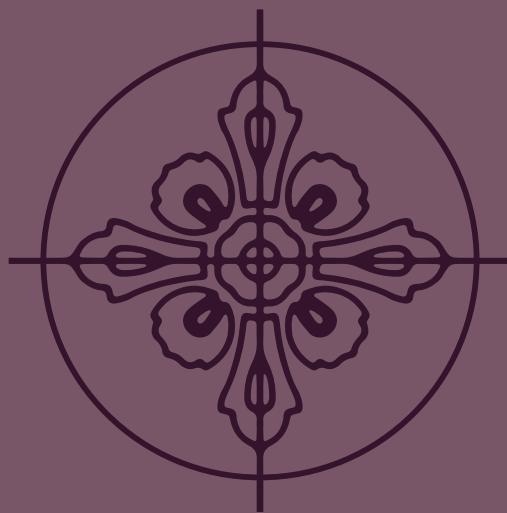
All night long I flood my bed with weeping
and drench my couch with tears.

⁷ My eyes grow weak with sorrow;
they fail because of all my foes.

⁸ Away from me, all you who do evil,
for the Lord has heard my weeping.

⁹ The Lord has heard my cry for mercy;
the Lord accepts my prayer.

¹⁰ All my enemies will be overwhelmed with
shame and anguish;
they will turn back and sud-
denly be put to shame.



Lent

• WEEK 1 •

Refreshment for a Weary Soul

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

ISAIAH 55:1

Are you weary, tired, and worn out from life? Here is an invitation to come to Him who is able to quench your thirsty soul. I ran onto a song by Harvest Grace Parker entitled, “There is a peace.” Her lyrics describe most everyone that I know.

*You've been tempted and shaken, tested and failed
You've been so far from Jesus and too close to hell
For your vision's been clouded by this world's delight
But I tell you you're not of this world, stand up and fight
You're not of this world, stand up and fight*

Oh, how I wish we were not seduced by “this world’s delight.” We forget to Whom we belong, we take our blessings for granted and delight in the things of the world. We really worship *creation* rather than the *creator* as the Apostle Paul puts it in Romans 1. I do believe we ebb and flow as Harvest described in her lyrics. Life is hard and trying. Our brokenness runs deep. Evidence of our fallen world is all around us and deep within us.

We can take comfort in the fact that we have a compassionate savior who longs to be with us, even in our weakness. Jesus says to those who have been “tempted and shaken, tested and failed,” *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28).

Jesus, the source of life, echoes and magnifies the message of Isaiah. Come, come without cost. Surrender into the loving arms of Jesus and He will give you rest. He does not offer a simple physical rest so you can once again pick yourself up by your boot straps and carry yourself forward. No, this is a deep spiritual rest. Come to the waters and drink deeply, and “out of his heart

will flow rivers of living waters” (John 7:38).

The waters refer to the Holy Spirit. As you come weary and tired to the source of life your vision is renewed or reoriented and the delights of the world fade in the view of Jesus’ Kingdom and you will find peace which you had not been able to find by looking for it. Harvest’s lyrics continue:

*There's a peace, to settle your soul
There is a peace that is calling you home*

There is security in belonging to Jesus. You are protected and comforted. You are not alone. You have been graced with a family who were once lost but now are found, weary and tired but now refreshed by the waters of grace. Where might the Lord be calling you to surrender more to Him in this season of Lent?

*It's calling you home
Calling you home*

*Rev. Jim Sallie, Rector,
Redeemer Anglican Church,
Parkersburg, WV*



The Hands that Save

*Original Artwork by C.M. Button, Member,
Hope Church, Charleston, WV*

Psalm 130

My Soul Waits for the Lord

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord!

² O Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive
to the voice of my pleas for mercy!

³ If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

⁴ But with you there is forgiveness,
that you may be feared.

⁵ I wait for the Lord, my soul waits,
and in his word I hope;

⁶ my soul waits for the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
more than watchmen for the morning.

⁷ O Israel, hope in the Lord!
For with the Lord there is steadfast love,
and with him is plentiful redemption.

⁸ And he will redeem Israel
from all his iniquities.

The Pilgrimage of Lent

*I lift up my eyes to the hills.
From where does my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.
He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
Behold, he who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.
The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.
The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep
your going out and your coming in
from this time forth and forevermore.*

PSALM 121

Lent is a pilgrimage, though not one we make on foot. It is a pilgrimage of our hearts and souls. On Ash Wednesday, we set out and we begin the journey that ends in Jerusalem, during the events of Holy Week. The Israelites of old did something similar, and in our way, Lent is the mirror image of the pilgrimage of the Israelites. Three times a year, Israelite males were required by the law of Moses to travel to the temple for the feast of Passover, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles. It should be unsurprising to us that the Israelites had their own liturgies for such an occasion, namely, the prayers associated with the journey. We find these prayers in Psalms 120-134, known as the Psalms of Ascent.

Reading through these psalms (a worthwhile practice in Lent) there are many ways we could draw parallels between our experience of Lent and

the Israelites pilgrimage to Jerusalem. But there is one that is particularly striking to me. Imagine being an Israelite on this journey, walking from your town to Jerusalem. Imagine the people you would pass. You would see the women and children staying home. You would see the aged or infirm who cannot make the journey. But what must have been striking for the Israelites obeying the law of Moses is to see all their kinsmen who had set up idols and worshipped them. Surely, this group was some of those who were mocking the faithful Israelites about which we hear in the Psalms of Ascent. The pilgrimage they took was itself the act of setting themselves apart from the idol worship that became so common in the history of Israel.

This is much like the pilgrimage of Lent. For in it, we separate ourselves from the things that our society and culture is so quick to worship. We set aside food or drink or entertainment or comfort, not because they are themselves evil, but because they make bad gods. Like the idols of old, our idols do not give life nor help us, they steal true life away from us and seek to consume us. We, like the faithful of Israel, know where our help actually comes from. It comes from the maker of heaven and earth.

All of our practices of self-denial in this season are in reality acts of defiance against false idols. They cannot save us nor bring us help. We, in this pilgrimage, set our eyes upon the "hill." We set our eyes upon Jerusalem, upon Gethsemane, upon the empty tomb. We look past the false claims of our world's idols and look to our Christ, who on Good Friday paid the cost for our souls and on Easter Sunday raised us to new life alongside Himself. This help, this salvation, no idol can afford nor grant. Glory belongs to God alone, and so too our lives.

*Andrew Wininger,
Church Planting Intern,
Hope Church, Charleston, WV*

The Wilderness Within

“Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.” MATTHEW 4:1

Lent begins not with triumph, but with wilderness. Before the miracles, before the crowds, before the cross—Jesus is led by the Spirit into desolation. It's striking: the same Spirit that descended on Him at baptism now drives Him into barren places. The voice that declared, “You are my beloved Son,” is followed immediately by silence, hunger, and testing.

That pattern still holds. Every follower of Christ will find that the Spirit sometimes leads us where comfort is stripped away and our illusions are exposed. The wilderness is not punishment—it's formation. It's where our hearts are revealed and remade.

Lent invites us to follow Jesus there. We are encouraged to fast, not to impress God, but to confront the desires that rule us. We are invited to pray, not to check the pious box, but to be honest with God in our own barrenness. We are called to give, not to earn favor, but to expose our attachments to wealth and control.

