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Lenten Devotional  
The Book of John  
March 2 - April 17, 2022

Moses said to God, "If I now come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' they are going to ask me, 'What's this God's name?' What am I supposed to say to them?" God said to Moses, "I Am Who I Am. So say to the Israelites, 'I Am has sent me to you.'" *Exodus 3:13-14*

In Exodus 3, God gave Moses a rather inadequate and mysterious answer to Moses' question about God's identity.

Since then, God's people have been growing in our understanding of who God is. A powerful hymn written by Thomas Troeger captures some of the scriptural imagery for the Holy:

Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud, Fortress, Fountain, Shelter,  
Light, Judge, Defender, Mercy, Might, Life whose life all life endowed.

May the church at prayer recall that no single holy name  
but the truth behind them all is the God whom we proclaim.

("Source and Sovereign, Rock and Cloud," #11 in *Glory to God*)

As Christians, as followers of Jesus, we experience God in the person of Jesus, and in the gospel according to John, Jesus uses evocative imagery to describe himself: bread of life, light of the world, resurrection and the life, and more.

I encourage you to make a commitment to reading the entire gospel of John with the help of these reflections. John's gospel is more theological and even more mystical than Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and some sections are hard to understand. But as you read, keep thinking about Jesus, and I encourage you to talk with one another about how you understand and experience Jesus, with the hope that we grow in faith, hope, and love.

On the journey together,

*Charlie Berthoud*

Charlie Berthoud, Senior Pastor

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# In the Beginning | John 1:1-18

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Polly Guequierre

Wednesday, March 2 (Ash Wednesday)

The Word. Overwhelming and breathtaking, that Word. In the Beginning, the Word with God, was God, was life, and became flesh. Just when was the Beginning? Could that be eternity going backward from human creation?? Forever and ever and ever without beginning?

The passage also has me wondering about humans. In a recent prayer, Pastor Jeff included this, “You loved us before we were.” Were we with the Word in the Beginning, before the Word was life and the light for all people? Where were we before we were? In Jeremiah 1:5, it says, “Before I created you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart;” If God knew us then, it tells me that He desires us to live, thrive, and glorify Him on earth as his fore-known beloved children.

Jesus was with the Word, was the Word, then became flesh. He made his home here on earth to share his knowledge of God with us, making God’s steadfast love known to all people. The Word, born here for us.

So. Much. To. Ponder.

*Dear Lord,*

*We praise the Word that you are. You brought light to us in Jesus. We give thanks for His life that made you known to us, and his teachings that taught us how to follow your way. Amen.*

# Paving the Way for Jesus through Connections | John 1:19-51

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Julie Sadowsky

Thursday, March 3

In this passage John is working to prepare people for Jesus and Jesus is starting to gather his disciples and show the promise of what he will do.

There are many important components here and one of the overarching things that stands out to me is how each person is connected to others. John is baptizing so the people can get a fresh start with God and he identifies Jesus as the Son of God. Jesus invites John's disciples to follow him. One of them, Andrew, went to find his brother Simon to tell him they'd found the Messiah and led him to Jesus. Next Jesus tells Philip to follow him and Philip found Nathaniel and told him about Jesus.

It reminds me that we are all connected through Jesus and while we may sometimes feel isolated, especially as the pandemic continues to change the way and the frequency with which we interact, we are all together in Christ.

*Loving and gracious God,*

*Your gift of Jesus is a connection between us and you and with each other that is magnificent. Help us each day to strive to make our connections stronger and more meaningful and guide our actions to follow your will. Amen.*

## Mother Knows Best | John 2:1-12

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Judy Von Bergen

Friday, March 4

I picked this familiar passage of Jesus being a guest at a wedding that ran out of wine. What intrigued me as I read the passage this time is the notice and importance of Jesus's mother, not spoken of by name. She brings the problem of no more wine to her son. He responds, "What concern it that of ours? My hour has not yet come." He reconsiders however, it seems Mother Knows Best this time, and the miracle occurs.

I am delighted that the author included Mary in this writing. To me, it points to her influence and values her role of a wise mother. It also shows Mary's trust in the capabilities of her son, before they are known to others. She demanded nothing; if she had there well not have been the miracle! I choose to evaluate this as honoring Mary in particular, and women in general.

*Divine,*

*As people who influence and love others, particularly young people; parents, grandparents, aunts uncles and teachers; may we listen for your discernment on when to make suggestions and how to make suggestions. With your continual guidance, may we gently guide others. Amen.*



# My Home is My Temple | John 2:13-25

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David Lincecum

Saturday, March 5

I'm leading up to an outburst. "I'm turning my house into a market!"

A weekly brigade of Amazon packages. A new cooking gadget. A better coffee machine. A refreshed TV.

During these covid years I have nested. In some ways, it's been good. I have enjoyed the comfort of my space. At other times, it turned my home into the market. Periodically I behave like Jesus. I clear the counters and make a box of stuff. Drop it at the goodwill. I Kon-Mari my closet, again. Do I love this shirt?

I am blessed with abundance, and I am cursed with stuff. Does Jesus offer the solution? Well, not in his outburst. It provides the wake-up call – but it's not the real solution. But then he said, "Zeal for your house will consume me."

He was expressing extraordinary concern for the house of God. So, what can I do with this statement? How can I understand its meaning for me?

I can love my home and my space and desire to better it. But I must beware of greed and accumulation. I can fill my house with God. I can fill the empty space in me with God. I can remember that my body and home are my temple where I can feel love, tenderness, and connected to the beauty of the universe. I can reduce the trappings of human life and increase the spiritual presence of God in my life.

I can put my faith in God – but in the last two verses we get another perspective. ". . . he knew that it was in each person." God is not out there in the church. God is in me. Here in my home. Here in my temple.

*Lord,*

*Help me keep my home from becoming a market. Focus my mind on God and family and relieve me of my material desires. Remind me that God lives within. Amen.*



# First Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 6

I AM the Bread of Life



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## What If? | John 3:1-21

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Brad Brown

Monday, March 7

In describing the course of human development, famous psychologist Jean Piaget said that our minds are transported to a more advanced and complex different dimension when we learn to move past “what is” and entertain the question: “What if...?” When we are no longer constrained in our thinking to the concrete world that we can see, touch, hear, we are opened to understanding life from the perspective of possibilities. Nicodemus struggled to make this cognitive leap. To him, being born again somehow would have to involve a second journey from within the womb out into the world. To him, heaven must be a physical place with many of the concrete elements we encounter on earth. But what if...? What if being born again involves being transported into a completely different dimension of existence? What if heaven is as much a state of being as a physical place to traverse? What if being “born of water and Spirit” involves a transformation beyond the constraints of our concrete reality, beyond physical time and physical place into an entirely different dimension? A dimension that somehow contains the elements of our world without being defined by them, constrained by them? What would we encounter in this existence? How would we act? How would we perceive who Jesus was, what Jesus said and did, what he meant? How would we perceive what God intended us to be, to do? Is the light of which Jesus speaks in this passage something like the sun or an LED bulb? Or is it something akin to insight that allows us to understand how “our deeds have been done in God”? How do we get there? How do we know when we are there? What would persuade us to take a leap of faith into that rebirth, that new life? Could we summon the courage to try to understand our faith in that way? What if...?

