



2026 Lenten Devotionals

The Greendale Ecumenical Group
Central MA

Ash Wednesday, February 18th

Isaiah 58:1-12

“Repairers of the Breach “

And so, we begin.

I have always been captivated by the phrase, “repairer of the breach,” and “restorer of the streets to live in,” which follows closely. But those hopeful and encouraging phrases come at the close of the passage. The passage begins with challenging words of accountability. We (Israel) are being called out. There is no being pulled quietly aside and being told of one’s missteps. No, like a trumpet, our rebellion, failures, and very real sins are made known in a most public way.

This is the function of Ash Wednesday. It calls for a real accounting of one’s life, and if that means some pain and a little bruising, so be it, because the intention is a deep cleansing that works to set us free. All of us are bound up in sin, both large and small, and the systemic sin that dominates our lives is all-consuming. We need this Ash Wednesday recalibration so that we might be freed to pour out God’s good over the world.

Activist Shane Claiborne told a story about Jubilee and his community’s unexpected receipt of \$10,000, which led to a creative action on Wall Street:

We thought, “Wow, this money isn’t just for us. This should go to folks on the street, because we were literally fighting anti-homeless legislation.” We said, “Let’s have a Jubilee party and do it on Wall Street.” We invited a bunch of homeless folks from all over New York, saying, “We’re going to go to Wall Street and give away the money that we won in a lawsuit. We need to be peaceful, but it’s going to be beautiful.” We didn’t want it to be too crazy, so we broke it up in small change.... We had hundreds of us, and it was divvied up everywhere. We had people on bikes, people with backpacks, people with coffee mugs filled with money.

When we got to Wall Street, folks from the street were trickling in, wondering, “Is this for real?” The police were there insisting, “This is not happening. If anyone’s here for this money distribution, it’s not happening.” What they didn’t know was that we were already there... As soon as the bell sounded on Wall Street, ... we announced, “We believe another world is possible, another world where everybody has what they need, and there’s not this deep inequity.”

Then Sister Margaret announced the Jubilee, blew the ram’s horn, and money started pouring out everywhere. We had people on the balconies with paper money pouring it out.... It was beautiful. This one ... street sweeper, he’s got his dustpan filled with money. He’s like, “It is a good day at work. Hallelujah!” Another guy grabs some money off the street and says, “Now I can get the prescription I needed. Thank you.” We even had folks from inside Wall Street who heard about what was happening. They said, “There’s more fun happening out there than in here.” One guy went out and bought bagels and started handing them out. It was contagious....

In the end, our goal is not to create enemies but to courageously proclaim God’s vision that everyone is welcome. It also means, as Desmond Tutu says, that those who have been oppressed are free from oppression, and those who have done the oppressing are free from being the oppressor. Everyone is set free. That’s the Ash Wednesday invitation for us.

Pastor Mark – Salem Covenant Church

Thursday, February 19th

Psalm 51:10-12 per the King James Version

“The Joy of Thy Salvation”

*Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.
Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit.*

We are familiar with King David as the shepherd boy who slayed Goliath, driving back the Philistine army, and with his genius as a musician, having composed many of the Psalms. But there are darker stories about David's life found in Scripture, most notably his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his best soldiers, Uriah the Hittite.

When David learned that Bathsheba became pregnant from his affair with her, he devised a scheme to have Uriah return home from battle to be with his wife and create the illusion that the pregnancy resulted from their marriage, rather than David's sin. When this failed, David plotted Uriah's death by having him return to battle and placed in the front line of the fiercest fighting. David then commanded his troops to withdraw, leaving Uriah exposed to be killed by the enemy. David penned Psalm 51 after the prophet Nathan confronted him about his indiscretion with Bathsheba and plot to have her husband killed. Psalm 51 was written in the face of David's terrible sin and gives us a window into his inner turmoil and God's continued faithfulness and work in his life, helping us to better understand that while David did not lead a perfect and sinless life, he was still referred to as “a man after God's own heart.” By reading and praying Psalm 51 we understand how the darkest seasons of David's life reveal the terrible consequences of sin, but more importantly, the wonderful grace of God.

At times it may be difficult to articulate what is on our hearts and minds when our own words fail. When we pray the Psalms, our prayers are transformed into conversations with God through Scripture, lifting up our every emotion and giving voice to what we feel deep in our soul. When we pray Psalm 51, we begin a process of deep repentance, confession and spiritual renewal, leading us to experience God's cleansing, mercy and joy. This is the gospel message - when we confess our sins and humbly seek forgiveness, God takes what is broken in us and makes us whole. It is the cross of Jesus that bridges the gap between humanity and God. This is not by anything we have done but by what God has done for us by grace, through Jesus, loving us into who we were created to be as “image-bearers of God.” May we trust in this extravagant Love that guides our Lenten journey to the cross, where we are healed and restored to joy, peace and relationship with the Father, through the Son, our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Marie Sturdevant – Grace Lutheran @ Bethel

Friday February 20th
Jonah 4:1-11, Psalm 51

“Justice & Mercy”

A reluctant and lesser-known Prophet, Jonah’s story is not a book in the Bible I would search out to read...unless, of course, I wanted to know more about the well-known tale of Jonah and the Whale...and indeed there is so much more in this little book.

The book is narrative about the “prophet” himself who is commanded by God to go to the capital city of Assyria, Nineveh, one of the most powerful cities in the world as well as the most hated enemy of Israel. Its people did not know or fear Israel’s God. His mission was to deliver a word of judgement that would save one of Israel’s arch enemies. So, what did Jonah do? He set out for Tarshish...about as far from Nineveh as one could get. After an intense and frightening trip on the high seas...not to mention the drama of being thrown overboard and swallowed by the great fish, some frantic prayers to God, Jonah then goes to Nineveh as he was first asked to do. Which begs the question of our own “Jonah Experiences”. How often do we try to escape God? What lengths do we go to in order to avoid something we know God wants us to do...but, we don’t want to.

But, the story gets better with some interesting twists & turns and a weird plant that grows up overnight. Jonah delivers the message, although reluctantly and begrudgingly, which results in the conversion of this entire city; all who changed from their evil ways, including the King, were saved from the calamity that God had said He would put upon them...even the cattle! Still, Jonah was not happy. Jonah wanted justice; in his mind the people of Nineveh did not deserve to be forgiven so he pouts & sulks under his withering plant. Jonah is flawed and prejudiced...resentful that God loves his enemies. The plant saved Jonah from the discomfort of the heat and he was happy that it provided him shade and protection. God uses the example of the bush to explain to Jonah his love & mercy for the people...and animals...of Nineveh.