In the wilderness, Jesus faces three great temptations: to satisfy hunger apart from trust, to seize power apart

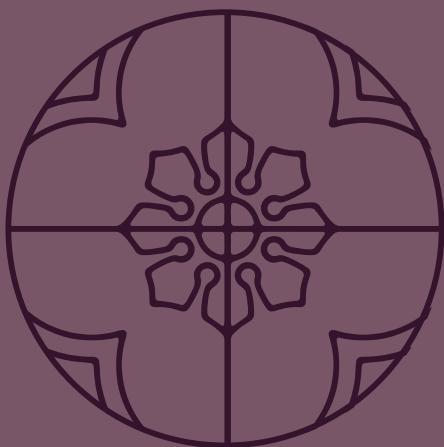
from obedience, and to demand proof apart from faith. Each of these remains at the core of human struggle. Lent brings them to the surface.

The wilderness, then, is not a location on a map but a condition of the soul. It is the place where God becomes our only sustenance, where His Word becomes more real than bread. It's where we learn again that life is not maintained by comfort, but by communion.

If we allow it, Lent will strip us of our false securities and make us hungry for what truly satisfies. It will lead us to the cross, not as an ornament of religion, but as the place where our old selves die and our true selves begin to live.

So, as you begin this season, resist the urge to rush past the emptiness. Don't fear the silence. Meet God there. The Spirit has led you to the wilderness, not to destroy you, but to make you new.

*Fr Derek Roberts, Rector,
Hope Church, Charleston, WV*



Lent

• WEEK 2 •

Holy Dissatisfaction

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.*

*Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.*

*It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

PSALM 127:1-2

I think because I grew up singing “Zacchaeus was a wee little man, and a wee little man was he,” I failed, for a long time, to realize how absolutely incredible his story is. By the standards of secular culture, this is a man who should have all he wants. As chief tax collector, he has a free pass to enrich himself to his heart’s desire. Sure, it’s at the expense of his fellow Israelites, but money always attracts hangers-on and minions, if not necessarily quality friends. Not to mention, he’s got to be on pretty good terms with the Romans to have advanced to this position.

With plenty of money, and powerful allies, and what’s likely an entertaining social circle, one might think that Zacchaeus is pretty set for life. But Luke clearly gives us a different picture of Zacchaeus. This is not a man who is happy, or even content with his riches. This is a man who is desperate for a way out of his circumstances, who is profoundly unhappy with his way of life.

And so he sets out to see Jesus with hopes that perhaps this itinerant wonder-worker can offer him something more. But remember, Zacchaeus is hated, and on top of that he’s short, so the crowd won’t let him through. We can imagine that more than one unfriendly elbow found its way to

Zacchaeus' head as he tried to get through the crowd. Frustrated in his attempts, he abandons all remaining dignity he has, runs out ahead of the crowd, and climbs a tree, more like a child than a powerful government official. It's at this point that everything changes. The Messiah sees him, calls him, and invites Zacchaeus into his presence. Immediately, Zacchaeus is a changed man, and we can assume he lived the rest of his life in the joy that he experienced when Jesus first called out to him, and that he lived a life of crucifying the flesh, taking up his cross, and following Jesus.

This Lent, think about where, in your life, you are like the old Zacchaeus. Whether it's work, or money, or politics, or anything else, what has a hold on you, but is leaving you deeply dissatisfied? And how you can, at all costs, pursue instead the one thing that can truly transform and satisfy, a relationship with Jesus?

*Chris Meckley, Priest,
The River Anglican Church,
Blacksburg, VA*

Psalm 32

Blessed Are the Forgiven. A Maskil of David.

¹Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.

²Blessed is the man against whom
the Lord counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit
it there is no deceit.

³For when I kept silent, my bones
wasted away
through my groan-
ing all day long.

⁴For day and night your hand was
heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as
by the heat of summer. *Selah*

⁵I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, “I will confess my trans-
gressions to the Lord,”
and you forgave the in-
iquity of my sin. *Selah*

⁶Therefore let everyone who
is godly
offer prayer to you at a time

when you may be found;
surely in the rush of great waters,
they shall not reach him.

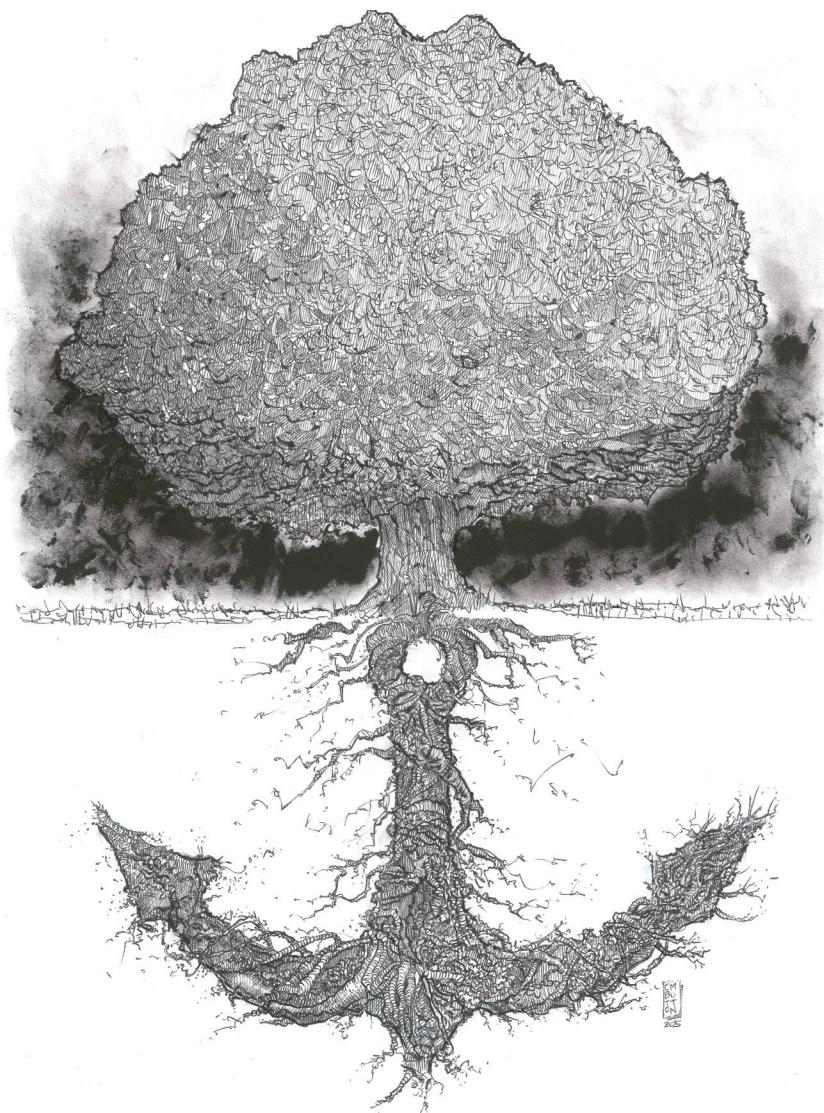
⁷You are a hiding place for me;
you preserve me from trouble;
you surround me with shouts
of deliverance. *Selah*

⁸I will instruct you and teach you
in the way you should go;
I will counsel you with
my eye upon you.

⁹Be not like a horse or a mule,
without understanding,
which must be curbed with bit
and bridle,
or it will not stay near you.

¹⁰Many are the sorrows of the
wicked,
but steadfast love surrounds
the one who trusts in the Lord.

¹¹Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice,
O righteous,
and shout for joy, all
you upright in heart!



Anchor Your Roots Underneath

*Original Artwork by C.M. Button,
Member, Hope Church, Charleston, WV*

Why

“Why?”

It’s the perpetual question of my four-year-old—and one that, honestly, I’m really tired of answering. But every now and again there is genuine inquiry that exposes a greater depth than you anticipate, like, “*If God made people, why do people die?*”—a question that makes any adult in earshot pause, waiting to hear how you will respond. The more I think about it, the more convinced I am that the question “why” is one of the most important we can ask. Besides, who am I to stifle a child’s curiosity so early in life, especially when asking (and answering) that question is part of my own vocation? “Why” should be encouraged. “Why” points us toward purpose.