*Lord,*

*Give us the courage to be reborn of the Spirit, the wisdom to step from darkness into light, and the fortitude to look past the troubles and terrors of our corporeal world and truly believe in you. Amen.*

# Could You Be Happy with Second Place?

John 3:22-36

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Barb Eikenberry

Tuesday, March 8

In this passage, some disciples of John the Baptist are concerned that Jesus is baptizing people across the river from where John is baptizing, and he seems to be “taking business away” from John. Their reaction seems a bit comical to me. But John affirms that he is not only ok with the situation but, in fact, he is joyful because he knows that he is not the Messiah, Jesus is. John says, “He must become greater; I must become less.” This speaks volumes about the true character of John. He does not try to outdo Jesus or be his rival. He firmly believes he was sent by God to help pave the way for Jesus, whom John strongly affirms as the Messiah.

I’m watching the Winter Olympics in addition to watching football playoffs. I’m impressed whenever I see an athlete at the top of their game congratulate the one who just bested them in a sport. I’m especially impressed when I learn that a senior athlete mentors and supports a younger athlete, all the while knowing that someday they may take second place to that younger athlete. As we all try to be the best we can be, using the varied gifts God gave us, can we be joyful if someone comes along who is perhaps more gifted than us at something but who could use a bit of our help to accomplish their goal for the greater good? Even if it comes at the expense of some or all of our pride and glory? The goal for John the Baptist wasn’t to get the most baptisms but instead to help more people come to know God. What incredible joy John must have felt to know he helped pave the way for the Messiah who would bring even more people to God.

*Lord,*

*Help us to discern those times in our lives when we are meant to lead and also those times when you want us to be helpers, not the leaders. May we do so joyfully, knowing that in doing so we can help bring your Kingdom to this earth. Amen.*

# Where Do We Worship? | John 4:1-42

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Eric Girard

Wednesday, March 9

In John 4:1-42 Jesus is conversing with a Samaritan woman. In that time Jews did not mix with inferior Samaritan, let alone pray or worship together. Only Jews that were allowed to worship in the temple, and the woman questioned why Jesus would preach to her noting that it was only proper to worship in Jerusalem. As Jesus continually did during his time on Earth, he challenged convention and told the women that God cared about worshipping in Spirit and Truth.

Jesus preached to the Samaritan “but whoever drinks from the water that I will give will never be thirsty again. The water that I give will become in those who drink it a spring of water that bubbles up into eternal life.” He reminded her the at the God’s love is available to all. Not just those who go to the Temple, but those who gather in the common areas down by the well.

Think about this today. Where is our church? Is it only in the comfortable environment of Bradfield Hall with a bunch of middle-class Madison West siders? Is Covenant limited to those walls or does the Spirit and Truth of God’s love extend beyond?

Jesus didn’t just worship in the temple, and because of this he brought God’s love to all, even the Samaritans. Covenant Presbyterian Church inspires me and reminds me that God’s word and love exists everywhere. Jesus reminds me that I should speak to those I’m not used to speaking to or not necessarily be comfortable around. My actions in every aspect of my life are a chance to worship in Spirit and Truth.

Lord,

*Be with us in the walls of our temple, and outside the walls of our temple. Help us to recognize today’s Samaritans. Help us to speak, act, and worship in Spirit and Truth. Amen.*

## Seeing and Believing | John 4:43-54

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Laurie Jones

Thursday, March 10

I'll believe it when I see it. How many times have we heard that statement or made it ourselves? It seems that it is important to witness whatever the desired change is for oneself. I've never witnessed water turned into wine, yet I believe that Jesus performed this miracle at the wedding in Cana. Jesus healed many people and I have no reason to doubt that these stories in the scriptures are false. But that's in the Bible...what about real life? It can be in our nature to be cynical and distrustful—to think the worst will happen in any given situation; but what if we set aside our distrust and believe that it will work out? What if we “let go and let God”; trust that God is in charge a little more often? Our outlook can change if we just take the time to stop, breathe, pray, and believe that good will come. It's a much happier place to believe that God has the best intentions for your life; our job is to believe it and act accordingly.

*Dear God,*

*Please be with me as I move through this day. Help me to realize that you are in my corner and I can rely on you to help me through whatever comes my way today. Amen.*

# What to Do on Sunday | John 5:1-29

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Jo Wiersema

Friday, March 11

When I first came to faith, I went up to the pastor and asked "Why Sunday? Wouldn't it have been easier to keep the same Jewish Sabbath?" to which the pastor replied, "Nothing in the Bible says it has to be Sunday, it just worked out that way for folks". I was astounded that this sacred day, The Lord's Day, was simply a scheduling fluke that has been on the books for some 1900 years. There's some more formal reasoning for the migration from Saturday to Sunday, but overall, my pastor wasn't wrong. (There's a neat Wikipedia article if that's of interest to you - [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath\\_in\\_Christianity](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sabbath_in_Christianity))

I grew up in the Bible belt, where most stores and many restaurants were closed on Sunday. It ended up being a day of rest because it was a true limitation of availability. That's not necessarily the case in Madison, I can still buy groceries and the soccer field near my house in the summer is full of small children chasing each other. As I've gotten older sabbath has become something of a mystical ideal in my life. As much as I try to take rest, there is always something to do. Meals to make, laundry to fold, people to try and love well. When Jesus breaks the Sabbath and, in a way, gives the sick man the first reprieve from pain in 38 years, is that not rest for the formerly sick man? Is offering our works to give rest for others just as important as rest ourselves? Yes and no. Jesus broke the sabbath to fight the system that's dedicated rigidity hurt people. Jesus didn't wait to heal people because allowing others to live in pain while I rest is not the intent of God the Parent.

Sundays are for rest, but they are not for feeling guilty about not resting because by golly we need dinner on the table. You can find Sabbath in every day. You can find the 5 minutes or 30 seconds to breath, to connect with God, and to turn yourself over to restfulness. Give yourself rest.