Are we OK with the fact that God loves our enemies? There are more times than I’d like to admit that I would prefer a punitive God to a merciful God. As a society, we have always grappled with justice vs mercy. The memoir by Bryan Stevenson (also a film) “Just Mercy” deals with the author’s life-long career in fighting injustice; we see similar themes in the beloved classic “To Kill A Mockingbird” and the popular musical (also book & movie) “Les Miserables”. Sadly, we are now witnessing injustice in real time on our American streets and cities. “Mercy is the greatest power of love, capable of healing wounds and restoring dignity where justice alone might only condemn” Pope John Paul II. Mercy is not a weakness but a higher form of justice making it more powerful than retribution.

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love....” Psalm 51:1. King David prays for mercy for an event in his life. Mercy & justice are woven throughout the Scriptures. As we make our Lenten journey this year may we work for justice but be aware of God’s intervention for mercy.

Peace be with you

Jackie Walsh – Grace Lutheran @ Bethel

Saturday, February 21st

Matthew 18:1-7

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" He called a child, whom he put among them, and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me. "If any of you cause one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for you if a great millstone were fastened around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe to the world because of things that cause sin! Such things are bound to come, but woe to the one through whom they come!

This scripture tends to be paraded out on Children's Sunday, with good reason, of course, since children are in the story and this reminds us all to be open to the wiggles and perfect imperfections of the children in our community, but to place this scripture near the beginning of the Lenten season presents a different message. It's not just about listening to a gaggle of kiddos belting out "Jesus Loves Me" and sharing in all that proud, big energy, but learning how to garner it within ourselves. This leads me to one of my favorite mantras: the work of growing up is actually the work of growing in. Children are often far more in tune to the purity of spirit, the wonder of being alive, the ordinary details of the sacred around us. Children move at a very different pace – not a very convenient one, often times – but a pace that allows for exploration: chasing a butterfly, licking an icicle, experimenting with volume in a sanctuary. My oldest son, for example, was obsessed with clocks as a toddler, and every time we passed a clock, which was quite often, he had to stop and study it. I could practically see the gears turning in his head as he observed the clock's gears, a joy if they were all exposed. Children are led by imagination and spirit, often outside the schedules of adults.

So, why place this scripture at Lent's beginning, just as we dig into our brokenness and hurts? If Lent is a time to be introspective, to dig in and dig deep, to feel who we really are beneath sinfulness and hurts, then it is a time to allow expansiveness and room to let the holy dictate our actions. That means that we need to crave out space for this – healing takes time. Forgiveness takes time. Growing in to grow up takes much time, and that all necessitates an abandonment of adulting's adherence to expectations and a devotion to the childlike (not to be confused with childish!) ways of a truly divine-led existence. What a gift to yourself and to the world, to bask in wonder, timeless time, play, experimentation, and the places that the spirit leads you....come closer to God, and trust that you are being safely parented.

Pastor Julie – First Congregational Church of Auburn

1st Sunday of Lent, February 22nd

Psalm 32:10

*Do not be like horse or mule, which have no understanding;
who must be fitted with bit and bridle,
or else they will not stay near you."*

Reflection: God is asking us to stay close to Him. He is not forcing us to stay close to Him. He has given us free will. So, during lent we take extra time to be with God. We walk and talk with God, taking the time to listen and consider what God wants from us. The real question we should be asking ourselves is "Am I being a person that is living in the Kingdom of God?"

Even if we aren't living in the Kingdom of God today, we can change that tomorrow because God is always staying near to us. All we have to do is turn around and let God in to help us live in His presence. This Lent become a citizen of God's kingdom.

Pastor Dennis - Greendale People's Church

Monday, February 23rd

Hebrews 2:10-18 per the NRSVUE

¹⁰ It was fitting that God, for whom and through whom all things exist, in bringing many children to glory, should make the [author] of their salvation perfect through sufferings. ¹¹ For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one Father. For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, ¹² saying,

"I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters; in the midst of the congregation, I will praise you."

¹³ And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Here am I and the children whom God has given me."

¹⁴ Since, therefore, the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the [effects of evil-intent which can be a death-knell for a person], ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. ¹⁶ For it is clear that he did not come to help angels but the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might become a Merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make a sacrifice [through Mercy] for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ Because he himself was [proven triumphant through enduring] what he suffered, he is able to help those who are [in distress].

In the third paragraph of the Nicene Creed, it states that Jesus was "made man" through his birth from mother, Mary. God incarnate in the flesh and blood of the 'created' on earth.

This was the *only* way for God to know humanity from "the inside out", to be able and best meet us to Love us into better versions of ourselves than world-alone teaching could ever encourage.

As such, Jesus' life modeled what the extra-biblical text of the *Gospel of Mary Magdala* refers to as the "True Humanity"; the form and shape of living our lives that God hopes each of us aspires to, people accepting and living from a heart of Grace and Mercy which are the Essence of our Creator. To model and minister in Truth, God in the person of Jesus met the best and the worst of humanity and through his dealings with it all revealed to us *the Way* to best tread our path of life.

We find in his comport the pattern for our lives in meeting the world every day; not with harshness or heart for retribution when wronged, but with patient witness through Love of other. Jesus endured challenges that encourage us in doing the same. As such he is the true "author" of the saving *Way* of pursuing the gift of life and breath on earth, and wherever we might travel to.

Pastor Andrew – Grace Lutheran

Tuesday, February 24th

Psalm 32, Genesis 4:1-16, Hebrews 4:14-5:10

“The Clearing of the Heart”

In the quiet season as winter wanes to softer breezes and the earth remembers how to breathe,
we, too, listen for the soft cracking open of our own hearts.

And we remember the story of a brother whose offering rose from the ground like a question,
and another whose anger shadowed the field.

We know them both in us—the one who longs to be seen, the other who fears they are not enough.

Lent invites us to walk gently with each.

A psalm whispers of the weight we carry—the unspoken, the unhealed,
the truths we bury so deep they begin to shape our bones.

But it also sings of the relief that comes when we stop running,
when we let ourselves be found by our own honesty, and a shameless love.

And there is a teacher who knows the texture of human struggle—not distant, not untouched,
but acquainted with the ache of choosing compassion in a world that rewards hardness.

