

Greendale Ecumenical Group



2025 Lenten Devotions

ASH WEDNESDAY - March 5th

Joel 2:1-2,12-17, Isaiah 58:1-12, Psalm 51:1-17,2 , Corinthians 5:20-6:10,Matthew 6:1-6,16-21

“Blow the trumpet of Zion: sound the alarm on my holy mountain! (Joel 2:1a)

“says the Lord, return to me with all your heart.” (Joel 2:12)

“Shout out; do not hold back!” (Isaiah 58:1a)

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love;” (Psalm 51:1a)

“So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ; be reconciled to God.” (2 Corinthians 5:20)

“Beware of practicing your righteousness before others in order to be seen by them, for then you have no reward from your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 6:1)

“Where is Your Heart’s Desire?”

Reading the first lines of the texts for this first day of Lent, I am moved by the series of commands. Sound out! Return to me! Shout! Have mercy on me! Be an ambassador! Practice is its own reward.

The season of Lent, meant to draw the Christian faithful closer to God by reenacting the 40 day wilderness experience of Jesus, when we hear that he was tempted by powers to place himself in line with God instead of in service to God’s mission. And our readings today have a similar message. As you practice your faith do not be caught up in the struggle for powers and principalities, do not be lead astray by the attention your actions have to bring you praise. Practice love, do not show off your faith. Fast for the purpose of inward awareness, not public piety. Be a disciple, not a sandwich-board for the coming Kingdom. Declare your faith by how you live into the life of the Kingdom here.

Rev. Aaron Payson, UUCW

THURSDAY – March 6th

Acts 7:30-34 MESSAGE

30-32 “Forty years later, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, an angel appeared to [Moses] in the guise of flames of a burning bush. Moses, not believing his eyes, went up to take a closer look. He heard God’s voice: ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.’ Frightened nearly out of his skin, Moses shut his eyes and turned away.

33-34 “God said, ‘Kneel and pray. You are in a holy place, on holy ground. I’ve seen the agony of my people in Egypt. I’ve heard their groans. I’ve come to help them. So get yourself ready; I’m sending you back to Egypt.’

Surprise, Moses!

We never know how God might “come-a-call’in-us”! When we live a life of faith there are many opportunities that can arise about us for which we have the tools in our capabilities with which to make a positive difference.

And God earnestly hopes that we put two-and-two-together in figuring a place where we are called to witness.

Moses’ story reveals he was unsure of his capacity to follow what God laid out for him to do. We might feel the same way in a situation that seems to call us to action. But, we can surely trust that the Spirit of God can empower in making the right decision and providing for the Divine to work through us Grace and Mercy in the moment.

Surprise, believer! God *does* have work for us to do!

Pr. Andrew Borden

FRIDAY – March 7th

Psalm 91:1-2, 9-16; Exodus 6:1-13; Acts 7:35-42

“Being a Voice in the Wilderness”

“The prophetic tasks of the church are to tell the truth in a society that lives in illusion, grieve in a society that practices denial, and express hope in a society that lives in despair.”

Walter Brueggemann

What do the faithful do in the presence of injustice? They begin by remembering whose they are and what they are called to be in the moment. They continue by being a voice for equity and fairness in the face of those who are unjust. They gather together with those who share the same mission as messengers of the Spirit of Righteousness, the Source of Love, Compassion. They take care to remember the history from which they have been born as a faithful people, and they continue to reflect a different way. They are the voice in the wilderness that know when they are on holy ground.

Rev. Aaron Payson, UUCW

SATURDAY – March 8th

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

*“For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven.” – Ecclesiastes 3:1*

“The Seasons of Life”

There is a paradoxical tension within Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, that for every positive experience in life, there is a corresponding negative or contrasting experience, like birth and death, joy and sorrow. These positive and negative experiences are woven into the fabric of who we are, each having an appropriate season and purpose. God does not cause these experiences; they result from free will and are a part of the human condition. But God does work through the events and experiences of our lives, and even through difficult times to bring about our spiritual growth.