*Almighty God,*

*God of all creation, you are also a God of rest. You're a God who took time at the end of the busiest of weeks to rest. We ask that you give us rest in a restless world, just as we ask for peace in a chaotic world. Resting in your love and faithful is something we strive and often fail to do, give us the strength to realize our weakness and let us hand over ourselves to you. In your incredibly rebellious Son's name. Amen.*

Nan Schaefer

Saturday, March 12

“I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgement is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me.” -John 5: 30

“If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?” -John 5:46-47

This passage follows the account of Jesus healing a weak, sick man on the Sabbath, and responding to criticism by saying his Father works on the Sabbath, therefore he does also. That response antagonized the Jewish leaders, because Jesus had not only broken the Sabbath law but had called God his Father, implying a close relationship.

Jesus continued his teachings by claiming that all his authority came from God, that his gifts of teaching and healing came from God. He claimed that Moses, and then John, had proclaimed his coming, that if people believed Moses and John, they would believe the words Jesus told them.

My epiphany star word this year is “Believe.” This passage spoke to me a lot, as it reminds me that I must seek deeper within myself to find belief in the words of the Bible. I must believe that God sent prophets to prepare us for Jesus and his words, so that we could deepen our belief in and understanding of God. Trust and belief are tough concepts for me; doubt and skepticism are more likely to prevail over ready trust. I truly appreciate the teachings of our pastors, who guide us in knowing how not to necessarily take all the words at face value, but to seek God’s meaning with love as a focus.

*Dear God,*

*Open my heart and mind to belief in the words I read, in the lessons I hear from Jesus. Let me be wise enough to find meaning through the lens of love, brave enough to put those words to work in my life, and serene enough to accept God’s love for me with faith and trust. Amen.*



## Second Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 13

I AM the Light of the World



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## Food for Thought | John 6:1-59

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Steve Sauer

Monday, March 14

“Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted.” My initial reaction to this passage always contains some level of astonishment. Did Jesus really conjure loaves and fishes? But upon further thought, this passage becomes for me less about supporting or refuting a miracle and more about celebrating Jesus’ presence and his intent. Jesus fed the five thousand hungry so they could experience the glory of God.

I also appreciate that this passage illustrates how Jesus valued time for personal reflection and wasn’t swayed by prevailing popular opinion, “Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.”

The practical needs of the moment constantly return Jesus to engage the world. Only hours after retreating to the mountain, Jesus sensed his disciples’ distress and transported himself across land and sea to rescue them and their small boat from stormy seas. The next day Jesus continued his teaching to the crowds that followed him, “Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For it is on him that God the Father has set his seal.” When the people asked for more, he responded, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

This passage brings to me the following prayer:

*Lord God,*

*Help me be present, cultivate the quiet, engage the world, and celebrate all the miracles of your glory.*

*Amen.*

# Are you Rattled? | John 6:60-71

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Melissa Hinz

Tuesday, March 15

John 6:61 “Jesus sensed that his disciples were having a hard time with this and said, “Does this rattle you completely?” (The Message)

Jesus had just declared that he is the Bread of Life - and that if one eat of his flesh and drink of his blood, if they believed in him, they would live forever. It is a hard teaching. What does that mean? Who is this teacher? What do I have to do? Can I really live forever?

Humans are so tied to this world. We want to see, to touch, to smell, to prove, to know. We struggle to understand those things that we cannot see, that we cannot touch, and that we really have no frame of reference for in this world. While on earth, we will never fully comprehend the mysteries of the Triune God, but we have been given the Bible as the Word of God and the Holy Spirit to bring us into relationship with God through Jesus.

Jesus is so many things, and this exploration of the "I AM" statements helps us to broaden our understanding of and our relationship with Jesus. He knows each of us, knows our hearts, knows our struggles and our doubts. He knows how we have fallen short and yet he loves us still - always.

Whatever challenges you are facing, whatever tough questions you struggle to answer, know that you are a beloved Child of God. You need not have all the answers, but only a willing heart and a sincere desire to be a disciple of Jesus.

*Gracious God,*

*Grant me understanding and faith each day as I seek to live as a follower of Jesus. Give me strength when I struggle, and belief in your goodness and grace. Amen.*

# Holy Spirit, You Are Welcome Here

John 7:1-36

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Lori Conley

Wednesday, March 16

In John 7, Jesus secretly travels to the Festival of Tabernacles in Judea. He walks amongst the attendees and hears people whispering about Him. Some say he is a good man while others say he is deceiving people. Halfway through the festival, He goes to the temple courts to teach. The Jews are amazed at the depth of His knowledge. They skeptically question how he knows so much.

“Jesus answered, ‘My teaching is not my own. It comes from the one who sent me. Anyone who chooses to do the will of God will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own. Whoever speaks on their own does so to gain personal glory, but he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is a man of truth; there is nothing false about him.’” -John 7:16-18

Do you have someone in your life who’s critical, or not very tolerant? Someone who likes to stir things up, or doesn’t have a filter and says whatever is on their mind even if it’s hurtful? I do.

Jesus’ words inspire me to ask for assistance when I’m visiting someone with whom conversations are difficult. I ask the Holy Spirit to speak through me. I ask to be a conduit of God’s love. Sometimes I even sing the chorus from Francesca Battistelli’s song “Holy Spirit” in my head. Every time I do this, I am amazed at the peace that envelopes me and by what comes out of my mouth. The words are more patient and kinder than I would ever be able to speak on my own.

*Heavenly Father,*

*Gracious Lord, it is Your glory I seek, not my own. As I walk through this Lenten season, allow me to walk in an atmosphere filled with the Holy Spirit, one that allows all my interactions to be loving and kind. Thank you for sending Jesus to teach us how to live and for the Holy Spirit who lives inside of me. In Your precious Son’s name. Amen.*

# Rivers of Living Water | John 7:37-52

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Melissa Hinz

Thursday, March 17

“On the last day of the festival, [The Festival of Booths] the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, ‘Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, 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.’” 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.” -John 7:37-39

In this passage, Jesus is preaching in the temple and he cries out that all who are thirsty should come to him, and out of the believer’s heart will flow rivers of living water. While this was not well received by many in the temple that day, we who believe can rest in this promise. We who are thirsty can come and drink, and we will be satisfied. In Isaiah 58:11 “The Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong; and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail.” Those rivers of living water come from faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord through the power given by the Holy Spirit. The living water fills us and sustains us, the Spirit guides us and leads us to eternal life in Christ.

Much like the woman at the well in John 4, we all long to have that living water, to no longer be thirsty, as we know that the things of this world do not satisfy. We can trust that the living water is available to us, to quench our thirst, to fulfill our deepest longings through a relationship with Jesus. Drink deeply, knowing that Jesus is the living water.