The older I get, the more I find myself reflecting on *why* we were created. In the first two chapters of Genesis, the author makes clear that humanity was the final, climactic piece of the puzzle—placed as God’s own image in the temple of his good creation. We were given the task of extending his creative order into the world, reflecting his creative and loving power outward, and reflecting the worship of creation back to him. Sadly, this perfect order lasted only one chapter before the whole thing went sideways, as we—the pinnacle of creation—turned from God and dragged the world into sin and darkness. This isn’t just an ancient story, but one we continue to reenact.

And yet, there is hope. As we move toward Good Friday and Easter, we remember that God did not abandon his broken creation. Jesus inaugurated a new kingdom—one that will one day be completed when he returns to set all things right. Paul describes this in Romans 8 as the groaning of creation, waiting for its rescue and renewal.

Jesus, the servant king, came to dwell among us as the perfect human—faithful where we have been faithless, obedient where we have resisted. In him,

we see everything humanity was always meant to be. His life shows us how to care for the poor, the sick, the persecuted, and the stranger among us. In his words and actions, we find the answer to *why* we are here: to love God and to love our neighbor, even when that love costs us something.

Jesus' ministry points toward the world as it will one day fully be. This Lenten season invites us to pause and ask why we follow him, and to examine how he is reshaping our lives. We are imperfect people, marked by repentance and hope, learning again and again what it means to be who God created us to be. We live in the twilight of dawn—new life just below the surface, waiting to break free with the rising sun.

Always be ready to ask why. And if the answer isn't immediately apparent, seek it out. It is a simple but powerful question, capable of making even a small child the wisest person in the room.

*Austin Knies, Vestry Member,
The River Anglican Church,
Blacksburg, VA*

Our Feeble Strength

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.*

PSALM 127:1-2

During lent, our days are marked by preparation. Preparation for our high holy day of Easter and the season of Eastertide. This preparation is an act of consecration of our time, our attitudes, and our rhythms unto the Lord. This time of preparation and consecration exists so that we might receive with more awareness the gloriously good news of Jesus Christ: that the God of the universe came and bore upon His own shoulders our sin, the darkness of the world, and death itself. In bearing it, He died. But He did not just die, He rose from the dead and claimed victory over sin, darkness, and death.

It might seem odd that we prepare ourselves for glory by a long season of self-denial, but it is so that we might acquaint ourselves with the very thing we have been rescued from. We—who have such a tendency live in denial of sin, darkness, and death—face these things in this season. We wrestle with their reality rather than run from it, so that when Easter comes we might hear the good news with fresh joy. The path to life leads through death.

Lent is far from being a season of self-reliance; a season where we try to take on acts of self-denial so that we might make ourselves worthy to experience the joy and salvation of Easter. No, it is more like the church collectively practicing the first steps in a 12 Steps program. We are addicted to sin, so we collectively admit our utter powerlessness over sin and our deep need and

dependance upon God Himself to rescue us. We remove ourselves from the comforts and security blankets we keep in daily life. For these things often serve us like masks, hiding the sin and darkness that exists in us. It is easy to feign patience when we are endlessly entertained. It is easy to feign joy when our plates and wine glasses are full. It is easy to feign the fruits of faith when we spend our days turning our minds away from the things of God. We remove these masks to see ourselves more clearly and be reminded of our desperate need for the Holy Spirit to be our very life.

Dear brothers and sisters, this Lent, do not be surprised when self-denial is hard. Do not be discouraged when your sin becomes vivid. For this is who we are. We are creatures of His grace and mercy: nothing more and nothing less. As we pray the Prayer of Humble Access, "We do not presume to come to this, thy table, O merciful Lord, trusting in our own righteousness but in thy manifold and great mercies." This season, we reckon ourselves with just how untrustworthy our own righteousness is so that we might prepare ourselves to see afresh just how great His mercy is, and in His mercy, we rejoice.

*Andrew Wininger,
Church Planting Intern,
Hope Church, Charleston, WV*



Lent

• WEEK 3 •

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day

I wake and feel the fell of dark, not day.
What hours, O what black hours we have spent
This night! what sights you, heart, saw; ways you went!
And more must, in yet longer light's delay.
With witness I speak this. But where I say
Hours I mean years, mean life. And my lament
Is cries countless, cries like dead letters sent
To dearest him that lives alas! away.

I am gall, I am heartburn. God's most deep decree
Bitter would have me taste: my taste was me;
Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.
Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see
The lost are like this, and their scourge to be
As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.

Gerard Manley Hopkins, c. 1885

The Imputed Righteousness of a Non-Repentant Life

“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

HEBREWS 4:15-16

St. Francis is known to have prayed, “Lord, who are you, and who am I?” Upon these answers depend all true things.

We begin the season of Lent with intention and contemplation seeking to focus on Christ. We hope to see his life, especially in the wilderness and then in his death and resurrection, more fully. *Who He is* in his perfect obedience causes us to see the contrasting who we are. When we focus rightly, our response is always one of repentance. The opportunities to evaluate the quantity of our repentance and the quality of our repentance increases when juxtaposed to our perfect, glorious Savior. Who we are are—undisciplined, failing to pray continually, disobedient, not completely trusting God for life, breath, and everything else, not laying down our lives for our neighbors, creating idols of created gifts—I could go on and on—is clear. God, by His Spirit, is kind to make it clear.

We, saved by grace through faith, are *repenters*, as God repents us (Acts 5:31;11:18; Romans 2:4). In speaking of repentance, Gretchen Roneveik elaborates, “...confession is and should be a regular part of the Christian Life. The reason for this isn’t that we need to be re-saved, or re-forgiven, or that every time we sin, we are in mortal danger of losing our salvation. The reason for this is that sin festers, and Satan accuses. Confession and absolution are active reminders that God’s grace remains.¹”

¹ Roneveik, Gretchen. *Ragged*. Irvine, CA. 1517 Publishing, 2021.

And at the same time, who God is in the person and work of Christ is revealed. What is credited us becomes clear. We would not be so safe as to allow the sharpness of the Sword to fall upon us without His goodness outweighing our sinfulness.

The life Jesus accomplished for sinners is a *non-repentant* life. Because of his perfect life (Hebrews 4:15), his record before the Father is one of utter and complete perfection *for us*. As a child, as a teen, as a man, in every thought, word, and deed, he fully trusted and obeyed his Father. He never deviated from the plan to accomplish the work God gave him on earth. Our lists of sins which so often entangle us? None are present in the imputed, justified life given us in Christ.

So if your repentance isn't robust, if it languishes under the law, repent again and know that turning from sin is conforming you to the image of Christ even now. Let the darkness of the depths of depravity contrast the light of the Love of God. Remember again the life credited you by Jesus and receive the peace afforded all saints. The gift of Lent, like the gift we receive in every other season, is Jesus. He is the reward and our true and only Hope. His is a non-repentant life—and His life is also yours, my dear friends.

*Tiffany Childs, Director of Women's Ministry,
Grace Anglican Church,
Louisville, KY*

Learning to be Empty

*“What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart?
For I am ready not only to be imprisoned but even to
die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”*

ACTS 21:13

Lent is probably the time of year that Christians are most liable to hear about the importance of learning to die to self. While Christ is far more than a model for the Christian life, the greatness of his sacrifice is a clear lesson in self-emptying. When this season draws our attention to the infinite gap between heaven and Calvary, we see clearly the dignity of sacrificial love.

But how can we come to practice this self-giving in our own lives and become the givers that Lent calls us to be? It's easy to get lost in the imperative of Lent—to focus on the call to be holy without considering how we can answer that call. For that, we need direction.