Life is constantly changing, and just like the annual cycles in nature which bring about beginnings, endings, and rebirth, seedtime, growth, harvest and new life in the spring, so do the seasons of our lives. We are born, we live out the measure of the earthly time allotted to us, and we die. But through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, death does not have the final answer; for in Christ, we die and are reborn into new life. This is our faith, and what gives us the hope to meet the many experiences and challenges of day-to-day living. As we hold the tension of this cyclical nature of life found in today's Scripture, trusting in God, may we find meaning in each moment and in each season, even when facing difficult circumstances.

So then, may we accept the natural flow of life, acknowledging that both happiness and hardship are part of the human experience and should be embraced in their proper time and in due season, trusting that God is working divine purpose in each moment of our lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Marie Sturdevant - Grace Lutheran

SUNDAY – March 9th

Deuteronomy 26:1-11

“The Good Ache of Memory”

I write these thoughts as I am in Seattle. Seattle was once home to me, but it is no longer. Yet, there is hardly a street, house, or corner, nor the position of the sun on a body of water, that doesn't trigger some silent memory. Since the first years I lived here were my adolescence, the memories seem deeper, fuller, and more robust. I was young, like a sponge soaking up the world and its experiences with heightened sensitivity and vitality. Such memories are foundational to our identity. They are like sacred longings that ache and wait to be heard and felt again. Thus, the act of tithing—remembering where one comes from and whom one comes from—is an essential act of wholeness. It re-members us, putting back together the pieces of our existence that have splintered in this fractured world. Placing before God the fruits of our lives is a sure act of worship.

What will you place before God in this Lenten season?

Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant

MONDAY – March 10th

Psalm 17, 1 John 2:1-6

“Wondrously show us”

I find “Bible words” interesting and they arouse my curiosity. Psalm 17 is a lament, a prayer for deliverance from personal enemies...the prayer of an innocent person. In verse 7, the Psalmist calls upon God to WONDROUSLY show His steadfast love. Hmmm...not wonderfully or wondrous...not spoken or heard very often...maybe in hymns. Definitely a “Bible word”. Actually, the earliest known use of the word was in the Bible in the year 1535.

The bible teaches that the Lord’s love has been known through a history of “wonderful deeds”—translated as WONDROUS works...marvels, miracles, great wonders. The text uses the word as an adverb—to WONDROUSLY show or take action, to deliver from evil, to show His steadfast love extremely well or to a great degree; to exceed human ability by tapping into God’s ability.

In the first book of John chapter 2 verses 1-6, God WONDROUSLY showed His love by sending Jesus to plead our case, to advocate for us, to appease for our sins—and not only ours’ but also for the whole world. During this Lenten season, let us WONDROUSLY grow to act more and more like Christ, abide in Him and walk as Jesus lived. Thanks be to God!

Jackie Walsh – Grace Lutheran

TUESDAY – March 11th

Zechariah 3:1-10

The Lord said to Jeshua, “If you follow my ways and carefully serve me, then you will be given authority over my Temple and its courtyards.”

By listening to God and heeding His instructions we can determine how best to serve God in our religious practice and in our daily life. This means there is union between what God wants of us and how we live our lives.

Lent is a time for us to be quiet and listen to God, and to have courage to show our faith by what we say and how we act. Be brave and trust in God.

Pr. Dennis O'Malley

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WEDNESDAY - March 12th

Psalm 17; Job 1:1-22; Luke 21:34-22:6

“What is faith for?”

Faith is easy when things are going well. But that is not what faith was meant to be. Feeling blessed by good fortune can lull one into a sense of superiority. Faith, it turns out is most powerful when it is manifest in the presence of that which is most challenging. Faith, is the power to resist the temptation to give into the call to surrender to circumstances which seem all too often out of our control, and to claim again for ourselves allegiance to that which is far deeper than circumstance. We are called to witness to power greater than all that which claims to control our destiny and reach beyond the visions presented to us by principalities that believe they are in control, to that place of being that lies at the heart of faith which is a love that cannot be killed and will not be manipulated by anything short of the spirit from which it is born.

Rev. Aaron Payson, UUCW

THURSDAY – March 13th

PSALM 27

*You've always been right there for me;
don't turn your back on me now.
Don't throw me out, don't abandon me;
you've always kept the door open.
My father and mother walked out and left me,
but God took me in.*

“The Door Left Ajar”

I'm back in the city – graffiti, honking horns, tent cities, poverty, runaways, forgotten people.