*“With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. And you will say in that day: Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; make known his deeds among the nations; proclaim that his name is exalted.” (Isaiah 12:3-4) You fill us with living water and we shall never to be thirsty again. May we live with gratitude and praise, today and always. Amen.*

## Who's to Judge? | John 7:53-8:30

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Monica Mark

Friday, March 18

There's a lot of judging going on in John 7:53-8:20. The scribes and Pharisees judge a woman caught in adultery to be deserving of death; they then try to get Jesus to incriminate himself so they can later on render judgment against him (they've clearly already judged him to be a troublemaker and a danger, as they're actively looking for ways to bring charges against him). Later on, Jesus tells the Pharisees who he is – and they reject his “testimony” as invalid. Jesus then explains to them that they “judge by human standards,” while he judges validly, together with God the Father.

The story of the woman caught in adultery suggests at what Jesus's next conversation with the Pharisees makes explicit: it's for God to judge our souls, not other people. (We all know that there is no human being among us “without sin,” no matter how hard we try.) To be clear, Jesus doesn't toss out the law, saying it doesn't matter; it clearly does. But when it comes down to it, it's not for other humans to decide that the woman isn't worthy of forgiveness or that she has to pay for her sin with her life. That's between her and God.

The wonderful thing about this story is that it also makes clear that as part of that calculus, God forgives, and gives us second and third and fourth changes. Instead of judging the woman guilty, Jesus sends her on her way, telling her not to sin again. At the same time, he's caused the crowds to reflect on their own consciences – and to me, the fact that they quietly disperse, one by one, really suggests that at least some of them are taking that reflection seriously (and perhaps, like the woman in the story, resolving anew to strive not to sin anymore).

*God,*

*Help us, instead of judging others, to reflect on ourselves; to seek your forgiveness; and to go our way, striving not to sin again. Amen.*

## Paternity Test | John 8:31-59

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Jenn Sauer

Saturday, March 19

As we chatted before school this week, a student (I'll call her Dana) told me, a bit facetiously, "Oh, I definitely take advantage of being K.'s little sister--teachers assume I'll be perfect like her, and I can get away with a lot in the beginning." She sounds a lot like the Jews in this passage--except more self-aware than those deluded people, who firmly believe if they can simply trace their lineage to Abraham, then they are clearly of unimpeachable moral character.

Dana, at 14, has figured out what Jesus can't seem to get these grown men to grasp: your DNA can get you only so far before your true colors emerge and make clear who you really are. And Jesus doesn't pull any punches when he tells these people--whom he knows are plotting his murder--exactly what he knows them to be: children from "[their] father the devil". They claim that Abraham is their father, but Jesus points out, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing what Abraham did...". They even claim God as their father, yet they don't recognize God's truth when Jesus preaches it. Jesus tells them, "Whoever is from God hears the words of God. The reason you do not hear them is that you are not from God."

They fail the most basic paternity test.

It's easy to harshly judge these wicked, clueless people. But, lest I prove myself just as deluded, I need to own the times I've relied on my affiliations and "memberships" to telegraph virtues that have become more theoretical than practiced. Does my speech always reflect the compassion and mercy of the Jesus I claim to follow? Do I consistently go out of my way to serve "the last and the least", as membership in Christ's church dictates I do? Ummm.... no. But I'll take a page from Dana and acknowledge that I fall short of my "heritage". Then I'll try and try again to live up to it.

*Father God,*

*Give me the clear eyes and humility to live a life worthy of my identity as your child. Amen.*



## Third Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 20

I AM the Vine, You are the Branches



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## Having Eyes that See | John 9

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Lloyd Southwick

Monday, March 21

The man in John Ch. 9 has been blind from birth, and since he is of age (v. 21), he is at least in his teens. As in Gen 2.7, from clay (dust in Genesis) God forms a new creation. To the Pharisees he announces (Jn 9.25), “One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.” See Paul’s parallel claim in 1 Cor 2.2: “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified.” The man with newly opened eyes reveals throughout the rest of the chapter that he sees with true spiritual vision: not only did a man heal him, but one who was a prophet sent by God, and even one worthy of worship, the Lord himself. His confession leads to substantial suffering, excommunication from the synagogue.

As the chapter progresses, the healed man grows in faith, in confidence about who Jesus is. He well demonstrates Peter’s admonition (2 Pet 3.18), “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The man with new sight has been removed from the synagogue and all its religious and social benefits, yet he still strongly professes Jesus (Jn 9.38): “Lord, I believe.”

When John’s disciples ask him who had sinned to explain the man’s blindness, Jesus replies that it is better to look at the glory of God revealed in the healing than to ponder reasons for his condition (vv. 2-3). May each of us be sensitive to the glory of God around us, shown by the little things and the big that occur in our presence, if we but have eyes to see.

*Lord Jesus,*

*May we be aware of what you are doing today. Amen.*

# The Great I Am | John 10:1-21

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Steve Fulton

Tuesday, March 22

Years ago while visiting friends I noticed a cross-stitched wall hanging in their home that described the different names that we attribute to Jesus. The first name in bold lettering was “the good shepherd.” The letters were in a bold style. The many subsequent names were in completely different font styles. My enduring recollection of this wall hanging is this: Jesus, first and foremost, is our leader, our good shepherd. Today’s passage describes just how Jesus accomplishes this constant care-by never leaving us in danger or unattended, as in the case of the lost sheep. We know his voice just as he knows ours. He is the gatekeeper and we have only to walk through that open door to receive his love and mercy. By reading the other names on this tapestry we are reminded of all he has sacrificed for us and gives to us freely. He is:

The Lamb of God. The Resurrection & The Life. The Rock. The Bread of Life. The Living Water. The True Vine. The Messiah. The Everlasting Father. The Prince of Peace. The Way, The Truth, The Life.....With You Always.

*God of our life,*

*We know you are with us always. And we know that often we need reminders of this-this all encompassing love that surrounds us. Please forgive our lapses of discernment that make you real and push us to live in your words, way and life. You are indeed our great I Am, our Great Shepherd. Amen and Amen.*

## Claims We Make | John 10:22-42

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Nancy McCulley

Wednesday, March 23

Jesus got himself into plenty of hot water. Can you relate? Have you ever expressed your truth and found that it didn't sit well with others? Perhaps you shared your faith and found yourself defensively answering hard questions. Maybe you showed up for a protest that alienated your family or friends. Or... you might be considering "coming out" and wonder how the news will be received.

Jesus's claims of "I Am" were harder for the scholars and authorities of his day to accept than anything we ever had to or will deal with. "We're stoning you not for any good work, but for blasphemy! You, a mere man, claim to be God." (v. 33) He was willing to fulfill the messages of the prophets, knowing for certain that it would stir the pot... a pot of hot water much bigger than anything any of us can imagine. And he used the scriptures to prove his case. Still there were unbelievers. Haters. Deniers.

We make claims all the time, either directly with our words and actions, or indirectly with their consequences. I can claim a political affiliation, a professional designation, or membership in a particular group. All those claims tell others who "I am" and might get me into hot water. But the most important claim to be made—I am a believer in Christ—begs the question: am I living as Christ would have me live?