The text at the top of this page offers two distinct clues to the self-emptying holiness this season beckons us to. It's among the last words which Paul says to the disciples in Caesarea before he goes to Jerusalem, where he will be imprisoned for the faith. These are the words of a man who is prepared to do whatever it takes to share the love of Christ—a man who will pour himself out like a drink offering for the sake of Jesus's name.

The first clue Paul gives us is that we must find a people we love to the point of emptying ourselves. Paul is prepared to be imprisoned and, if necessary, even to die “in Jerusalem.” He's found a people he loves to the point of self-emptying. If we would love as Christ calls us to love, we must find for ourselves a people that we love enough to be persecuted by them (and not simply *for* them, but *by* them). Who do you love enough to be persecuted by them?

It's alright to not immediately have an answer to this difficult question. It calls more for honesty and repentance than for a swift response. But I guarantee that when we can say with Paul that we are ready to die for our mission field we will be one step closer to this self-emptying love.

The second clue is the last phrase, “for the name of the Lord Jesus.” Nothing brings us to the point of self-emptying like being filled with Christ. The people God calls us to may eventually seem unlovable, but the Savior who came gave himself for us is worthy of all love and service. Lent’s call is not first to sacrifice, but to consider Jesus’s great sacrifice for us and live in its light. We become “ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die” for his name’s sake because he was ready not only to be imprisoned but even to die for us. So to him be all the glory this Lenten season.

*Zachary Miguel, Seminarian,
Grace Anglican Church,
Louisville, KY*



The Discipline of Silence in a Digital Age

Lent invites us into the wilderness with Jesus—a place of quiet, restraint, and deep attentiveness to God. In a world saturated with screens, alerts, and endless streams of information, one of the most meaningful fasts we can undertake is to step away from our devices. Technology isn't necessarily bad, but constant digital consumption can dull our awareness of God's presence and disrupt inner stillness.

When Jesus fasted for forty days in the wilderness, He was not merely abstaining from food; He was creating space to rely fully on the Father. As He reminds us, “*One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God*” (Matthew 4:4). Today, many of us live not by bread alone, but by notifications, headlines, and social feeds—often without realizing how much they shape our thoughts, emotions, and attention.

The Psalmist writes, “*Be still, and know that I am God*” (Psalm 46:10). Stillness is increasingly countercultural. News cycles thrive on urgency, social media rewards outrage or comparison, and devices train us to reach for distraction the moment silence appears. A Lenten fast from

devices—whether for certain hours of the day or specific platforms—can become an act of obedience and trust, allowing God to reorient our hearts.

Begin modestly. Perhaps set aside your phone during morning prayer and evening compline. Turn off news notifications, choosing instead to entrust the world’s troubles to God in intercession. Replace scrolling with Scripture, allowing God’s Word to shape your world view more than the headlines. “*Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path*” (Psalm 119:105).

Fasting from devices is not about withdrawal from the world, but instead cultivating a deeper engagement with Christ so that we are strengthened in Him as we move through the world. Isaiah reminds us that a true fast loosens burdens and restores right relationship (Isaiah 58:6). As you step away from digital noise, notice what rises to the surface—restlessness, anxiety, or perhaps grief you have been avoiding. Surrender these to God in prayer.

Consider using this reclaimed time to pray the Daily Office, read the Bible, journal, or take a walk in nature and enjoy the beauty of God’s creation. Allow your attention to become an offering.

As we fast, we are reminded that God is not found in the constant rush, but in the quiet turning of the heart. Lent prepares us for the joy of Easter by teaching us to hunger rightly—not for distraction, but for God Himself. “*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled*” (Matthew 5:6).

May this season draw you closer to Christ, attune your heart to His voice, and restore a deeper sense of peace.

*Carolanne W., Member,
The River Anglican Church,
Blacksburg, VA*

Psalm 143

My Soul Thirsts for You

A Psalm of David.

¹Hear my prayer, O Lord;
give ear to my pleas for mercy!
In your faithfulness answer
me, in your righteousness!

²Enter not into judgment with
your servant,
for no one living is righ-
teous before you.

³For the enemy has pursued my
soul;
he has crushed my life to the
ground;
he has made me sit in dark-
ness like those long dead.

⁴Therefore my spirit faints within
me;
my heart within me is appalled.

⁵I remember the days of old;
I meditate on all that you have
done;
I ponder the work
of your hands.

⁶I stretch out my hands to you;
my soul thirsts for you
like a parched land. Selah

⁷Answer me quickly, O Lord!

My spirit fails!
Hide not your face from me,
lest I be like those who
go down to the pit.

⁸Let me hear in the morning of
your steadfast love,
for in you I trust.
Make me know the way I should
go,
for to you I lift up my soul.

⁹Deliver me from my enemies,
O Lord!
I have fled to you for refuge.

¹⁰Teach me to do your will,
for you are my God!
Let your good Spirit lead me
on level ground!

¹¹For your name's sake,
O Lord, preserve my life!
In your righteousness bring
my soul out of trouble!

¹²And in your steadfast love you
will cut off my enemies,
and you will destroy all the
adversaries of my soul,
for I am your servant.



Lent

• WEEK 4 •

I Will Wait:

A Meditation on Psalm 130

Psalm 130 is read on the fifth Sunday of Lent in Year A. The poem is located in the sub-collection of Book 5 known as the Psalms of Ascent (Pss. 120–134), a collection which, among other things, envisions the Israelites “ascending” from exile to worship God on Zion (cf. Ps. 81:10; Amos 2:10; 2 Chr 36:23). Situated in the midst of a journey from exile to the holy mountain, that place where our Lord was crucified, Psalm 130 is an appropriate poem for meditation this Lenten season.

The Psalm concerns the cry of sinners as they make pilgrimage from exile. In the first two couplets, the poet desperately pleads with God for help:

*From the depths I called you, oh Lord
my Lord, hear my voice;
Let your ears be attentive
to the sound of my plea (vv. 1a–2)*

The poet is in dire straits, drowning in the sea (“the depths”). There are few things more helpless than being tossed in the water and unable to reach safety. All you can do in such a moment is save your energy and call for help—to a lifeguard, a friend, a rescue boat—and hope someone will respond. When sinking into the metaphorical water, the poet turns to God with his desperate plea. We don’t even know what he said, only that he “called” and sounded a “plea.”

Remarkably, the poet never receives an answer to his call. Despite this, he demonstrates immense patience and trust in the midst of his turmoil:

*I will wait, oh Lord,
my soul will wait,
and in his word I will hope;
My soul to the Lord
more than watchmen for the morning,
... watchmen for the morning (vv. 5–6)*

This set of triplets is instructive on two counts. First, when the poet does not hear a response to his pleading in vv. 1a–2, he resolves to patiently wait. This can not be taken lightly. The image of a drowning man in v. 1a might elicit panic. But anyone who has been trained in water safety knows that when one fears drowning, the most important thing to do is to keep calm. Call for help, yes, but keep calm. This way, you do not expend your reserve of energy.

Second, the poet does not wait in vain. He does not wait for a life-guard-of-the-imagination. He likens his waiting to that of a watchman for the morning. The watchman knows the morning will come. It is assured. Likewise, it is not that God has not responded to the poet, it is that he has not responded *yet*.