He reminds us that the priestly call is a bridge, not a pedestal: a way of walking with one another
through the tender places where courage is born.

So, in this Lenten season be a clearing, may we lay down what harms us, and take up what restores.

May we listen for the truth beneath our anger, the yearning beneath our fear.

May we remember that we are held by a love that understands our frailty and our fire.

And may we rise—not purified, but more whole, more honest,
more ready to walk the long road toward one another and toward the world that is still becoming.

Pastor Aaron - UUCW

Wednesday, February 25th

Psalm 32

*While I kept silent, my body wasted away
through my groaning all day long.
For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.*

The Salem congregation began Epiphany with a challenge: we took the scripture lessons for that first week, and I asked everyone to choose one word that captured their attention. Taking a cue from the star that guided the wise men on their journey to Jesus, I suggested this word serve as their “star word,” guiding them and directing their spiritual journey for one full year. People have reported some dramatic “epiphanic” experiences.

My word is “witness.”

As a guiding force, “witness” has challenged me to consider all the messages I receive to not speak, to keep quiet - say nothing. There is often a cost to that silence for me and most often for others. Oppressive forces want nothing more from us but to stay silent and not speak out. It is often easier to side with the oppressor because the oppressor demands nothing but to stay silent. But the victim, the victim demands that you see, hear, act, and engage. The victim calls out not for silence but for advocacy.

One of the most powerful messages I received from the vulnerable immigrant community came from a young woman, an immigrant from Mexico who had come to this country years ago, and had a green card, yet was terrified that ICE would come and steal her away. She said to me, “Your silence does not keep me safe.” “While I kept silent, my body wasted away, for her hand was heavy upon me all day long.” Witness!

Pastor Mark – Salem Covenant Church

Thursday, February 26th

Psalm 121

“A Song of Ascent”

- 1 *I lift up my eyes to the mountains -Where does my help come from?*
- 2 *My Help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.*
- 3 *He will not let your foot slip - he who watches over you will not slumber;*
- 4 *indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.*
- 5 *The Lord watches over you - the Lord is your shade at your right hand;*
- 6 *The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.*
- 7 *The Lord will keep you from all harm - the Lord will watch over your coming*
- 8 *and going both now and forevermore.*

This beautiful Psalm is “as ascending an upward slope” according to Websters Dictionary. It is one of my favorite Psalms. My Mom used to recite it in teaching me and my four siblings often about God’s Love, Grace, and Presence that was with each of us no matter where we were. It has been my experience that just as the Lord watched over Israel, God does watch over our lives, night and day.

The mountains are so majestic, colorful, reaching up toward heaven. When I look at the mountains, I always feel closer to God as they remind me with their beauty, solitude and peace that God is only a prayer away from each and every one of us all the time.

I love to paint pictures of the mountains. They bring my soul peace and always remind me of the Loving presence of God and of this beautiful Psalm, as well as of my parents.

Roberta F. Briggs - Grace Lutheran @ Bethel

Saturday, February 28th

Psalm 121

Assurance of God's Protection

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

This scripture was my go-to for hospital visits when I first began my ministry and wasn't sure where to start. I had a belief that no matter who I was visiting, there was a benefit to the reminder of God's steadfast protection and support. I would later learn that this was called The Traveler's Psalm, intended not just for those on a geographic journey but a spiritual one. What an appropriate Psalm for us to hold dear, early on in Lent! The Psalm begins with an important reminder for all travelers, that we may look ahead to our destination, with anticipation and maybe anxiety, and no matter the distance or terrain, the true destination is God, and God is not far at all. In fact, if we keep God close, we are always arriving as we are moving towards whatever is next. This Psalm is not very long, and manages to describe the Lord as "keeper" in six different times, as the one who guards and watches, presenting God as a sleepless one, who is always embracing us so WE can do the resting. The word keep has another translation – preserve. God preserves us and the vitality of our spirit, a concept that recurs with some other images, like God as sunshade protecting us from heat and the sun's rays, or God as great shield from evil.

Moving through Lent, this is a Psalm to secure us, "let your foot not be moved" (line 3), in a God who is indisputably and perpetually loving us through all the seasons of life, including the often dark, emerging ones of Lent. Allow this Psalm to be that assurance!

Pastor Julie – First Congregational Church of Auburn

Sunday, March 1st

Genesis 12:1-4a, Psalm 121, Romans 4:1-5;13-17; Matthew 17:1-9

“The Road That Finds Us”

There comes a moment when the familiar doorframe no longer fits our growing.

A voice—quiet as breath, persistent as thawing earth—whispers, Go.

Not because the map is clear, but because the world is wider than the place we've been standing.

So, we step out, like an ancestor who trusted a Divine promise,
carrying only the hope that blessing is not a prize but a path we walk for the sake of all.

As we travel, we lift our eyes to the hills that hold us.

Not for answers carved in stone, but for the steady assurance that help rises in many forms—
in companions who share the load,

in courage we didn't know we had, in the quiet strength that meets us on the road.

The lesson reminds us we are not measured by perfection,
but by widening our trust in grace that does not tally, in love felt not earned,
in the possibility that we, too, are a blessing.

On the mountain where light broke open the ordinary,
revealing what had always been true:
that the sacred is not elsewhere, but shines through our living.

Fear may rise like a cloud, but so does clarity—
a reminder to listen, to stay awake to the wonder which is already here.

This Lenten season, may we walk toward the unknown with open hands.
May we trust the road that keeps unfolding, the help that keeps arriving,
the light that keeps revealing who we are becoming.

And when the moment comes to descend the mountain and return to the work of love,
may we go with courage—blessed to be a blessing,
called to be a companion on the long, transforming way.

Pastor Aaron - UUCW

Tuesday, March 3rd

Isaiah 65:17-25 per the NRSVUE

¹⁷ For I am about to create new heavens and a new earth; the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.

¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I am creating, for I am about to create Jerusalem as a joy and its people as a delight.

¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people; no more shall the sound of weeping be heard in it or the cry of distress. ²⁰ No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days or an old person who does not live out a lifetime, for one who dies at a hundred years will be considered a youth, and one who falls short of a hundred will be considered accursed.

²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat, for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

²³ They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be offspring blessed by the LORD—and their descendants as well.

²⁴ Before they call, I will answer, while they are yet speaking, I will hear.

²⁵ The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, but the serpent—its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, says the LORD.