Psalms 27 is a powerful psalm for people seeking strength, comfort, and belonging. Life can be so overwhelming that it is easy to feel forgotten and left behind. The first verses set the tone, and the psalm carries it through to the end: God is Light, God is Salvation; there is nothing to fear.

I am particularly drawn to the phrase, “you’ve always kept the door open.” Too often our doors are shut. We have shut them on others, we have shut them on ourselves. Only God has the patience and endurance to keep them open. Life has a way of tenderizing us so that we see others who have been pushed out with new eyes. In his book, *How to Know A Person*, David Brooks writes, “Evil happens when people are unseeing, when they don’t recognize the personhood in other human beings.”

Psalms 27 is a strong affirmation of a God who always sees us and never loses sight. In Him we are strengthened and given great courage. The essential moral act is to see all humanity with the same eyes as Jesus – the one who always keeps the door open.

Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant

FRIDAY – March 14th

Psalm 27; Genesis 14:17-24; Philippians 3:17-20

“To Truly Bless and Be a Blessing”

The scriptures for this day demonstrate what it is to be blessed and to be a blessing. Psalm 27 reminds us to abide in the blessings of God, to witness to the spirit that is both a blessing, and the source of our own blessedness. Genesis shows us the antithesis of blessing through the words of Melchizedek whose act of blessing is merely the quest for power. Abram responds by reminding the King that there is blessing to be gained in maintaining the promises one keeps with the source of one's being. And in the Epistle to the Philippians this theme continues as the faithful are exhorted to imitate the very spirit and love which is holy. Being a citizen of heaven is to be a harbinger of love.

Rev. Aaron Payson, UUCW

SATURDAY – March 15th

Psalm 27; Psalm 118:26-29; Matthew 23:37-39

“Coming in Name and Spirit”

What is the link between faith and grief? Grief, it turns out is a time of recognition, when loss informs us of the absence of that which has meaning, purpose, hope and love. It is, if it is attended to, a moment of awakening, deepening, and reconnecting to that which was, and still is of utmost importance. The question is whether grief indicates an end, or the possibility of continuing connection to that which seems absent. What we receive today in our readings from scripture is both celebration and lamentation. A recognition of that which is eternal, a blessing, and worthy of giving our life energies to. And, in the face of that which would rob us of those energies, an awareness of loss, but not the absence of hope. For “Blessed are those who come in the name of the Lord.”

Rev. Aaron Payson, UUCW

SUNDAY – March 16th

Genesis 15:1-12

Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness.

To be righteous we have to believe that God is intimately connected to us. We must believe God is directing us to where we are meant to be, and confidently carrying out His instructions. Thus, we will know the blessing God has bestowed on us and our brothers and sisters.

This lent feel God's presence, hear His voice and be His physical presence in the world. Come to know God intimately.

Pr. Dennis O'Malley

MONDAY – March 17th

Romans 4:1-12 MESSAGE

1-3 So how do we fit what we know of Abraham, our first father in the faith, into this new way of looking at things? If Abraham, by what he did for God, got God to approve him, he could certainly have taken credit for it. But the story we're given is a God-story, not an Abraham-story. What we read in scripture is, "Abraham entered into what God was doing for him, and that was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own."

4-5 If you're a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; we don't call your wages a gift. But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it's something only God can do, and you trust [God] to do it—you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked—well, that trusting-[God]-to-do-it is what gets you set right with God, by God. Sheer gift.

6-9 [King] David confirmed this way of looking at it, saying that the one who trusts God to do the putting-everything-right without insisting on having a say in it is one fortunate man:

Fortunate those whose crimes are whisked away, whose sins are wiped clean from the slate. Fortunate the person against whom the Lord does not keep score.

Do you think for a minute that this blessing is only pronounced over those of us who keep our religious ways and are circumcised? Or do you think it possible that the blessing could be given to those who never even heard of our ways, who were never brought up in the disciplines of God? We all agree, don't we, that it was by embracing what God did for him that Abraham was declared fit before God?

10-11 Now think: Was that declaration made before or after he was marked by the covenant rite of circumcision? That's right, before he was marked. That means that he underwent circumcision as evidence and confirmation of what God had done long before to bring him into this acceptable standing with himself, an act of God he had embraced with his whole life.