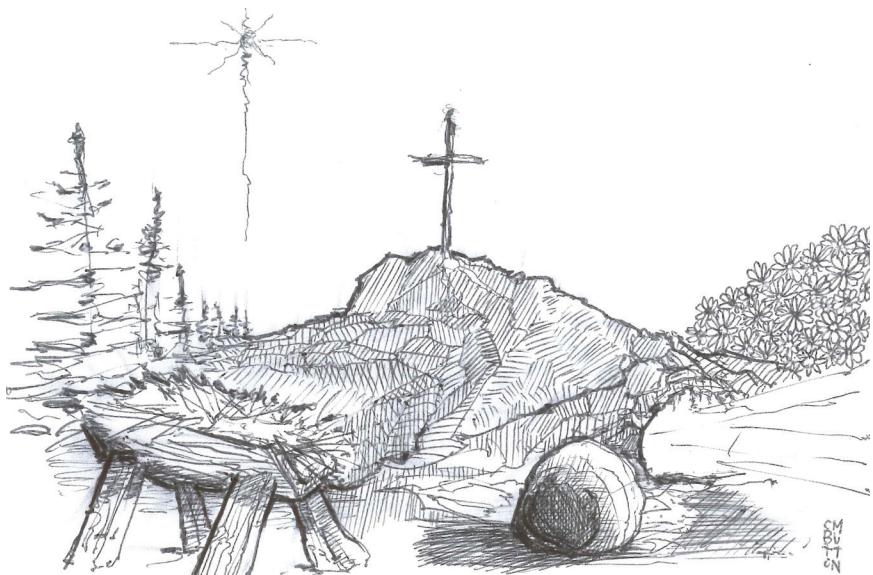
But what could provoke such trust? How can one wait patiently when existential danger looms? The secret lies between vv. 1a–2 and 5–6 where the poet confesses confidence in God's great mercy:

*If iniquities you would keep, oh Lord,
my Lord, who could stand?
But with you is forgiveness,
that you might be feared (vv. 3–4)*

The poet knows his God is merciful. He does not keep tally of our sins but “redeems Israel from all his iniquities” (v. 8). Meditating on the merciful character of God, he is confident to wait for rescue in patient faith.

As we journey through this Lenten season, mindful of our own frailty and our longing for redemption from exile, let us, like the poet, call upon our God—not in unrestrained panic, but in steady trust—ever reminding ourselves of our Lord's great mercy in our lives, and in our world.

*David L. Taylor, Layperson
Grace Anglican Church, Louisville, KY*



The Only Gospel

*Original Artwork by C.M. Button,
Member, Hope Church, Charleston, WV*

Cracked Vessels

"But whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

JOHN 4:14

I am a cracked vessel, a broken pot
Thinking I'm full when I leak a lot
With each step I take
upon the path of life
I drip and trickle with
drought and strife
Until I'm so thirsty, I
know I'm near empty
And I'll seek to fill myself with any-
thing I see.

But this isn't the way it has to be...

There is One who walks with me
Through dry deserts and stormy seas
He is my key, my guarantee
He is the water, He is the stream
He fills my cup with jubilee
And though I walk bro-
ken, I am but free.

For whenever I feel like I'm
lost and I'm leaking
You give me a drink from
your eternal spring
For You are the well
that never runs dry
Living waters ever flow-
ing in great supply
You fill me up with new
life again and again
A well-watered garden where
weeds had once been.

*Breanna Lowman, Member,
Grace Anglican Church,
Louisville, KY*

Just Trust?

"Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God."

PSALM 20:7

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."

JOHN 14:15

When I was a new Christian people told me that the Christian life was simple: “Just trust Christ.”

I thought, “That’s easy. He’s the embodiment of God’s wisdom and love. Of course I can trust him!”

It all seemed easy—a little too easy, as so many Evangelical sayings are.

Eventually, I realized that, at best, “Just trust Christ” was an incomplete thought.

Trusting Christ, if it has any meaning at all, means *obeying Christ even when it seems obviously against your own interests*. And that is never easy.

There is often a stark contrast between choosing God’s way vs the world’s way. The world’s way is what seems practical and beneficial, obvious and commonsensical. God’s way is often not.

I began to see that this thread wound all through scripture: over and over we find a situation where God asks, *Will you obey Me even when it seems impractical, unwise, and even self-destructive?* In fact, the salvation and sanctification of the human race depend on this thread.

Examples are too many to list, but here is a sample: Adam and Eve are commanded to ignore a harmless and beautiful fruit. Abraham is told to kill his own son. Israel is commanded to take over the land flowing with milk and honey, though it has giants. David takes on Goliath.

Saul turns to the occult for answers, impatient with God's silence. Aged King David enacts a census, for which God punishes the entire nation, for David has trusted in numbers rather than God Almighty. Peter denies Christ to save his own skin (or so he thinks). Ananias and Sapphira trust money and white lies rather than the Holy Spirit.

But the reigning story in scripture is a positive one. Jesus chooses to die on the cross, when he could have done what seems the practical and effective thing: Conquer Rome and set up his own permanent kingdom. Instead, he chose a path that was terrifying even to himself: "utter helplessness turned out to utter risk," as C.S. Lewis once wrote about death.

And am I any better than King Saul or David? When and where do I, perhaps habitually, choose that path that seems common-sensical and justified in the world's eyes? ("A person has got to feed their family!" says even the concentration camp guard.)

Trusting in God, in these situations, means believing that God *has secret knowledge and everything will actually turn out for the best*. Let us remember to "look to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2) and let us make the crazy, "supernatural" choices.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, show me clearly when a path is forking in front of me, the world's path vs. the path of your footsteps. Send the Holy Spirit to remind me and make the choice clear. Give me the power to choose to follow you, no matter how crazy it seems.

*Mark Filiatreau, Member,
The River Anglican Church,
Blacksburg, VA*

Psalm 102

Do Not Hide Your Face from Me

A Prayer of one afflicted, when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the Lord.

¹ Hear my prayer, O Lord;
let my cry come to you!

² Do not hide your face from me
in the day of my distress!
Incline your ear to me;
answer me speedily in
the day when I call!

³ For my days pass away like
smoke,
and my bones burn
like a furnace.

⁴ My heart is struck down like
grass and has withered;
I forgot to eat my bread.

⁵ Because of my loud groaning
my bones cling to my flesh.

⁶ I am like a desert owl of the
wilderness,
like an owl[a] of
the waste places;

⁷ I lie awake;
I am like a lonely spar-
row on the housetop.

⁸ All the day my enemies taunt me;
those who deride me use
my name for a curse.

⁹ For I eat ashes like bread
and mingle tears with my drink,
¹⁰ because of your indignation and
anger;
for you have taken me up
and thrown me down.

¹¹ My days are like an evening
shadow;
I wither away like grass.

¹² But you, O Lord, are enthroned
forever;
you are remembered
throughout all generations.

¹³ You will arise and have pity on
Zion;
it is the time to favor her;
the appointed time has come.

¹⁴ For your servants hold her stones
dear
and have pity on her dust.

¹⁵ Nations will fear the name of the Lord,

and all the kings of the earth will fear your glory.

¹⁶ For the Lord builds up Zion; he appears in his glory;

¹⁷ he regards the prayer of the destitute

and does not despise their prayer.

¹⁸ Let this be recorded for a generation to come,

so that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord:

¹⁹ that he looked down from his holy height;

from heaven the Lord looked at the earth,

²⁰ to hear the groans of the prisoners,

to set free those who were doomed to die,

²¹ that they may declare in Zion the name of the Lord,

and in Jerusalem his praise,

²² when peoples gather together,

and kingdoms, to worship the Lord.

²³ He has broken my strength in midcourse;

he has shortened my days.

²⁴ “O my God,” I say, “take me not away

in the midst of my days—

you whose years endure

throughout all generations!”

²⁵ Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,

and the heavens are the work of your hands.

²⁶ They will perish, but you will remain;

they will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,

²⁷ but you are the same, and your years have no end.

²⁸ The children of your servants shall dwell secure;

their offspring shall be established before you.