There is a lot of metaphor in scripture! It can be difficult for some people who “crack open” a bible infrequently, or only listen to a single human source interpret scripture for them, to appreciate what the text is actually revealing to us.

As with anything in life, each of us needs multi-source access to information from which to discern reality! And with this, also communication with God so to find guidance in making good choices through which to thrive!

The third prophet known as Isaiah is helping the Hebrew people returning from exile who are worn out from their experiences, and those in any generation, understand how there is always hope because God is perpetually working to help us be renewed, to be able and get up over and again no matter what experiences and situations have caused us to endure. To those who commit to a life of faith there is always blessing to know and revel in!

Pastor Andrew – Grace Lutheran

Thursday, March 5th

Exodus 16:1-8

“Betwixt and Between”

All of Israel's journeys and experiences seem to capture us all so well. Here we are introduced to the provision of bread and meat in the wilderness. There is grumbling and complaining in the camp because, from this distance, Egypt looked so much better than what they were experiencing out in the desert.

Transformation and change always involve both life and death. We must first die to something to receive the new life that is being provided. The desert is often the place of such transition because it takes us out of our places of what is known and into the unknown in which we must depend wholly on the guide. It must be a place outside of normal geographic/cultural boundaries. This is the liminal space where earth touches the heavens, where confusion touches insight, where our waiting touches our belonging.

The desert is the perfect place for such transformation because it is such a harsh place that contain none of the privileges of home and comfort. It is that place that is betwixt and between, which mirrors our emotional states.

Can we, in some small way, put ourselves in such places so that God could get at us in significant ways? I see myself all over these poor Israelites, sitting in my deeply ingrained rebelliousness. This is a grand testing, I think, both of the people and of God.

Pastor Mark, Salem Covenant Church

Friday, March 6, 2026

Psalm 95, Exodus 16:9-21, Ephesians 2:11-22

“Bread for the Journey, Stone for the Wall”

A call echoes through the ages—
an invitation to listen
with the whole of our being.
Not out of fear,
but out of the deep knowing
that our hearts grow softer
when we pause long enough
to hear the truth within them.

There are people hungry in the wilderness,
learning again
that liberation is not a single moment
but a long, uneven walk
toward trust.
Morning by morning,
the earth offered enough—
not to hoard,
not to clutch,
but to share.
A daily reminder
that abundance is a practice,
not a possession.

The Psalmist urges us
not to harden our hearts—
as though hardness were a shield
we could afford to carry.
But Lent whispers otherwise:
that tenderness is strength,
that listening is courage,
that the sacred meets us
in the very places
we resist.

Remember the lesson
that once we were strangers
to one another,
divided by walls
we did not build alone.
But something larger than fear—
call it grace,
call it love,
call it the widening circle—
has been dismantling those walls
stone by stone,
inviting us to remember
that we belong to one another
more deeply than we knew.

During this annual time of preparation,
may we gather the manna
of each day's enough.
May we soften
where life has made us rigid.
May we join the holy work
of unbuilding the walls
that keep us apart.

And as we walk the path through this wilderness,
may we discover
that the bread we share
becomes strength,
the listening we offer
becomes healing,
and the community we build
becomes a dwelling place
for hope.

Pastor Aaron - UUCW

Saturday, March 7th

John 4:1-26

Jesus Talks With a Samaritan Woman

4 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and baptizing more disciples than John—² although in fact it was not Jesus who baptized, but his disciples. ³ So he left Judea and went back once more to Galilee.

4 Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon.

7 When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.)

9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.^[a])

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?"

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water so that I won't get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water."

16 He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back."

17 "I have no husband," she replied.

Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true."

19 "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem."

21 "Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. ²² You Samaritans worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. ²⁴ God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth."

25 The woman said, "I know that Messiah" (called Christ) "is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us."

26 Then Jesus declared, "I, the one speaking to you—I am he."

This story is a great study in many things: cross-cultural conversation, evangelism, a sassy woman bold enough to talk back, John's trademark of revealing a teaching in "the light" (this happens at noon), all the symbolism of living water and the literal water at the well, the newness of this encounter on a site with a long history (it is also Jacob's well). This is also a story about forgiveness, about conversion, and about an all-knowing God who gives every sinner the possibility to be restored. In addition, I always appreciate that Jesus is the one who initiates it all by asking for a drink of water for himself; Jesus is thirsty, and without his companions, and speaking to a foreign woman (gasp!) in search of something to drink. Further, this spunky back and forth about Jesus's lack of preparation and failure to have a

vessel of water turns into an opportunity for him to define the eternal water that he can provide. This story may seem like an ordinary moment, but it is packed with unexpected, extraordinary features.

For us, as we inch through Lent, I appreciate that Jesus shows up and asks for something from a regular “sinner” on a regular day, and leaves without drinking any water from that well (that we know of), but gifting this “sinful” woman with plenty of eternal water to share, far and wide. The all-knowingness of Jesus, while making me a little cagey that Jesus does indeed know everything, becomes a deep comfort; while Jesus is aware of all that we carry, our hurts and betrayals and pains, caused by us or upon us, we are still loved. Many of us, myself included, would prefer to mask all of the undesirable events of the past, and feel such shame with the history that we carry. However, as this story reminds us, not only do we need to be unburdened by our past (Jesus already knows it, forgives us for it!), we have a responsibility to live with that freedom and share it. So, my friends, drink from that living well. There is enough water for everyone. Always.

Pastor Julie – First Congregational Church of Auburn

Monday, March 9th

Psalm, 42:2

*2 My soul thirsts for God, a thirst for the living God;
when shall I come to appear before the presence of God?*

Reflection: During Lent we take the time to develop a thirst for God, knowing that we so often take God for granted. When we realize that we are lacking a solid connection with God, we realize how superficial our lives have become. The thirst that develops because of this realization can lead us to a more active relationship with God. Embrace the thirst, and let God quench that thirst bring us into His presence.

Pastor Dennis - Greendale People's Church

Tuesday, March 10th

Genesis 29:1-14

Jacob Sets Out

Perhaps this is fate: as I write this devotion about Jacob meeting the true love of his life, Rachael, I am writing on Valentine's Day.