*God of all understanding,*

*Help us to hear and believe the claims that Jesus made. Open our hearts to hear the claims of others, and to believe that by knowing them, we can create understanding and compassion for our neighbors. Continue to guide us as we navigate the hot waters of controversy, hatred, and false claims. Amen.*

# Marilyn Come Out | John 11:1-44

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Marilyn Krichko

Thursday, March 24

A few years after college, I moved to a small town in Sweden and went to work for church as a youth Pastor. I made friends with church people who I thought were the most wonderful people I had ever met.

Years later, I told one of my Swedish friends that I was gay. They said I was going to hell if I did not repent. One by one, the rest of those church friends cut me out of their lives and after some time, I felt very alone. I stopped reading my bible every day, I lost interest in praying, my heart became cold, and eventually I forgot about God. Every time I entered a church, I was afraid of being judged for being gay, so I stopped going to church.

One day I was taking a walk when I said a little prayer asking God to help me. At once, I heard God say, “come out”. “What?” I asked. “Come out, you are dead, you have been away so long, you don’t even know you are dead. So, come out of that dead place in your heart, and I will heal you”. I think now you know why the story of Lazarus resonates with me. Just like Lazarus was dead and Jesus called to him to come out and be with him and his friends (Mary and Martha, siblings of Lazarus, were with Jesus that day), God called me to come out of the dead place in my heart and to trust in relationships that are led by the Holy Spirit. I was not surprised to find out that the name Lazarus means “God has helped”. God does help us. When I cried out for help, God raised me from the dead in my heart and when we moved to Madison, God helped me find CPC, and gave me new friends who understand that I do not need to repent, but instead live a full life in the image of God – the way God created me.

*God,*

*You hear our cries for help, you call us out of the dead and give us life. Please show us the way, help us love each other as you have loved us. Amen.*

## God's Time | John 11:45-57

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Barbara McCall

Friday, March 25

*Holy God, Creator of Life,*

*Today we begin to walk the long, slow path to the crucifixion of Jesus. Be with us now as we ponder our responses to the resurrection of Lazarus, the resurrection of Jesus and the promise of resurrection in our own lives. In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen*

This is a shocking scripture passage! Raising Lazarus from the tomb was a miracle, a sign of God. But not everyone was joyous or believed. Spies took news of the event to the Jewish leaders where it evoked anger and fear. Lazarus was the tipping point.

Earlier that year, Caiaphas prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation. After Jesus raised Lazarus, he convinced the Jewish leaders to declare that Jesus be officially marked for death. Lazarus, the living evidence of the resurrection, was also to be eliminated. (Luke 12: 10) These were drastic measures! But Caiaphas thought he had everything under control.

Jesus lived in a world of conflict, full of contradictions. It was the age of messianic hope, it was the era of dreaded Roman occupation. Crowds welcomed Jesus, spies observed and reported his signs of God. Jesus came to give us hope and love and life, he roused existential fears in the religious authorities. But Jesus rose from death to give us life even though Caiaphas plotted his demise. Caiaphas' fears and machinations were no match for the power of God's love.

We too are living in times of conflict and contradiction. The twenty-first century is the best of times and it is the worst of times. This is our place in history. How then do we face the future?

We remember the words, "Fear not, for I am with you." Our lives, complex and troubling though they be, are lived out in God's world. This is God's time. God is ever present. We live in faith knowing that God's love is even greater than we can imagine.

*Holy God, Creator of my life,*

*May I see and thankfully acknowledge the many signs of your love in my life. And may I remember that my purpose in your creation is to be an agent of your love in the world. I live in God's time! You are with me always! In Jesus name I pray. Amen.*

## Dawning Days | John 12:1-36

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Rosemary Jones

Saturday, March 26

As I write this, in early February, I am grateful for each minute of light that our days are gaining. When I walk outside, I am surprised by how much better I feel for the time I can be outside in the light. I am thankful to be alive and moving about in the light; it is like a blessing for that day. Light is very important to all of us, it allows the plants to grow, the animals to have food, and it allows us to see the earth in all of its glory. It's something to think about as we read this passage of John.

This is a very eventful passage in the Bible. It begins in Bethany with Jesus' feet being anointed with oil, and includes Lazarus, who at this point is a major symbol of Jesus' power. Jesus then enters Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, much to the dismay of the Pharisees. The people following Jesus are joyful and celebrating his arrival as the King of Israel, which is predicted in the scriptures.

Jesus then begins to talk about his death: "Very truly I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies, it bears much fruit." He also says: "The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so that the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of the light."

It's sometimes hard to appreciate the light when you have it, and to show your love for it when it is with you, believing it will always be there. In Jesus we have a light which was extinguished only to come back stronger and more powerful, as he speaks of the grain of wheat. I'm sure Mary was forever happy she had showered him with her ointment while he was on earth with her.

*Loving God,*

*Help us to show our love and appreciation to the people who bring light to our world, as well as always thanking you for bringing us the light of Jesus. Thank you for showing us how to be children of the light. Amen.*



## Fourth Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 27

I AM the Good Shepherd



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## Sent by God | John 12:27-50

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Melissa Hinz

Monday, March 28

John 12:44-46 “Then Jesus cried aloud: ‘Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness.’”

Jesus came, not for personal glory or renown, but to reveal God to the world. Jesus' life and ministry demonstrated the power and love of God as God worked through Jesus to heal, to preach, to admonish and to save.

Who is Jesus? What did he stand for? I have always appreciated the verse that follows the well-known John 3:16. Jesus is God incarnate, sent to the world not to “condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” (John 3:17) Jesus is the Light of the world sent to dispel the darkness, to challenge sin and evil, and to ultimately redeem the broken world. He is the Gate to the Father-Creator God. He is our example to follow. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

Jesus was sent by God to be the Light in the darkness, bringing hope, peace and joy. In Christ, we live knowing that we are loved, and that by grace, through faith, we are forgiven and free. Thanks be to God!

*Jesus,*

*Redeemer, Lord, lead me to the Father-Creator God. Be a light on my path as I seek to follow your ways and love as you love. Amen.*

## The Full Extent of Love | John 13:1-30

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Melissa Schmidt

Tuesday, March 29

“Jesus knew that the time had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love.”

Have you ever pondered what you will do when you know that your time has come to leave this world and go to the Father? To whom will you show the full extent of your love and what will that look like?

The night that Jesus was arrested, he showed us what the full extent of his love looked like. It looks like getting up to wash the feet of your beloved and betrayer like a humble servant, even though God had put all things under your power. It looks like speaking in wisdom and truth to bring others closer to God. It looks like serving food to your betrayer, in the same manner that you do for your most beloved. It looks like making the most of every opportunity, even when you are troubled in spirit. It looks like directing your betrayer to do what must be done – and to do so quickly – because your time is numbered and your calling is great.