Lent

• WEEK 5 •

Glad to Be in That Number:

*A Lenten Reflection from the Book of Numbers*¹

The Bible opens in Genesis with God creating the world by speaking an ordered reality into existence out of the chaotic waters of the Deep (*tehōm*)—waters associated with death and destruction (cf. Gen. 7:11; Ex. 15:5; Ezek. 26:19). He creates a world fit for both Himself and His first human creatures, Adam and Eve, to dwell in together. After creating them, God speaks with them and walks with them in the Garden (Gen. 2:16; 3:8). Put another way—a way that is used later in the Bible—God creates the world and dwells in the midst of His people.

After the Fall, however, everything begins to unravel. God no longer walks with humanity as He once did in the Garden. When Adam and Eve sinned, they were excommunicated—driven out of the Garden and away from God’s life-giving presence. And by the time of Noah, human wickedness had so thoroughly corrupted the world God had made that He determined to excommunicate humankind from the world itself. In the flood, He “uncreated” the very world He had once formed out of nothing (Gen. 7:11–12).

Something similar occurs in the book of Numbers. In a real and visible reversal of the excommunication that took place in Eden, God comes again to dwell in the midst of His people. Through the opening census in Numbers 1, and through the formation of Israel’s camp around the Tabernacle in chapter 2, Israel is “born” as God’s son (Ex. 4:21–23), constituted as a living people ordered around His divine and royal dwelling place—the Tabernacle—where God Himself takes up residence (Ex. 40:34–38), where He literally dwells in the midst of His people. It’s a hopeful picture because it represents a small but significant reversal of the Fall: God dwelling in the midst of His people once again.

¹ Anything insightful in this reflection should be attributed to the labors and insights found in L. Michael Morales’ commentary on the book of Numbers as I’ve merely tried to apply what I’ve learned from him. *Numbers 1–19 (Apollos Old Testament Commentary)*, 2024.

Yet things don't go well. Israel engages in a series of rebellions that mirror Adam's refusal to trust God's word and provision (Num. 11–25). God gave Adam and Eve every tree in the Garden for food except one (Gen. 2:15–17). In the same way, God gave Israel manna from heaven in the wilderness—daily, abundant provision. But the people craved something else, something God hadn't yet given them. Their craving was so strong—so governed by the god of their bellies—that they were willing to return to Egypt, to the grave they'd been delivered from, in order to satisfy it (Num. 11:1–6).²

As a result, God's judgment burned against His people, and the camp was gradually "uncreated," just as the world once was in the flood. God's judgment in the flood resulted in the death of all mankind except Noah and his family, who were given the task of leading humanity into the new, post-flood world. And in Numbers 11–25, death spreads throughout the wilderness generation until all of them are dead, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb—Joshua himself being charged with leading God's people into the Promised Land (Num. 14:30; Josh. 1). If there's to be any hope for God's people *en masse*, it'll have to come through resurrection.

That resurrection appears in Numbers 26, when God commands Moses and Eleazar to take a new census, giving "birth" to the second generation of His people to come out of Egypt. Where sin and death prevail, God's mercy prevails all the more. The census in Numbers 26 signals that resurrection and new life follow judgment and death because God keeps His promises. If He says He'll bring you into a Promised Land of abundance, He'll do it—and not even death can stop Him.

In Revelation 20:9, John sees God's people—described as "the camp of the saints"—under attack from Satan and the nations. Yet God rescues that camp. And in Revelation 21–22, the camp gives way to a permanent and glorious city about which God declares, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man!" (Rev. 21:3). What was once a pilgrim camp in the wilderness

2 For more on how the Bible depicts Egypt as a great grave ruled by a wicked dragon-king, see my contribution to this devotional from 2025. For an in-depth development of this theme see L. Michael Morales' book, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*.

is revealed as the everlasting city where God dwells with His people forever.

As I write this, we're in Christmastide. And as I reflect on the coming Lenten season, with Holy Week and Good Friday—and on both Israel's wilderness wandering and Jesus' own time in the wilderness—I'm reminded that while Lent is rightly marked as a season of repentance, fasting, and self-examination, it isn't a season without hope. Just as Israel's resurrection from death in the wilderness followed God's judgment against her, Easter follows Lent.

In 1 Corinthians 15:12–28, the apostle Paul articulates what I sometimes call a *logic of hope* that God has woven into the fabric of reality itself—a logic the Church's calendar faithfully reflects. Because Jesus has defeated the grave, we, of all people, possess an unsurpassable hope. For God's people, death is real, but it isn't ultimate. Judgment is severe, but it isn't final. Lent leads to Easter not because the Church wishes it so, but because our Savior, Jesus Christ, has already passed through death and emerged victorious from the grave. Easter hope is robust, and it spills into every season of the Church's life. It follows, then, that no season is without hope—and as time-bound creatures, we can't help but live in that hope in every season.

So remember this Lent: you've sinned boldly. You've rebelled against God in the wilderness of this life. Left to yourself, you belong among those whose rebellion leads to death and exile. You deserve to be put out of the camp. But you don't stand before God as an isolated individual. You've been united to Jesus' death and resurrection in baptism and washed into *the camp of the saints*—a people God has promised to bring through the wilderness and into a land of abundance. This hope is yours. Rejoice...even during Lent!

*Michael Neal, Director of Family Ministry,
Grace Anglican Church,
Louisville, KY*

Refreshing Reflections

“The snares of death encompassed me, and the pains of the Grave laid hold of me; I suffered trouble and sorrow. Then I called upon the Name of the Lord...”

PSALM 116:3-4

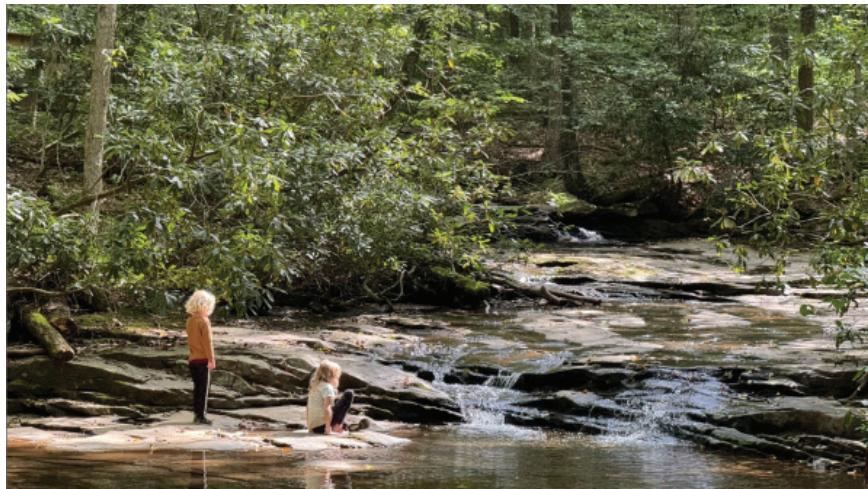
Few stories illuminate the darkest corners of men’s hearts quite like Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment*. It follows the descent of a young man into the depths of delusion, leading him to commit one of the most depraved acts imaginable: cold-blooded murder. As you read, however, you find nearly every character in the book is guilty of heinous sin to one degree or another. Adulterers, drunkards, lunatics, liars, thieves, and prostitutes abound beside the gray banks of the River Neva. Good Samaritans make appearances, and yet often assist for their own ends. In a word, the world to which Dostoyevsky introduces you is morbid. Truth be told, when I began the novel I periodically set it down (sometimes for weeks) before I found the wherewithal to continue. Yet I found myself drawn deeper in with every attempt. The surprising genius of the work, I realized, does not come from the writer’s ability to craft unlikable characters, but that I saw myself in each one. “If thou gaze long into an abyss,” Friedrich Nietzsche warned, “the abyss will also gaze into thee.”