Jacob's life is filled with rich story of journey and relationship with the Holy. I recommend it to all. In our text, Jacob sets out on a journey to find a wife. It is part of the blessing of Jacob even as he has tricked his way into it. The journey will take him to foreign lands and back and fittingly begins with a dream vision. Dreams, as we note throughout scripture, are God's way of communicating and letting the protagonist know that God is with him or her. On this journey, Jacob will go through many portals of adulthood as he matures into full manhood and devotion to God. Place is important. The places he goes and stops are not willy-nilly but imbued with theological significance. If we look back in 28:12,13, the word “here” is used three times: “Here,” he dreamt, and a ladder was set, “here”, messengers of God were going up and down, “here” God was standing over against him. The motif of a stone is continued: the stone under his head, the setting up of a stone marker common to the region's culture, and Jacob's moving of the large stone of the well, a feat of physical strength that the hero commonly performs. It is here that the deceptions that Jacob has been involved in will turn back upon Jacob. But for now, he has met his true bride.

Pastor Mark – Salem Covenant Church

Wednesday, March 11th

John 7:14-31, 37-39 per the NRSVUE

¹⁴ About the middle of the festival Jesus went up into the temple and began to teach. ¹⁵ The [Judean people] were astonished at it, saying, “How does this man have such learning, when he has never been taught?” ¹⁶ Then Jesus answered them, “My teaching is not mine but his who sent me. ¹⁷ Anyone who resolves to do the will of God will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on my own. ¹⁸ Those who speak on their own seek their own glory, but the [person] who seeks the glory of [the One] who sent [them] is true, and there is nothing unjust in [them].

¹⁹ “Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why are you looking for an opportunity to kill me?” ²⁰ The crowd answered, “You have a demon! Who is trying to kill you?” ²¹ Jesus answered them, “I performed one work, and all of you are astonished. ²² Because of this Moses gave you circumcision (it is, of course, not from Moses but from the patriarchs), and you circumcise a man on the Sabbath. ²³ If a man receives circumcision on the Sabbath in order that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me because I healed a man’s whole body on the Sabbath? ²⁴ Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.”

²⁵ Now some of the people of Jerusalem were saying, “Is not this the man whom they are trying to kill? ²⁶ And here he is, speaking openly, but they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Messiah? ²⁷ Yet we know where this man is from, but when the Messiah comes no one will know where he is from.” ²⁸ Then Jesus cried out as he was teaching in the temple, “You know me, and you know where I am from. I have not come on my own. But the One who sent me is True, and you do not know [this One]. ²⁹ I know [the One] because I am from [Them who] sent me.” ³⁰ Then they tried to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him because his hour had not yet come. ³¹ Yet many in the crowd believed in him and were saying, “When the Messiah comes, will he do more signs than this man has done?”

³⁷ On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, ³⁸ and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.’ ” ³⁹ Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive, for as yet there was no Spirit because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Whose interpretations or opinions do we “cotton to”? It’s an important question! Because the flavor of understanding that we stand upon in our lives can not only cast a big shadow, but more importantly, can also restrict our full engagement in the breadth and depth of creation. To recap, who we are can affect others and our dis-ability to fully listen, hear, receive, mature and respond can be life-limiting!

Within the scripture before today many Judeans confronted by Jesus’ witness couldn’t make out his intent as they were stuck within a legalistic interpretation of the Law, instead of truly understanding its meaning; which is in molding our lives in a healthy way to be our best selves and honor God.

Let us be careful in not making hasty decisions as life-happens, but let the relational teaching of the Law root us in second-nature engagement through all things in Love and care for each other.

Pastor Andrew – Grace Lutheran

Thursday, March 12th

Psalm 23, 1 Samuel 15:10-21, Ephesians 4:25-32

“The Work of a Softer Heart”

The Psalmist walks beside us
like a quiet companion—
reminding us that even
in the shadowed valleys,
we are not abandoned.

Guidance comes as presence,
in the steadyng touch
of compassion,
on the table set
where we least expect it.

We remember a leader who listened
only to the echo of his own desire,
mistaking partial obedience for wisdom.

We know this pattern—
the way ego can dress itself
as righteousness,
the way fear can masquerade
as certainty.

Lent invites us
to notice these shadows
without shame,
and to choose again.

We are called toward a different way of living—
one where truth is spoken
not as a weapon but an invitation
to reach across the chasm of our seperateness,
where anger is honored not enthroned,
where kindness is a daily discipline,
and forgiveness a form of liberation.

So in this season
of turning and returning,
may we learn to walk
with a gentler courage.

May we release the habits
that harden us,
the stories that bind us,
the impulses that fracture
what we long to mend.

May we discover
that goodness and mercy
are not rewards
but companions that shaping us,

teaching us to build
a world where tenderness
is strength,
and every wandering soul
can find a home
in peace.

Pastor Aaron - UUCW

Friday, March 13th

Psalm 81:9

*⁹ There shall be no strange god among you;
you shall not worship a foreign god.*

Reflection: What sort of strange gods do we hold near and dear to us? Many of us desire riches, fame, power, etc., but they are often just greed, vanity, control, etc. They are false gods. Gods you can't have a relationship with. Our god wants to be in a relationship with us. He wants you to enrich others, to notice others, to give support to others, etc. God wants us to be in relationship with Him, with His creation, and with each other. This lent let us work at being in a real relationship with the one true God.

Pastor Dennis - Greendale People's Church

Saturday, March 14th

Psalm 23

¹ The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.

² He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, ³ he refreshes my soul. He guides me along the right paths for his name's sake.

⁴ Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

This scripture is well-known, from *Little Women* to *The Titanic*, from soaring liturgical music to Coolio's rap hit, "Gangsta's Paradise" to the Christian Pop tune all over the radio, "Still Waters." Yes, it is read at almost every funeral, whether in a graveside or a church, and every time I offer it as a pastor to anyone, even those who claim no religious background, they almost always exhale a familiar sigh, "ah, that one," upon hearing the words. Aside from being soothing in their familiarity, the poetic words of this Psalm gently wash over us, a healing balm, and one needed at this point in Lent.

Consider the sensations permitted by these lines: deep rest, stillness, quiet, trust, wholeness. The pastoral scene is one that we can imagine, yes, and one that I challenge each of us to fully embody, and not just when we are grief-stricken at a funeral or blessed with this scripture's appearance multiple times over the course of the church calendar, but daily. Can you understand what it may feel like, to be in that pastoral field, lounging beside a gentle stream, and able to truly relax?

Important side note – sheep usually sleep standing, vulnerable to predators, unless they deeply trust their shepherd and can truly surrender. Can you?