12 And it means further that Abraham is father of all people who embrace what God does for them while they are still on the "outs" with God, as yet unidentified as God's, in an "uncircumcised" condition. It is precisely these people in this condition who are called "set right by God and with God"! Abraham is also, of course, father of those who have undergone the religious rite of circumcision not just because of the ritual but because they were willing to live in the risky faith-embrace of God's action for them, the way Abraham lived long before he was marked by circumcision.

We don't need do anything to earn God's Love. Each person is Loved by God right from the beginning of things!

To realize the blessing of life, though, takes work leaning into the Love that is God and permitting the Spirit in working ongoing change in us; rooting within each of us Wisdom, the insight bringing with it hope and wholeness and through our living out the Grace and Mercy emanating from this Love an improvement in all things we rub off upon takes place!

Might each of us, through faith bringing us Wisdom, let God's "setting right: of us help us reset things that may be broken that we come into contact with.

Pr. Andrew Borden

WEDNESDAY – March 19th

Luke 13: 22-31

“THE NARROW DOOR”

²² Jesus went through towns and villages teaching the people and making his way toward Jerusalem.

²³ Someone asked him, “Sir, will just a few people be saved.”

Jesus answered them, ²⁴ “Do your best to go in through the narrow door; because many people will surely try to go in but will not be able. ²⁵ The master of the house will get up and close the door; then when you stand outside and begin to knock on the door and say, “Open the door for us, Sir!” He will answer you, “I don’t know where you come from.”

How wonderful! How loving of our God to assure us, even after all these years, God still loves each and every one of us.

When each one of my parents died five years apart at the age of 33, I knew God was there! When my brother Ture died at the age of 21 when he fell asleep at the wheel and hit a tree, I knew God was there! When my only sister Terry, died, as well as another brother, Ken, I knew God was there! My last brother, Rick was 90 on Christmas Eve. Then God was there again when Rick had a coronary on January 5, 2025 and God was with him, sparing him to take care of his wife who requires his loving care.

God has always been with me as well as blessing me and taking care of me through many challenges I have faced because God has always been there with me. I have always believed in God and his son, Jesus Christ, as they have led me on a narrow pathway and kept me alive for so many years. I am so grateful, humble, and thankful for the many blessings they have bestowed on me through my 87 years so far. Ever since I was eight years old, I have believed if I did what was right, treated others as I wanted to be treated, believed in God and in Jesus, they would never abandon me.

I believe I still have a purpose no matter where I live or for how long. There is always someone I can help in some way. I love to listen to anyone who wants to talk to, or with me. Perhaps I can help someone to empty or share their pain, worry, fear. I also will pray with anyone who wants me to help them to humbly “talk” with God.

I would like to share with you something one of my relatives, Paul Brewer in Canada, has shared with me. He is a relative my husband and I found while doing my genealogy.

“When I am alone, God is my comforter.”

“When I am weak, God is my strength.”

“When I am nothing, God is my Everything.”

Amen.

Roberta F. Briggs – Grace Lutheran

FRIDAY – March 21st

Psalm 63:1-18 MESSAGE

God—you're my God! I can't get enough of You! I've worked up such hunger and thirst for God, traveling across dry and weary deserts.

²⁻⁴ So here I am in the place of worship, eyes open, drinking in Your strength and glory. In Your generous Love I am really living at last!

My lips brim praises like fountains. I bless You every time I take a breath; My arms wave like banners of praise to You.

⁵⁻⁸ I eat my fill of prime rib and gravy; I smack my lips. It's time to shout praises! If I'm sleepless at midnight, I spend the hours in grateful reflection.

Because You've always stood up for me, I'm free to run and play. I hold on to You for dear life, and You hold me steady as a post.

Everyone wants their life to be smooth and pleasant; no bumps, ruts, crookedness, dampness, darkness, freezing cold, well, you know what I mean.

We're each set-in-motion at birth with possibilities wrapped-up within our being. And the world spins with the interactions, and inactions, of humans and all sorts of creatures, interspersed with environmental agitations. And we bump up and against it all from our geographical and familial rootings.

What the psalmist has declared from their own experience is how life, with a centeredness in God, trumps all possible negativities to reveal the blessedness that this opportunity for experiencing on earth really and truly is!