Great books often act as a mirror, reflecting images of you and me back until we see the plain-faced truth, pockmarks and all. We should expect as much—all mankind share a common condition, after all. Scripture teaches God inscribes his law upon our hearts (Jer. 31:33; Rom. 2:15). To mix my metaphors, we all share the same yardstick, yet in honest moments we find ourselves coming up short. In 1 Corinthians 15:56, the Apostle Paul spoke of such uses of the law when he said, “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.” To put it another way, it’s a full-length, floor to ceiling, hand-crafted mirror with golden affects and zero smudge marks.

Seasons of self-reflection serve as reminders that Godly repentance lasts a lifetime. It means an ongoing appraisal of what bubbles beneath the surface. Repentance demands we consider the sickness of sin, the treasonous nature of the heart, and keep a constant vigil over our households. It's when we recognize all of sin's enticements are truly smoke and mirrors. Repentance is warfare; a rage against our inner criminal.

But this isn't a "pull yourselves up by your bootstraps" sort of article. Most of you probably aren't wearing boots anyway. But this isn't a "pull yourselves up by your house slippers" sort of article either. In fact, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people! *Christ has come.* His blood conquers sin and invites you to join him in his triumph! Romans 5:20 rejoices with us, "but where sin abounded, grace did abound more exceedingly." The heel of repentance stirs up a whirlwind of grace. As Anglicans, God invites us into this victory each time we take the Eucharist: the beauty of Christ's promises made manifest to us. The priest stands before the people and asks God to "have mercy upon *you*." The Comfortable Words ease our tumultuous souls. We speak aloud our prayers and ask Christ to meet as, just as he said. We may shuffle our way to the altar, heads down, hearts stricken, and still "this is my body, which is broken for you." After our darkest reflections we discover Jesus on the other side, standing in the clearing, offering living water for our souls.

R.W. Lee, Member,
Grace Anglican Church,
Louisville, KY



Keep Your Heart With All Vigilance

Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.

PROVERBS 4:23

During this season of fasting and repentance, there's an opportunity and a gift for us. There's an intentionality to conduct a pulse check. Rather than flitting from activity to activity and filling our lives with distraction, we are encouraged to slow down, take a break, and intentionally let go of the business of busyness.

At times we do treat our relentless activities like we are running a business. Our seemingly endless lists of activities, tasks, and markers of productivity proclaim to the world and to our minds that we are important—our busyness is a vanity metric showing anyone who asks that we are working hard and we are successful. We must certainly be maximizing our life if we are so relentlessly buzzing around from activity to activity.

But the wisdom of the proverbs points us elsewhere. The intentional fasting of the Lenten season forces us to examine the state of our soul, not the state of our productivity. When you and I take a break from the noise

of our task lists, meetings, and very important goals, we get an insight on the one goal and metric that matters, the state of our heart.

Out of the abundance of our heart our mouth speaks. Where our treasure is, there our heart will be also. What is flowing from your heart right now?

And what does it mean to keep your heart with all vigilance? It means to pay attention. The writer of this proverb is telling us to pay attention to our heart. Give full attention to the maintenance and support of your heart, for from it flow the springs of life.

If we aren't paying attention, the flow of the springs of life might get clogged or blocked. It might mean that we lose energy and lose a sense of joy for the blessings of the life we've been given. It might mean that instead of a spring of life, the lack of flow becomes a stagnant pool and we miss out on experiencing the freshness of the life God has granted us. Instead of life and health, we experience a heart that is sick and weak.

Today, take some time to tend to your heart, invite Jesus to join you in keeping your heart with all vigilance. As you do, may you experience freshly the springs of life that come from our King's fresh mercy.

*Billy Williams, Church Planter,
Wellspring Church,
Morgantown, WV*

Psalm 51

Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet went to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

¹Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.

²Wash me thoroughly from my
iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!

³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.

⁴Against you, you only, have I
sinned
and done what is evil in your
sight,
so that you may be justified in your
words

and blameless in your judgment.

⁵Behold, I was brought forth in
iniquity,
and in sin did my

mother conceive me.

⁶Behold, you delight in truth in the
inward being,
and you teach me wis-
dom in the secret heart.

⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall
be clean;
wash me, and I shall
be whiter than snow.

⁸Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you
have broken rejoice.

⁹Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O
God,
and renew a right spir-
it within me.

¹¹ Cast me not away from your presence,
and take not your Holy Spirit from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and uphold me with a willing spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will return to you.

¹⁴ Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God,
O God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of your righteousness.

¹⁵ O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will

declare your praise.

¹⁶ For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.

¹⁸ Do good to Zion in your good pleasure;
build up the walls of Jerusalem;
¹⁹ then will you delight in right sacrifices,
in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

We pray first because we believe something; perhaps at that stage a very crude or vague something. And with the deepening of prayer, its patient cultivation, there comes—perhaps slowly, perhaps suddenly—the enrichment and enlargement of belief, as we enter into a first hand communion with the Reality who is the object of our faith. . . So we begin the overhaul of our spiritual equipment not by thinking about our own needs and shortcomings, but by looking up and out at this One Reality, this Unchanging God...Our eyes are not in focus for His Reality, until they are out of focus for our own petty concerns.

*Evelyn Underhill,
Concerning the Inner Life, 1926*



Lent

• HOLY WEEK •

Psalm 38

*Do Not Forsake Me, O Lord, A Psalm
of David, for the memorial offering.*

¹ O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger,
nor discipline me in your wrath!

² For your arrows have sunk into me,
and your hand has come down on me.

³ There is no soundness in my flesh
because of your indignation;
there is no health in my bones
because of my sin.

⁴ For my iniquities have gone over my head;
like a heavy burden, they
are too heavy for me.

⁵ My wounds stink and fester
because of my foolishness,

⁶ I am utterly bowed down and prostrate;
all the day I go about mourning.

⁷ For my sides are filled with burning,
and there is no soundness in my flesh.

⁸ I am feeble and crushed;
I groan because of the tumult of my heart.

⁹ O Lord, all my longing is before you;
my sighing is not hidden from you.

¹⁰ My heart throbs; my strength fails me,
and the light of my eyes—
it also has gone from me.

¹¹ My friends and companions stand aloof
from my plague,
and my nearest kin stand far off.

¹² Those who seek my life lay their snares;
those who seek my hurt speak of ruin
and meditate treachery all day long.

¹³ But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear,
like a mute man who does
not open his mouth.

¹⁴ I have become like a man who does not
hear,
and in whose mouth are no rebukes.

¹⁵ But for you, O Lord, do I wait;
it is you, O Lord my God, who will answer.

¹⁶ For I said, “Only let them not rejoice over
me,
who boast against me when my foot slips!”

¹⁷ For I am ready to fall,
and my pain is ever before me.

¹⁸ I confess my iniquity;
I am sorry for my sin.

¹⁹ But my foes are vigorous, they are mighty,
and many are those who
hate me wrongfully.

²⁰ Those who render me evil for good
accuse me because I follow after good.

²¹ Do not forsake me, O Lord!
O my God, be not far from me!

²² Make haste to help me,
O Lord, my salvation!

Leave No Room for Worry

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-8

It is easy for us to get swallowed up in the events of this world, in the hateful things going on around us. We live in a world where we can get the most recent current events at the click of a button, and though many of us like to call it 'staying informed', it can actually be pulling us away from God. I find that when I get lost scrolling into the depths of social media, I am fed by hate and bitterness. It leaves me feeling as though I have taken on a massive weight to carry on my back. This is exactly what the enemy is trying to do. He surrounds us with events that are designed to make us worry. When we think too deeply on things like this, we can become fearful and subconsciously doubt God's power. We forget that He is ultimately the one in control.