While a sensation of halcyonic rest is the experience of this scripture, the charge is not initially a restful one at all: living with the Lord as your shepherd requires complete obedience and dependence. Thankfully, I have friends who are farmers, and have explained to me how sheep listen, devoted to their master's voice and recognizing it even after years of separation or even in a chaos of sound. This is the fascinating challenge, isn't it, learning to tune out all the other voices competing for our attention and hear only our Lord, the shepherd. Are you able to sift through all the voices calling to your attention and obey the Holy first and foremost?

As the Leanna Crawford song begins, "write scripture on your heart for when you need it," and this scripture is one to write on your heart, a tool for calm and reminder of the radical trust we are encouraged to have in God. Imagine trusting this deeply, so deeply that you can truly surrender....and how can we heal without that kind of radical release to the divine?

Pastor Julie – First Congregational Church of Auburn

Monday, March 16th

Psalm 30:3

*³ You brought me up, O LORD, from the dead;
you restored my life as I was going down to the grave.*

Reflection: Let us give thanks to God for giving our lives purpose and meaning. We are alive if we have faith. Our bodies are growing old and will die, but our spirit will be forever young and they will soar with joy and rejoicing as long as we have faith. Lent is a time to work on our faith in God knowing that He is always with us, and we will soar with Him.

Pastor Dennis O'Malley - Greendale People's Church

Tuesday, March 17th

Colossians 1:9-14

"Are You Attuned to God's Will?"

*"Be assured that from the first day we heard of you, we haven't stopped praying for you, asking God to give you wise minds and spirits **attuned to his will**, and so acquire a thorough understanding of the ways in which God works." - Colossians 1:9 (The Message)*

In a musical performance, it's important to tune the instruments and voices with each other, to vibrate together in a pleasing and synchronized way in order to create beautiful harmonious music. To be "in tune" often refers to being in musical or literal agreement, while being "attuned" refers to being emotionally responsive, sensitive, or connected to someone or something. They are similar in meaning as they both imply harmony and alignment. I like the words "attuned to his will," which are found in today's reading in Colossians from The Message. Being attuned to God's will brings peace, confidence, and joy when our lives align with divine purpose rather than selfish ambition. This alignment results in harmony, spiritual growth, the strength to endure trials, and assurance that all things work together for good.

The beginning of Paul's Epistle to the Colossians is structured around his earnest prayer that believers may be given wisdom, spiritual understanding, fruitfulness, and strength in order to grow and be attuned to God's will. This prayer is both practical and timeless as it extends to us today, serving as a guide for daily spiritual living, while being a model for how we ought to pray for each other.

Cultivating a deep, relational connection with God helps us to better understand the meaning and purpose of our lives. This connection is developed through spiritual disciplines of prayer and listening for the voice of God through meditation on God's Word. If our thoughts and actions contradict Scripture, we are not aligned with God, but when our decisions promote love, joy, peace, patience, and mercy, then we are attuned to God's will. In these words that are attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola, "*Whatever you are doing, that which makes you feel the most alive...that is where God is.*" – that is where we find purpose, joy, and divine presence, - that is when we know we are attuned to God's will.

As we continue our Lenten journey, may we grow stronger in our faith, aligned with God's purpose for our lives, "*giving thanks to the Father, who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*" – Colossians 1:12-14 (NRSVUE) Amen.

Marie Sturdevant – Grace Lutheran @ Bethel

Friday, March 20th

Ezekiel 33:10-16 per the NRSVUE

¹⁰ Now you, mortal, say to the house of Israel: Thus you have said: "Our transgressions and our sins weigh upon us, and we waste away because of them; how then can we live?" ¹¹ Say to them: As I live, says the Lord GOD, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel? ¹² And you, mortal, say to your people: The righteousness of the righteous shall not save them when they transgress, and as for the wickedness of the wicked, it shall not make them stumble when they turn from their wickedness, and the righteous shall not be able to live by their righteousness when they sin. ¹³ Though I say to the righteous that they shall surely live, yet if they trust in their righteousness and commit iniquity, none of their righteous deeds shall be remembered, but in the iniquity that they have committed they shall die. ¹⁴ Again, though I say to the wicked, "You shall surely die," yet if they turn from their sin and do what is lawful and right—¹⁵ if the wicked restore the pledge, give back what they have taken by robbery, and walk in the statutes of life, committing no iniquity—they shall surely live; they shall not die. ¹⁶ None of the sins that they have committed shall be remembered against them; they have done what is lawful and right; they shall surely live.

The text today confronts us with language to challenge our view of things; how do we understand God? Unfortunately, God is misunderstood in many places. The text reveals that our own actions can cause us to "waste away" and that God has "no pleasure" that our shame over ourselves should depress us. The prophet speaks for God that the answer to a more fruitful and joy-filled life comes from giving up saying and doing the things that cause us and others, problems; for us to give ourselves over to Godly direction that is only guided by Grace!

Pastor Andrew – Grace Lutheran

Sunday, March 22nd

Ezekiel 37:1-14, Psalm 130, Romans 8:6-11, John 11:1-45

“Breath Enough for Rising”

There are seasons of dry ground spirit—

cracked, silent,
waiting for something
we cannot yet name.

We walk among the bones
of old certainties,
old dreams,
old versions of ourselves,
wondering if life
can return to what has long
felt lost.

From the depths,

a psalm rises—

not triumphant,
but honest.
teaching us
that hope begins
not with answers,
but with the courage
to cry out of the shadows,
learning to trust
that dawn is not a rumor
but a promise.

There is a wisdom

that reminds us

life and peace

grow where we turn

toward compassion,

toward justice,

toward the quiet insistence

of the Spirit

that breathes through all things.

This Spirit does not coerce;

it coaxes,

nudging us toward renewal

one small surrender at a time.

Remember your friend called back

from the tomb—

not to erase grief,

but to show that love

refuses to abandon us

to the places

where we feel sealed in.

Even the stone-heavy moments
are not beyond
the reach of tenderness.
Even what we think is finished
may yet stir
with unexpected life.

During this season,
may we listen
for the breath that moves
through our valleys.

May we trust
the slow rising
of our own becoming.
May we lean toward
what brings life,
and loosen our grip
on what keeps us small.

And when the voice of love
calls us to step forward—
still wrapped in the cloth
of our old fears—
may we answer
with trembling courage,
knowing that community
waits at the threshold
to unbind us,
to welcome us,
to help us live again.