Lent is a time to “tap the brakes” on busyness to take time and notice Grace more often and how it pervades everything, even as the media blasts-away with one negative commentary and report after another (because that's what the Godless love to kibitz over).

Might we become more attuned to God around us by the Power of the Spirit and reflect that Light in overcoming the darkness which looms about, helping the Godless find the Love to set them free in becoming whole and hopeful!

Pr. Andrew Borden

SUNDAY – March 23rd

Luke 13:6-9 SCHOLAR'S EDITION

Then Jesus told this parable:

A man had a fig tree growing in his vineyard; he came looking for fruit on it but didn't find any.

So he said to the vinekeeper, "See here, for three years in a row I have come looking for fruit on this tree, and haven't found any. Cut it down. Why should it suck the nutrients out of the soil?"

In response he says to him, "Let it stand, sir, one more year until I get a chance to dig around it and work in some manure. Maybe it will produce next year; but if it doesn't, we can go ahead and cut it down."

We can be quick to act without much thought sometimes. People say things in the "heat of the moment" and "knee-jerk" reactions abound that don't usually end well.

The parable from Luke attests to a tradition in the Levantine region of comparing a person's health to that of a fig tree. In this version attributed to Jesus, and only in this gospel account, we see push-back from the vinekeeper against the knee-jerk reaction of the vineyard owner, disgruntled not to see fruit on his tree.

Patience in tending to the health of the tree is evident, eliciting hope in its future ability to bear fruit. Jesus' model in ministry points to our taking on his lead and tending to each other with patience and hope that we nurture our corporate-human ability in bearing fruit, in gracious unity, representing justice, in support of God's kingdom growth here on earth.

Pr. Andrew Borden

WEDNESDAY – March 26th

Luke 13:18-21 MESSAGE

18-19 Then [Jesus] said, “How can I picture God’s kingdom for you? What kind of story can I use? It’s like an acorn that a man plants in his front yard. It grows into a huge oak tree with thick branches, and eagles build nests in it.”

20-21 [Jesus] tried again. “How can I picture God’s kingdom? It’s like yeast that a woman works into enough dough for three loaves of bread—and waits while the dough rises.”

We received a wonderful gift in the form of a plant bulb. It has been fascinating watching as it began sprouting, forming a bud and beginning to blossom! My wife remembers the same experience in previous years of preschool, leading to the fascination of the little ones.

Jesus uses the growth metaphor in describing what a life of faith can be like for us. As let the seed, the bulb, of the Spirit settle in our soul, watered and tended to by connection with the Divine, how a budding of newness will develop and come into it’s own through us: a new creation in God!

As space is created within our daily cycle of activities to connect with the Source of our being, we can grow into beautiful representations of Grace and Mercy; God, like leaven, helping us rise up to maturity!

Pr. Andrew Borden

THURSDAY – March 27th

Joshua 4:1-13

When the Jewish people cross the Jordon to reach the plains of Jericho, Joshua was ordered by God to take 12 stones from the middle of the river, which was parted because the Ark of the Covenant was still in the middle of the Jordon, and build a memorial to commemorate what had just taken place. He was also ordered to take 12 stones and build a memorial in the middle of the Jordon which were covered by the waters of the Jordon once the Ark completely crossed the river.

Two memorials, one on dry land and the other under water. The memorials are there to let people know God is present making clear our path to the Promise Land. However, one is easy to see, and the other is not. If the water represents our active lives, then it could be saying that to recognize God's active presence in our lives we have to find time outside our busy schedule to be quiet and listen. When we are busy with the demands of daily lives, we forget God travels with us.

This lent, take the time to be cognizant of God's presence.

Pr. Dennis O'Malley

SATURDAY – March 29th

Luke 15:1-10

Jesus told this parable: “What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing.

And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.’” – Luke 15:3-6

“I Once Was Lost, And Now I’m Found”

We are all familiar with the hymn *Amazing Grace*, written in 1772 by English Anglican clergyman John Newton. Prior to his life as an ordained minister, Newton participated in the Atlantic slave trade as captain of a slave ship. During a violent storm off the coast of Ireland in 1748, the ship he was aboard was tossed back and forth and some of the crew were swept overboard. Newton desperately prayed for God to rescue him. Newton’s life was spared and the ship reached safety. This event marked Newton’s conversion to becoming a follower of Christ. The lyrics of his beloved hymn are based on his receiving God’s grace and mercy, despite the terrible things he had done.