*Oh Lord,*

*May we remember the full extent of your love, follow your teaching, and become humble servants. In doing so may we show others the full extent of your love. Amen.*

## A New Commandment | John 13:30-38

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Jean Spilburg

Wednesday, March 30

In Chapter 13 of the gospel of John, Jesus is nearing the end of his ministry here on earth. He washes the disciples' feet, an act of servanthood which his whole ministry has been modeling. He also foretells his betrayal by Judas, and tells the disciples they cannot follow where he is going.

Then in verses 34 and 35 Jesus gives a new commandment which voices his desire for them to love each other in the same way that he has loved them – completely selflessly. He tries to make the disciples understand the depth of his love for them. In these verses he makes it clear that loving one another in this way is the key to sharing our faith.

In order to share our faith, we aspire to this kind of love for each other. What a challenge! I have been blessed to find guidance and inspiration from people in my life. Often, they have been people of faith whom I have known through church and also, folks I have known outside of church. They have been wonderful examples of selfless love. Oh, how we need each other, and the help of the Holy Spirit!

The prayer of St. Francis has been for me a guide to putting into practice this selfless love. After enumerating many ways in which we can bring God's love to others, he concludes with:

*O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek  
To be consoled as to console,  
To be understood as to understand,  
To be loved as to love.*

*For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.  
Amen.*

## The Heart of God | John 14:1-14

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Sandy Nuernberg      Thursday, March 31

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” -John 14:1,27b

Just after Simon Peter asked where Jesus was going, and Jesus’ disturbing response of him (Peter) denying him (Jesus) three times, we hear comforting words from Jesus about his return to them. Chapter 14 of the Gospel of John is straight Christology; some scholars say, a rendition of the Second Coming of Jesus. Others believe John wrote to let those questioning who this Jesus was, that he was divine and really the Son of God. I believe John wrote his book about Jesus and his usage of “signs” of Jesus point to one thing, clearly, that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and “through believing you may have life in his name,” (John 20:31). In other words, Jesus’ farewell address we hear in our text today is helping us understand not only life after death, it’s a text having everything about our lives here and now, today!

This, or parts of this well-known text are read frequently at memorial services/funerals, and rightly so. It is for comfort, strength in the loss of a loved one. Jesus is telling his disciples, and us, to renew our connection and trust in him; Jesus is preparing a place for us, to have that same intimate relationship with God, that he (Jesus) has with his Father. He is not promoting panic for his leaving his earthly life and going to his eternal life; he is preparing us for what is to come—if we know him, we will know his Father. Jesus’ entire ‘mission’ on earth is to make known his Father—for us to know who God is. Jesus is the heart, the character of God; Everything of Jesus is what comes from God.

Everything with life here and now is Jesus trusting his disciples and us to carry on his mission. His promise is for us to see God’s good works in us through the power of the Holy Spirit in us; for us to accomplish God’s purposes (works) in the world. Let us pray:

*Lord,*

*We know it is not easy for us to see your visible, spectacular, miraculous accomplishments in our lives. Help us to see more clearly, hear more carefully and deeply your healing, reconciling, life-giving work that is happening before us. We thank you that wherever there is life in abundance, this is Jesus’ presence, the heart of God in our midst. Amen.*

# The Peace of Christ | John 14:15-30

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Doug Poland

Friday, April 1

“Peace I leave with you; my own peace I give you; not as the world gives, I give to you.” - John 14:27.

What does the Passing of the Peace in a worship service mean to you? A few years ago, John Buchanan, a retired pastor at the Presbyterian church in Chicago where Amy and I worshiped, wrote an essay in the *The Christian Century* describing the passing of the peace he observed in worship services at various churches after leaving the pulpit: “There is laughter, sometimes raucous, as two members share an inside joke. People discuss the results of a football game or yesterday’s storm.” Although the point of his essay was not directed specifically at the question, Dr. Buchanan asked parenthetically — “Why don’t we say, ‘The Peace of Christ be with you’? We don’t mean the generic 1960s peace that was communicated with a V sign.” That got me thinking: What does it mean to pass the Peace of Christ?

John 14:27 tells us what it does not mean. Jesus is express in stating that he gives us his peace, and that it is not the peace the world gives us. But what does it mean? I find the words of Osheta Moore, a writer, pastor, speaker, and podcaster, instructive. In her book, *Dear White Peacemakers: Dismantling Racism with Grit and Grace*, she writes that her peacemaking is rooted in the Hebraic concept of shalom, “God’s dream for the world as it should be, nothing missing, nothing broken, everything made whole,” or what Jesus called the kingdom of God. She further notes that Jesus began his ministry proclaiming, ‘The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!’ (Mark 1:15). This was good news indeed—the peacemaking kingdom had come and Jesus was prepared to teach us how to live its countercultural ways.” When we greet each other with the Peace of Christ, we would do well to remember that we are giving one another the same extraordinary gift of shalom that Jesus gave his disciples and gives to us still.

*May the Peace of Christ be with you. Amen.*

# Make Yourself at Home in Me | John 15:1-17

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Marcia Lund      Saturday, April 2

In this passage Jesus repeats, “Abide in me” or “Make yourselves at home in me” over twelve times.

John’s gospel is full of conversations—simple, ordinary conversations about life and relationships and God. Clement of Alexandria, the scholar, wrote this about this gospel, “John did not see the events of Jesus’ life simply as events in time; he saw them as windows looking into eternity.” Jesus is preparing his disciples for his death and yet the conversation revolves around prayer and love and joy and friendship.

His first statement, “I am the real vine” just five words packs a punch. God told Moses who he was by saying, “I AM WHO I AM,” that is, Yahweh. Jesus says, “I am God,” in the flesh. And, by the way, “I am the REAL deal.” I am the truth.

This certainly got John’s attention because, it appears that he remembered every word Jesus said after that, otherwise how could he write with such a keen memory 70 years after Jesus died? When Jesus says, “Make yourselves at home in me,” he promises he will always be present for us. “Whatever you ask will be listened to and acted upon.” This is the gift of prayer, communion with God.

Unconditional love is another gift Jesus speaks of in this passage when we are “at-home” in his love. Scott Peck has defined love as, “The will to extend one’s self for the purpose of nurturing one’s own or another’s spiritual growth.” Jesus’ sacrificial love frees us to be in a relationship with God.

Joy is on Jesus’ lips, “...my joy might be your joy and your joy wholly mature.”

And, Jesus clarifies his level of intimacy with his disciples by saying, “I have named you friends because I’ve let you in on everything I’ve heard from the Father.” This “intimate and organic” relationship is what the vine and the branches imagery is all about, sharing the soil and the roots and the connections.