Pastor Aaron - UUCW

Tuesday, March 24th

Ephesians 2:10

Value: Transformation

Spiritual Practice: "Finding the Gold"

This week, take a few minutes to look at something in your life that feels "unfinished" or even a bit messy, maybe it's a project you started, a difficult relationship, or just a cluttered corner of your home. Instead of looking at it with a critical eye, try to see it as a "work-in-progress." Ask yourself: *Where is the potential for something beautiful to emerge here?*

Your Step for Today: Do one small, kind thing, either for yourself or someone else, to honor the fact that we are all still being shaped. It doesn't have to be big; a masterpiece is made of many tiny, intentional strokes.

Laura Lennox – First Congregational Church of Auburn

Wednesday, March 25th

Jeremiah 32:1-9

A Future Secured

The passage sticks in our memories because it involves an investment at the worst of times. Real estate is location, location, location, but it also depends on striking at the right time. Jeremiah would seem to have everything wrong in the playbook of a successful real estate mogul.

The action comes a short time before the final collapse of Jerusalem. Jeremiah is hated in the king's court because he has been too pro-Babylon and will not give the King what he wants to hear. Despite the encircling gloom, Jeremiah remains in a steady and impressive optimism, while he is essentially incarcerated by those loyal to the King.

Now comes the action: "Do I have a deal for you!" Why not invest in a piece of property in downtown Jerusalem? Sure, the place is falling apart, is just about to be burned to the ground, and all the good folk will be taken away in exile, but the price is good, and you never know.

It is Jeremiah's unflinching faith in God that allows him to buy the risky real estate, despite what appears to be a severe market downturn. But Jeremiah's faith is not in market analysis but in the living God. He knows that someone in his family will receive a windfall when this transaction finally comes to fruition.

Pastor Mark – Salem Covenant Church

Thursday March 26th

I Samuel 16:11-13

God's Choice

"Samuel said to Jesse 'Are all your sons here?' And he said 'There remains yet the youngest but he is keeping the sheep'"....I Samuel 16:11. We don't know why David was kept in the background. In her book, "The Secret Chord", an historical novel, Geraldine Brooks provides new context and some of her own ideas to answer some of the questions about King David's complex and flawed life. From shepherd to Giant slayer, musician and Psalmist, soldier to beloved King...since children we have all been fascinated with the David stories. The text in I Samuel seems to imply that David's father Jesse thought too little of him to present his youngest of seven sons to Samuel. But, God doesn't choose the way we do.

God often chooses the humble or the unexpected to lead. We see in David his youth and inexperience pointing him to the power of God and leading him. In the verses leading up to today's text, "the Lord said to Samuel 'Do not look upon his appearance or on the height of his stature'" verse 7. Many times we are more concerned with outward appearances; God is more concerned about the heart; we are to consider God's thoughts and not our own; to see people through God's eyes. We are reminded that Jesus, too, was not the type of King the people were looking for.

During our Lenten journey may we reflect on our own choices versus God's choices. May we stop thinking about looks and begin to see people through God's eyes. May love, compassion and grace change us all from a worldly perspective to a spirit-led view point knowing that every person, regardless of their faults, is precious and made in God's image.

Jackie Walsh – Grace Lutheran @ Bethel

Friday, March 27th

Psalm 31:14-15

Value: Surrender

Spiritual Practice: "The Open Palms"

Tonight, before you turn out the light, sit for just a moment at the edge of your bed. Close your eyes and clench your fists tight, thinking about the worries or the "glass plates" you've been trying to keep in the air all day. Feel that tension. Then, very slowly, open your hands so your palms are facing upward on your lap. **Your Step for Today:** As you open your hands, take a deep breath and silently say, *"My times are in Your hands."* Notice the physical feeling of letting go. Give yourself permission to leave those worries in that open space, trusting that you don't have to carry them through the night.

Laura Lennox – First Congregational Church of Auburn

Saturday, March 28th

Mark 10:32-34 per the NRSVUE

32 They were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, 33 saying, "Look, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the gentiles; 34 they will mock him and spit upon him and flog him and kill him, and after three days he will rise again."

Jesus was counter-cultural, which in his day didn't go over well with the authorities. The Romans, had experience with non-conformists stirring up crowds, causing so much trouble the troops would have to engage and calm things down, with detrimental affects like death and maiming a result.

Besides this, the Temple authorities had their own "police" listening and reporting back to the chief priests on the "tone" of the people.

No wonder those following Jesus held some fear as his teaching lifted up new ways of understanding Hebrew scripture that called for a commitment to God's *Way* over the world's way.

It's essentially the same today, and has been in every generation since Jesus' time. This *Way* of God forms around attitudes against retributive justice and coercion to settle upon Grace and Mercy-centered understanding. To be a follower of Jesus is counter-cultural and when we don't conform to self-centered, "me-first" agendas we can certainly be called out for *the Way* in which we walk!

However, Jesus' teaching and leading focus on bringing the world together, the sharing of ourselves through a heart of Love for the well-being of society and creation. This can be said to represent the Kingdom of God coming into reality here on earth.

So, let us follow through Love and become part of the Kingdom movement that respects and honors God and all of creation.

Pastor Andrew – Grace Lutheran

Tuesday, March 31st

Psalm 71:1

*¹ In you, O LORD, have I taken refuge;
let me never be ashamed.*

Reflection: Put all your trust in God even when times are tough. If you do will know you are blessed, you will know you have purpose, you will know you have much to offer and you will know you are a beloved child of God. This lent put all your trust in God.

Pastor Dennis - Greendale People's Church

Good Friday, April 3rd

Isaiah 52:13-53:12, Psalm 22, Hebrews 4:14-16; 5:7-9;10:16-25, John 18:1-19:42

“In the Shadow of the Crossroads”

A servant suffers
because the world
has not yet learned
to welcome gentleness.

They bear the weight
of human cruelty,
and still, somehow,
refuse to let violence
have the final word.

A psalm that begins in abandonment—

a cry from the deepest hollow
of the human spirit.

Yet even there,
a place where hope
has unraveled,
a thread remains.
A whisper of trust.

A memory of love.

A promise that despair
is not the end of the story.

We are taught about
a covenant written not on stone
but on the living heart—
a reminder that holiness
is not about sacrifice
but about transformation.

About drawing near
to what is true,
to what is compassionate,

to what calls us
into community
with courage.

Then there is a night garden,
a trial without justice,
a cross raised
by fear and empire.