We have all gone astray at some point in our lives, veering off course from time to time thinking we know better than God what’s best for our lives. Perhaps we have said unkind words or acted in a way that has hurt someone which we later deeply regretted. The Parable of the Lost Sheep reminds us of how Jesus actively searches for us when we’ve gone astray. He finds us and carries us on His shoulders, highlighting His care and concern for us because He is merciful. The image of the “Good Shepherd” carrying the lost lamb upon His shoulders gives a profound sense of love, security, and protection. We are the lost ones, and Jesus is our “Good Shepherd.” What an amazing sense of joy when, by the grace of God, we are found and carried by Jesus. But what I find most remarkable and humbling in this parable is the joyful celebration in the heavens when we are brought home to God. In that embrace between us and God, there is mutual joy. That’s how much we are loved by God. May we trust in that love, knowing that God will never let us go and that we will be carried by our “Good Shepherd” all the days of our lives. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Marie Sturdevant - Grace Lutheran

Sunday, March 30, 2025

Luke 15 or 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

“I’m Losing It”

Lost sheep, lost coin, lost son – we constantly lose things. You would think we would get better at losing because we are constantly losing. It’s a part of life. Where do socks go? Keys, my wallet, the remote, phone charger, and the worst of all readers (glasses). Sometimes people lose their readers when they are propped up on their own heads. I lose my temper, and I frequently lose my mind. On average, people will look for things for five minutes. 66% of people say that they regularly lose things, 50% say they are frequently late for work because they have lost something and are looking for it. Chicago taxi drivers report returning about 120,000 phones every year. The worst day for losing something is Sunday, and the worst time for losing is between 11 pm Saturday and 1 am Sunday. We are chronic losers. And yet, whenever I lose something, it’s like the first time I have experienced such. I stomp around, barking at anyone who gets in my way. You would think I would get better at handling such an experience, but nope, I have lost my ability to remember too.

Jesus tells these parables early in his ministry, and the things lost are not simple. When a relationship is lost – it’s a big deal. And when it is between a father and son or two brothers, it is particularly painful, a wound that can go very deep. This is why reconciliation is such a significant theme of scripture. The coming together of two people who have been estranged, the healing of a friendship, or the finding of friendship after a long season of loneliness is tantamount to salvation. And finding God – that’s the best!

Praise be to God, the Lord of lost causes!

Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant

WEDNESDAY – April 2nd

Luke 9:12-13

[Jesus said to the apostles,] “You give them something to eat.” – Luke 9:13

“More Than Enough”

A crowd had gathered around Jesus and the apostles to hear the good news of the kingdom of God, and to be healed of their infirmities. It was getting late in the day and the apostles were likely tired and overwhelmed by the enormity of the crowd. They wanted to send the people away, but Jesus said to them, *“you give them something to eat.”* How could they possibly feed five-thousand with what they had, - five loaves and two fish? Jesus had compassion for the people. Jesus took the loaves and the fish, looked up to heaven, gave thanks, broke the loaves, and gave them to the apostles to set before the crowd. There was more than enough, as all ate and were satisfied. And what was left over was picked up, - twelve baskets of broken pieces. Miracles cannot be explained by logic, and sometimes we need to accept them on faith.

Do we have faith needed to help feed those who suffer food insecurity throughout the world? Food is a basic need, but is there enough? According to current data, there is enough food available to feed everyone on the planet, yet there are still many who suffer from hunger. The problem is not food production, rather it's unequal distribution, food waste and the ability to access food. Jesus is speaking to us today, *“you give them something to eat.”* In a quote attributed to Mother Teresa, *“If you can't feed a hundred people, feed just one.”* If you can't help a large number of people, feeding even one who is hungry makes a positive impact on that one individual. ELCA World Hunger, End Hunger New England, and the Woo Fridges of Worcester are among the many agencies and venues that provide food for the hungry. Getting involved by supporting one of the many food programs helps provide a safety net for those in need. We are the hands and feet of Christ in the world today. Christ works in us and through us to provide for those who are hungry. There is more than enough to go around and even if we provide for only a few, it still demonstrates the power of love. So then, may we trust in God's provision as we open our hearts and participate with Jesus in feeding those who are hungry. Amen.