In the same way, we should be mindful of the way our personal struggles affect us. We all have things in our lives that are stressing us out, possibly because we don't know how God will work things out, or maybe just because we can't stand not having all the answers. For many people—including me—worry is an unwelcome guest that lets himself in whenever he feels the need. He waltzes his way through our mind and wreaks havoc. While it can sometimes feel impossible to drive him away, God is always waiting to be invited through prayer. He will happily come in and kick that stubborn guest out. So long as we keep Him in our mind, there will be no room for worry to barge his way back in. However, if we keep setting our minds to worldly troubles and events, it makes us more likely to let worry back in. For this reason, it is also important that we fill our minds with all things good, as all things good

come from God (James 1:17). Whether it's as small as the kindness of a stranger you saw at the grocery store, sweet thoughts of family members or friends, or even the pretty flower you saw on your way to work/school this morning, filling our minds with small sweet things and the goodness of God allows room for us to trust in God and in his power.

So, as we walk through this season of Lent, perhaps we should fast from being 'in the know' through social media and instead focus on the good things around us to see how it affects our mental and spiritual well-being.

Perhaps we should focus on bringing our worries to God and allow His goodness to keep us still. The reward is getting to see how He works everything out in His perfect timing and plan.

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"Yet Even Now"

Joel 2:12–13 (ESV) “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments.” Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

The prophet Joel is speaking to God’s people in the middle of disaster, disaster brought on by their own rebellion. Yet despite everything they’ve done, God remains steadfast in love, eager to show mercy and pour out grace. After pronouncing coming judgment, the Lord suddenly says, “Yet even now—return to Me with all your heart.”

That phrase—“Yet even now”—stopped me in my tracks recently while reading Matthew 26. I found myself captivated by the story of Judas. The Bible is clear that Judas experienced remorse. He was overwhelmed with shame and sorrow; he even tried to return the thirty pieces of silver and confessed, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” So I started digging: Was this saving repentance? Was Judas truly turning back to God?

That question led me straight to Peter, and the contrast couldn’t be clearer. Both men sinned grievously against Jesus. Both felt the crushing weight of their betrayal. But watch where each one ran.

Judas ran away from God. In his worldly sorrow, he tried to fix the mess himself—throw the money back, make it right on his own terms—and it ended in despair and death.

Peter ran to God. After denying Jesus three times, he didn’t try to earn his way back. He simply wept bitterly and, when the opportunity came, ran toward the risen Lord on the seashore. And what did Jesus do? He didn’t scold or reject him. Three times He asked, “Do you love Me?”—mirroring the three denials—and then reinstated him fully: “Feed My sheep. Tend My flock.”

That, friends, is the difference between rending our garments and rending our hearts. One is an outward show that tries to fix things in our own strength. The other is a broken, trusting heart that runs straight into the arms of a gracious God.

So here's the question Lent presses on us: When we see our sin, where do we run?

Our God is mighty to save. He's not waiting for us to clean ourselves up or throw back the silver. He wants us—broken, empty-handed, desperate—running to Him. Because even now, after every failure, every betrayal, every wandering step, He still says:

“Return to Me with all your heart... for I am gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love.”

This Lent, may we rend our hearts and not our garments. May we rest in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who is still pleading, still pursuing, still inviting: “Come to Me—and I will give you rest.”

He relents over disaster. He restores the years the locusts have eaten. He welcomes home every Peter—and every one of us—who will simply turn and run to Him.

Yet even now—return.

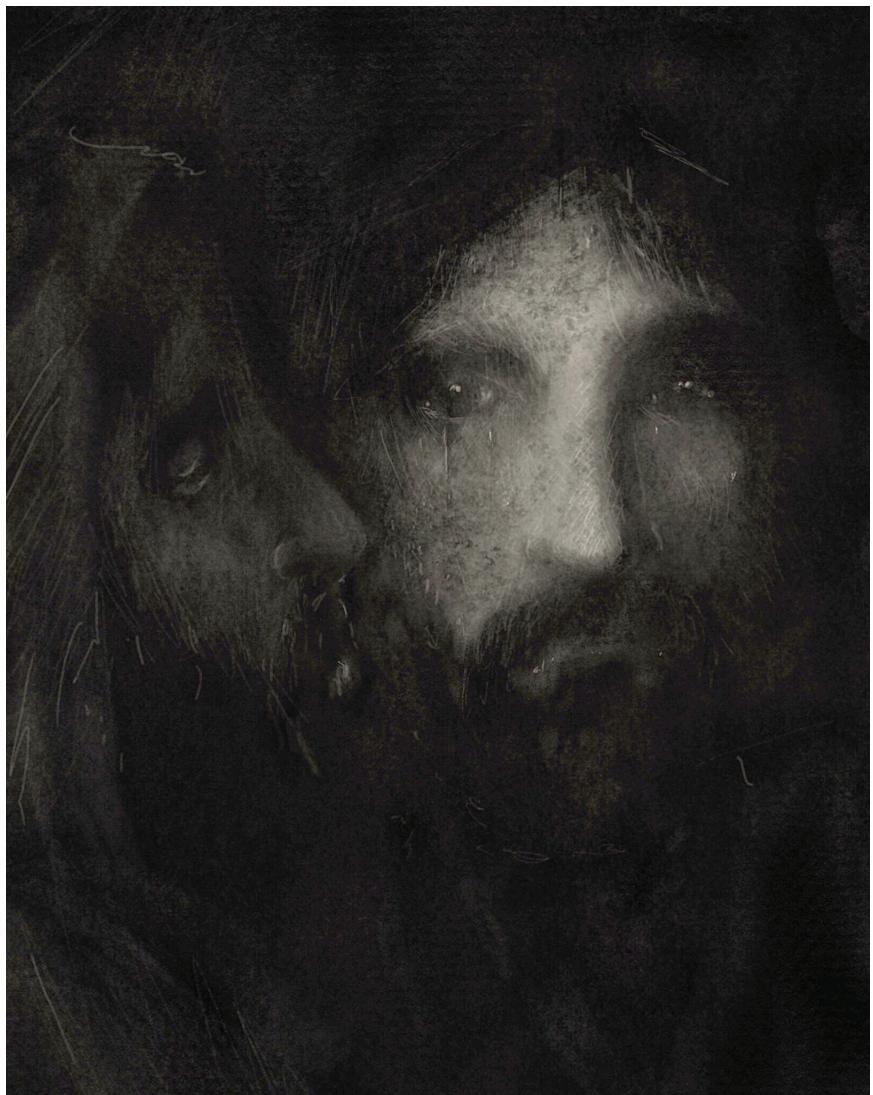
Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for your grace and your steadfast love that endures forever. We pray Lord, that you will create in us a heart that will always run to you and not from you. Thank you for all of your gracious invitations to come to you and find peace. We pray this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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MAUNDY

THURS



The Betrayer's Kiss

*Original Artwork by Joe Williams,
Director of Music, Hope Church, Charleston, WV*

Who Shall Deliver Me?

God strengthen me to bear myself;
That heaviest weight of all to bear,
Inalienable weight of care.

All others are outside myself;
I lock my door and bar them out
The turmoil, tedium, gad-about.

I lock my door upon myself,
And bar them out; but who shall wall
Self from myself, most loathed of all?

If I could once lay down myself,
And start self-purged upon the race
That all must run ! Death runs apace.

If I could set aside myself,
And start with lightened heart upon
The road by all men overgone!

God harden me against myself,
This coward with pathetic voice
Who craves for ease and rest and joys

Myself, arch-traitor to myself ;
My hollowest friend, my deadliest foe,
My clog whatever road I go.

Yet One there is can curb myself,
Can roll the strangling load from me
Break off the yoke and set me free.

Christina Rosetti, 1866

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THE APPALACHIAN DEANERY