Friends fled,
of a mother stayed,
of a body removed
with tenderness
and laid in a borrowed tomb.

It is a story
that knows the cost
of loving a world
that does not always
love back.

So in this Lenten season,
may we walk gently
through the shadows
of our own crossroads.
May we face the truths
we would rather avoid—
the harm we cause,
the harm we carry,
the harm we inherit.
May we remember
that vulnerability
is not weakness,
and that compassion
is a form of resistance.

And when the world
feels like a long Good Friday,
may we hold fast
to the quiet conviction
that love endures,
that justice persists,
that hope waits
just beyond our sight—
ready to rise
when we dare
to open our hearts
again.

Pastor Aaron - UUCW

Holy Saturday, April 4th

Job 14:1-14

Hope for a tree

14 “Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble. 2 They spring up like flowers and wither away; like fleeting shadows, they do not endure.

3 Do you fix your eye on them? Will you bring them before you for judgment? 4 Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one!

5 A person’s days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. 6 So look away from him and let him alone, till he has put in his time like a hired laborer.

7 “At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail. 8 Its roots may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, 9 yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant.

10 But a man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more. 11 As the water of a lake dries up or a riverbed becomes parched and dry,¹² so he lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, people will not awake or be roused from their sleep.

13 “If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! 14 If someone dies, will they live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come.

John 19:38-42

The Burial of Jesus

³⁸ Later, Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. ³⁹ He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about seventy-five pounds. ⁴⁰ Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. ⁴¹ At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. ⁴² Because it was the Jewish day of Preparation and since the tomb was nearby, they laid Jesus there.

Holy Saturday is that “in-between” day, sandwiched between the absolute despair of Holy Friday’s darkness and the uplifting joy of Easter resurrection. Holy Saturday has always felt so awkward to me as we churn through the shadows of the nights before, still burdened by the crucifixion and the shocking violent betrayals, all while running through our checklist of party preparations for Easter Sunday: faux grass, chocolate eggs, meals and bonnets. We know what is coming, and we can anticipate it, but if we have done the hard work of Holy Week and all of Lent, our readiness is only matched by the brutal devastation of the story.

These two scriptures, one from Job and one from John, address the in between stage, the straddle of death and life, really, as we cross from one extreme to the other. Rather, let me revise the last sentence – we move from the appearance of death into life; Jesus is not dead, nor is our bleak, late winter landscape into spring. The new tomb where Jesus has been laid is not a site of finality, and the garden around it does not wither. The scripture from Job points to the quietly growing roots of a tree, the stubbornness of a seed, not visible to our eyes, but growing with promise, the in between of anticipating what new life will flourish when we can’t quite see or believe it yet. It’s almost too much, trying to embrace the lingering grief and the coming resurrection...wait for it, wait for it, the first light of dawn is coming.

Easter Day, April 5th

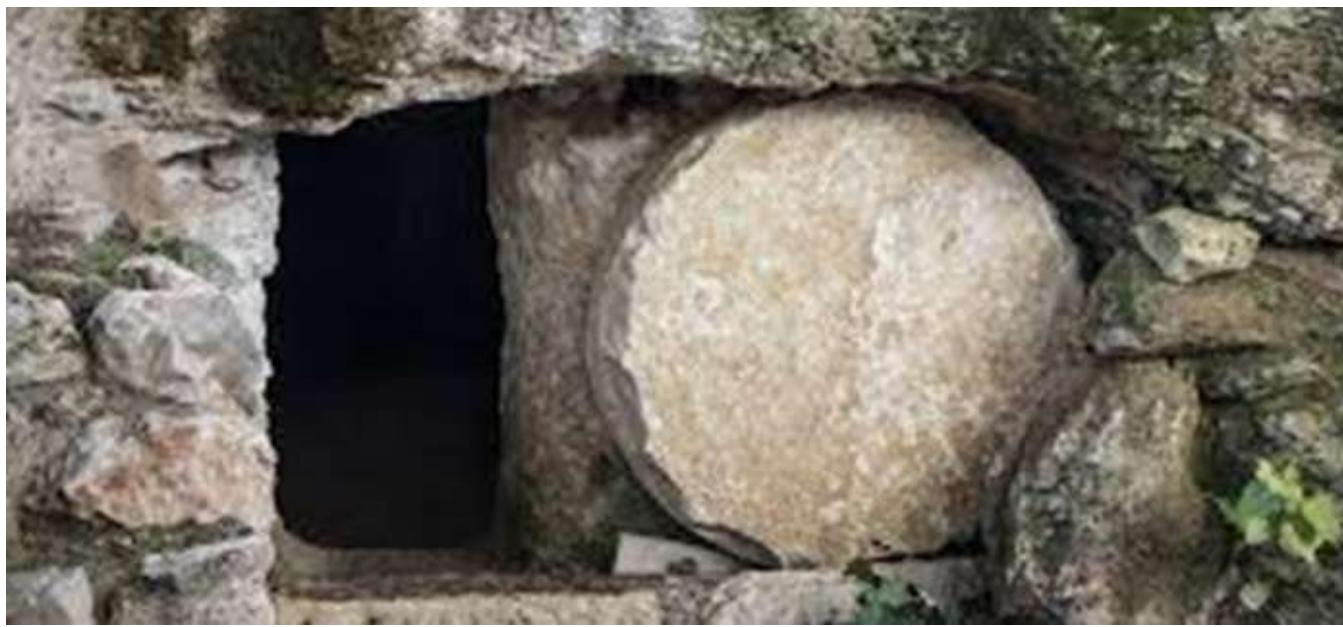
Psalm 118:19

“We Have Arrived”

Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
Praise him, all creatures here below;
Praise him above ye heav'nly host;
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

**“Open to me the gates of righteousness,
that I may enter through them
and give thanks to the LORD!”**

Pastor Mark – Salem Covenant Church



Participating Parishes from The Greendale Ecumenical Group

Grace Lutheran Church (ELCA) *Bethel & Zion*

The Rev. Andrew Borden, Pastor
Roberta Briggs
Jackie Walsh
Marie Sturdevant

Salem Covenant Church (ECC)

The Rev. Mark Nilson, Senior Pastor

The Unitarian Universalist Church of Worcester (UU)

The Rev. Aaron Payson, Minister

Greendale People's Church, Worcester

The Rev. Dennis O'Malley, Pastor

First Congregational Church of Auburn (UCC)

The Rev. Dr. Julie Cedrone, Pastor
Laura Lennox