Marie Sturdevant - Grace Lutheran

SUNDAY – April 6th

Philippians 3:4-14

“Credentials for Sale”

“You know my pedigree: a legitimate birth, circumcised on the eighth day; an Israelite from the elite tribe of Benjamin; a strict and devout adherent to God’s law; a fiery defender of the purity of my religion, even to the point of persecuting the church; a meticulous observer of everything set down in God’s law Book.”

We are still a world of credentials. We judge others and ourselves by the initials that follow or the lack of initials that follow our name. Paul had every initial that opened every door that was set before him. He could have ridden those initials into positions leading to wealth and the Jewish Hall of Fame. But in his encounter with Christ, all those credentials faded away. What was once of ultimate value became nothing. Paul had to be kicked off his horse and spend a few days in blindness, but slowly, surely, and ultimately - Christ became the thing and he never looked back. May we be so lucky to experience such a fall from grace.

Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant

MONDAY – April 7th

Psalm 20 MESSAGE

1-4 God answer you on the day you crash, the name God-of-Jacob put you out of harm's reach, send reinforcements from Holy Hill, dispatch from Zion fresh supplies, exclaim over your offerings, celebrate your sacrifices, give you what your heart desires, accomplish your plans.

5 When you win, we plan to raise the roof and lead the parade with our banners. May all your wishes come true!

6 That clinches it—help's coming, an answer's on the way, everything's going to work out.

7-8 See those people polishing their chariots, and those others grooming their horses? But we're making garlands for God our God. The chariots will rust, those horses pull up lame—and we'll be on our feet, standing tall.

9 Make the king a winner, God; the day we call, give us your answer.

When we “crash”, fail at one thing or another, feel down when bad news arrives, it can seem like it's the end.

I've experienced job loss with layoffs three times in my life. Talk about news to cause a crash!

However, like with the encouragement of the psalm on this day, I have always found that a “...dispatch from Zion fresh supplies...” lands front and center, supporting a solution.

The psalm writers spoke from personal experience about God's responsiveness to need, just a “prayer” away. The challenge to each of us is in trusting this about God and not placing our hope in things that “rust” or pull up “lame”.

Pr. Andrew Borden

THURSDAY - April 10th

Isaiah 53:10-12

“For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.”

Christ bore our sin, our unbelief that we are all children of God. Jesus didn't weigh the cost of helping people with their illness or with their problems or their lack of understanding. No, he helped them in their need, he fed the both spiritually and physically. He prayed for them and loved them. He was faithful in carrying out his Father's will, because he believed it God and us, his sisters and brothers.

This lent lets die to our egos in order to bare the sins of others. Not counting the cost, but rather serving others so that all may see God's blessing and know He is with us.

Pr. Dennis O'Malley

PALM SUNDAY – April 13th

Luke 19:28-40 MESSAGE

28-31 Jesus headed straight up to Jerusalem. When he got near Bethphage and Bethany at the mountain called Olives, he sent off two of the disciples with instructions: “Go to the village across from you. As soon as you enter, you’ll find a colt tethered, one that has never been ridden. Untie it and bring it. If anyone says anything, asks, ‘What are you doing?’ say, ‘His Master needs him.’”

32-33 The two left and found it just as he said. As they were untying the colt, its owners said, “What are you doing untying the colt?”

34 They said, “His Master needs him.”

35-36 They brought the colt to Jesus. Then, throwing their coats on its back, they helped Jesus get on. As he rode, the people gave him a grand welcome, throwing their coats on the street.

37-38 Right at the crest, where Mount Olives begins its descent, the whole crowd of disciples burst into enthusiastic praise over all the mighty works they had witnessed:

Blessed is he who comes,

the king in God’s name!

All’s well in heaven!

Glory in the high places!

39 Some Pharisees from the crowd told him, “Teacher, get your disciples under control!”

40 But he said, “If they kept quiet, the stones would do it for them, shouting praise.”

Much has been made amongst theologians and clergy over the years about just what was on Jesus’ mind when he asked for the colt to ride into Jerusalem. Did he intent to make a political statement as on the opposite side of the city a procession of Roman guard was entering with Pontius Pilate.