*Lord,*

*Thank you for the gift of being at-home in you. Amen.*



## Fifth Sunday of Lent

Sunday, April 3

I AM the Door for the Sheep



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# You and Me Against the World | John 15:18-27

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Laurie Jones

Monday, April 4

If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world—therefore the world hates you.... When the advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father, he will testify because you have been with me from the beginning.

I remember a song sung by Helen Reddy called “You and Me Against the World” where the refrain was “You and me against the world, sometimes it feels like you and me against the world.” I think we’ve all had this thought at one point or another. The song was about a boy and his mom, and the lyrics go on to say: “And for all the times we’ve cried, I always felt that God was on our side.” It’s a very special feeling when you have someone to go through the world with, to feel not so alone. It’s an especially great feeling to know that God has sent “the advocate,” the Holy Spirit, to be with us as we move through our days and nights whether we have an earthly partner or not. The world is a rough place to venture through and we need an advocate guiding us along.

*Dear Lord,*

*It’s you and me against the world. Please be with me and keep me safe; hold me in your arms and hold me close when I’m scared. Amen.*

## Um... I Can Hear You | John 16:1-24

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Derek Handley

Tuesday, April 5

It seems like the disciples are confused about something Jesus said around every corner of the Bible. It's easy for us to read the Bible and in hindsight (chronologically speaking) chastise the disciples. "How do they not understand what he is saying??" Well, none of us can truly feel the weight of this moment in time when the Christ was telling his best friends that he was going to die. Nonetheless, it makes me feel humbled that Christ's chosen few have a hard time understanding Jesus, understanding God. It's the understatement of the century to say that I have had moments in my life when I have had the same problem.

There is another profound yet arguably hidden message in this passage as well. Amidst their confusion, the disciples are muttering to themselves about what Jesus meant when he said:

"A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me.. Because I am going to the Father." (verse 17)

You know, on second thought, I understand why they were confused, that is terrible grammar... ignore that. Seriously though, I just want Jesus to say here: "Um.. I can hear you. I'm literally standing right here."

He does call them out perhaps in his own way. He elaborates and explains how they will have great joy amidst pain which is a comforting message in its own right of course.

My takeaway (at least this time around) is that we are so often like the disciples in verse 17. We mutter to each other what we think the Bible means, what God is trying to tell us. More times than I would think, I have to remind myself that God is "literally standing right here" in front of me. All the time. That was a promise made to us (Matthew 28:20).

*Ever-Present God,*

*Thank you for your promise that you are with us always. Help us remember this. Please forgive us for our forgetfulness, and remind us that you are here in times that we are incapable of holding on to that promise. Amen.*

# Standing on the Promises.. In Hard Times

## John 16:25-33

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Charlie Berthoud

Wednesday, April 6

As you've gathered by now, the Farewell Discourse in John 14-17 has Jesus preparing his disciples for an uncertain future, a time of separation from him.

Today we hear Jesus saying:

"The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" (16:32-33)

Covid has scattered our church community, as well as our families and friendships. We may not face persecution like the early church did, but we are divided politically, racially, culturally. We are exhausted. Life is hard right now.

In these hard times we need to cling to the promises of Jesus:

- the promise of peace (see also John 14:27)
- the promise of love (John 15:9)
- the promise of friendship with Jesus (John 15:14-15)
- and the promise that God's Spirit is with us always (John 14:26 and many other places).

Jesus is our Lord and Savior. Jesus is our Teacher and Friend. Jesus is our Way, our Truth, our Life.

*Dear God,*

*Thank you for sending Jesus to call us and get us back on track, to forgive us and renew us, and to give us courage for the journey ahead. Help us to keep listening, learning, and following. Amen.*

# Are We There Yet? | John 17

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Marilyn Unruh

Thursday, April 7

Jesus is praying: (vs.3) “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”

Contrary to thinking that eternal life is a quantitative unending duration of an afterlife, here we have Jesus saying that eternal life is a qualitative experience that we can enter into in this mortal life.

Jesus follows his description of eternal life with, “I have finished the work thou gavest me to do.” Earlier in this gospel (4:34) Jesus told his disciples, “My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to finish his work.” Again, (5:36) Jesus refers to “the works the Father has given me to finish.” On the cross his dying words were, “It is finished.” We gather from this that beyond his teaching and healing ministry there was a greater work that God sent Jesus to finish.

One of the early church fathers, Ireneaus, taught that we humans are not yet complete and are still a work in progress. The apostle Paul sums up his chapter on love by saying that now we know in part, but seeing face to face and knowing as we are known are still ahead of us. Various references in the Scriptures to 'the last day' and 'the day of the Lord' indicate that we are not there yet.

In our current state human nature is corruptible. By taking on human nature Jesus would have become corruptible. He was tempted as we are tempted. But from the temptation in the wilderness, throughout his life, culminating in the cross, he was never corrupted. His choices were for the eternal over the temporal, i.e., love over domination. In this way he would finish creation by completing the human being as God intends us to be, thus opening the way for us to follow him on this path that leads to eternal life where, completed, we will see face to face and know as we are known, the only true God and Jesus Christ.

“Thus the heavens and the earth were finished. . .” (Genesis 2:1). May it be so.

*Lord,*

*May we learn, in following Jesus, to discern the source of the choices we make, large and small, whether they are rooted in love or domination. Thank you for giving us this way to participate in your process of bringing us to completion. Amen.*

# Ah, Holy Jesus! | John 18:1-27

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Melissa Hinz

Friday, April 8

It is a blessing to be able to move through the church year and experience the seasons and holy days through music. The hymns and songs of Lent can be especially poignant as they draw us into the story of Jesus' brief life here on earth. Whether faithful songs of Jesus' ministry, triumphant hymns of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday or the haunting and sobering melodies of Good Friday, this music allows the Spirit to move and breathe in us as we engage with the stories of Jesus more deeply.

John 18:1-27 is the betrayal and arrest of Jesus, followed by Peter's denial of Jesus. The moment of the cock crowing and Peter having to face his denial of Jesus is, for me, always so very sobering. It leads me to consider ways in which I deny Jesus every day, small and not-so-small. I consider how like Peter I am, and yet, how faithful and compassionate Jesus is. I would like to share some of the text from one of the most haunting and beautiful Lenten hymns. May this text draw you into the story and allow you to experience Jesus' love for you as you grapple with the sacrifice that he made for all of us on the cross. You may even consider listening to a recording of the hymn.

“Ah, Holy Jesus” text by Johann Heermann, 1630; trans. Robert Seymour Bridges, 1899  
Ah, holy Jesus, how hast thou offended, that we to judge thee have in hate pretended?  
By foes derided, by thine own rejected, O most afflicted!