What Jesus represents to all generations is Grace and Mercy as the nature of God, what we as believers are called to embody ourselves. And as we do and are confronted by injustice and disunity of any type, anything anti-Grace and anti-Mercy, then we must not be silent, but offer in a respectful manner a corrective.

Jesus’ riding down the Mount of Olives and into the city was a statement, not in a militaristic or bombastic way, but in a manner of respectful corrective that God through faith must manifest itself within us to confront any earthly power when it is at odds with the Law of Love: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart mind and soul and your neighbor as you love yourself.*

The power of Rome oppressed the people of Jesus’ day. In every generation people are oppressed in various ways. In the present moment oppression is mounting as Grace and Mercy are under assault.

As we raise our palms in remembrance of Jesus’ ride so many years ago, might we consider what our part is in faithfully living out our calling in respectful and absolute ways that honor God, Christ and the Spirit and help bring the kingdom closer to every person here on earth!

Pr. Andrew Borden

WEDNESDAY – April 16th

Hebrews 12:1-13 MESSAGE

1-3 Do you see what this means—all these pioneers who blazed the way, all these veterans cheering us on? It means we'd better get on with it. Strip down, start running—and never quit! No extra spiritual fat, no parasitic sins. Keep your eyes on Jesus, who both began and finished this race we're in. Study how he did it. Because he never lost sight of where he was headed—that exhilarating finish in and with God—he could put up with anything along the way: Cross, shame, whatever. And now he's there, in the place of honor, right alongside God. When you find yourselves flagging in your faith, go over that story again, item by item, that long litany of hostility he plowed through. That will shoot adrenaline into your souls!

4-11 In this all-out match against sin, others have suffered far worse than you, to say nothing of what Jesus went through—all that bloodshed! So don't feel sorry for yourselves. Or have you forgotten how good parents treat children, and that God regards you as his children?

My dear child, don't shrug off God's [counsel], but don't be crushed by it either. It's the child [that God] loves that [God counsels]; the child he embraces, he also corrects.

God is educating you; that's why you must never drop out. [God is] treating you as dear children. This trouble you're in isn't punishment; it's training, the normal experience of children. Only irresponsible parents leave children to fend for themselves. Would you prefer an irresponsible God? We respect our own parents for training and not spoiling us, so why not embrace God's training so we can truly live? While we were children, our parents did what seemed best to them. But God is doing what is best for us, training us to live God's holy best. At the time, [counsel] isn't much fun. It always feels like it's going against the grain. Later, of course, it pays off big-time, for it's the well-trained who find themselves mature in their relationship with God.

12-13 So don't sit around on your hands! No more dragging your feet! Clear the path for long-distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. And run for it!

We don't like being told what to do. It's a "human" thing, right?

Our parents, guardians and such, have responsibility in helping us orient ourselves best for living like in the best way possible, honoring the gift that it is.

Each of us has free-will to accept or reject what anybody works to teach or share with us. But the earth's "record" of history reveals that when people don't learn from their past, they are doomed to repeat mistakes that can be disastrous.

This scripture reveals God working to help us avoid disaster, to instead, thrive in life.

Might we in the busy-ness that life can become take time to hear, comprehend and then embody the Wisdom God shares with us that leads to hope and wholeness.

Pr. Andrew Borden

GOOD FRIDAY – April 18th

Hebrews 10:16-25

“Perfection”

“It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people.” That’s how Eugene Peterson heard verse fourteen.

When Good Friday arrives, we are all too aware of our imperfect world and the many ways we conspire with that world in very subtle ways. However, this story never changes no matter how awful things have become – Jesus still goes to the cross and the world is forgiven. “It was a perfect sacrifice by a perfect person to perfect some very imperfect people. I encourage all of us to spend time in that story (John 18-19:42). Maybe read it in stages throughout the day. It is a long story. Read it in different places. Read it out loud. Read it with another person. Read it surrounded by others or read it alone. But whatever you do – let the story work on you. Happy Good Friday. Sunday will come.

Mark Nilson, Salem Covenant

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