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee? Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.  
'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee; I crucified thee.

The final stanza can serve as the prayer today:

*Therefore, kind Jesus, since I cannot pay thee, I do adore thee and will ever pray thee,  
think on thy pity and thy love unswerving, not my deserving. Amen.*

## Passing the Buck | John 18:28-40

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Grady Brown

Saturday, April 9

What struck me as I read and reread this passage was how badly Pilate was trying to shirk responsibility; to pass the buck. This dude was desperate to find an “out” in an uncomfortable situation. Even after trying to get Herod to decide Jesus’ fate, Pilate tries again and again, and eventually succeeds, in getting a crowd to pass judgement on Jesus, rather than own his responsibility and make a tough decision - one that certainly entailed its fair share of consequences. What’s more, is that throughout this story of Jesus’ trail, Pilate thinks Jesus is innocent or, at the very least, not deserving of death.

We all face difficult decisions in our work, personal, and faith lives. I can safely say, from personal experience, that there have been several times where the easy solution is appealing – trying to sidestep or find a path of avoidance to quell the anxiety and discomfort of making difficult decisions and owning difficult truths. It may be easier to ask a crowd or find somebody else to make the call, but as we clearly learn in this reading, that this sometimes doesn’t get us to the right answer and doesn’t absolve us of the ultimate responsibility we bear.

As we head towards Easter Sunday, it seems like an opportune time to reflect on the role of responsibility, difficult decisions, and tricky truths in our lives. In this important season of forgiveness and in the presence of Jesus - can we accept and grow from difficult decisions in our lives, own and accept uncomfortable truths and sins, and walk this path of rebirth with our Savior?

*Dear Lord,*

*During this Easter Sunday, be with us as we walk this journey of rebirth; accepting the difficult decisions and truths we face but also the everlasting love and forgiveness found in faith. Amen.*



## Palm Sunday

Sunday, April 10

I AM the Way and the Truth and the Life



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John's gospel has many memorable words of Jesus, such as the 'I am' statements, which ring down the centuries to inspire us. But this book has other words with terrible consequences.

John's recounting of Pilate's questioning of Jesus clearly states that it is "the Jews" who shout "Crucify him." Some current versions soften the effect by having "the crowd" or "the people" shouting. Others give all the murderous clamoring to the Jewish leaders. But the original text places the blame squarely on "the Jews."

This choice of words has led to countless deaths of Jews at the hands of Christians through the centuries. In relating the death of the Prince of Peace, the gospel writer provoked pogroms and persecution. Words matter.

The phrase "the Jews" is odd since there were more Jews dispersed throughout the Roman empire than lived in Jerusalem. It's akin to describing a group of protesters in New York City as "the Americans."

This choice of language is even stranger because Jesus and his followers were Jews. Was the gospel writer trying to hide that Jesus was Jewish?

John wrote at a time when the young Christian movement sought to differentiate itself from Jewish practices. Perhaps the gospel writer held some animosity against traditional Jews and here was an opportunity to attack them. Strange that a Biblical writer would use a gospel to advance his bigotry.

Ample opportunity existed for the gospel writer to distinguish between all Jews and the Jewish leaders or the crowd, but he intentionally misled his readers. The Jews -- all of them -- shout, "Crucify him."

These awful words are in our Bible. We can't ignore them and must acknowledge the terrible hurt they've caused. In response we should live by Jesus' example of compassion for all.

*Dear God,*

*Help us choose words of peace that we may celebrate the Prince of Peace. Amen.*

## Seeing the Harsh Truth | John 19:16-42

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Michael Whitley

Tuesday, April 12

In John Chapter 19 verses 16 to 42 we come to the unvarnished truth: The crucifixion and death of Jesus. There are other places in his gospel where John is poetic in his description of eternal life, of the sacrifice Jesus will make so that we might live forever. But for Jesus to be the source of eternal life, he must first fulfil his destiny to die on the cross.

John's words are simple and direct. He does not look away. He does not hide from the details. It is, for me, one of the most difficult sections in the bible because I want to skip ahead, to avoid the harsh truth. And in that desire, I see a lesson from John. We must face things that are difficult. We must see them plainly and truthfully. Skipping over the suffering of this world, and failing to see it clearly, leaves our understanding incomplete.

John also wants to make clear the price of our salvation and the thanks we owe – to God for planning for our salvation and to Jesus for his bravery in facing a brutal death at the hands of captors who wanted him to suffer and be humiliated. It is a debt we lack the currency to repay, but we can thank Jesus by working to end the suffering we see around us – by not looking away from those who suffer because it is hard to see the truth and doing what we can to make a difference.

*Jesus,*

*Today we are reminded to thank you for the suffering you endured to grant us the gift of eternal life. We pray that you help us see the suffering present in our world and give us the strength to help lift the weight of those that suffer. We pray John's words will give us the strength to carry your light and share it with the world.*

*Amen.*

# In the Beginning Was the Word... “Mary!” |

## John 20:1-23

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Eric Wendorff

Wednesday, April 13

“But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb. . . . Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned and said to him in Hebrew, “Rabbouni!” (which means Teacher).”

The prologue of John’s Gospel is the most philosophical, the least personal and intimate, of the Gospel incarnation narratives. Rather than giving us Baby Jesus in the manger, John recalls God’s creation of the heavens and earth in Genesis and proclaims the Cosmic Christ: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . All things came into being through him . . . The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us. . . .”

And yet John’s account of Mary Magdalene’s encounter with the Risen Christ is the most personal, tender and intimate of the Gospel resurrection narratives. It is early on the first day of the week and still dark – reminiscent of the first day of creation in Genesis 1 when “darkness covered the face of the deep.” Mary Magdalene, a troubled follower from whom Jesus had “cast out seven demons,” has come to honor Jesus’ broken and dead body in the tomb where it had been laid. Heart-broken on not finding the body, Mary weeps at the empty tomb. In the dark, through her tears, she does not recognize the risen Jesus, mistaking him for the gardener (the caretaker of the place of the dead). It is only when Jesus addresses her by her name, “Mary!” that she recognizes the Risen Christ. “Rabbouni!” she responds – “Dearest Master and Teacher!”

The Word through whom the endless galaxies came into existence addresses a troubled first century Jewish woman by name. Mary Magdalene is insignificant in the whole of human history and the infinitude of the universe, but she is a unique soul of ultimate value to the God who is Love in Jesus Christ. As is each one of us.

*Jesus,*

*Dearest master and teacher, may I hear and respond when you call me by name. Amen*

## Doubt | John 20:24-31

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Jane Bertram

Thursday, April 14 (Maundy Thursday)

Although some of Jesus' disciples related their encounter with the risen Jesus to those who were not present, Thomas, one of the original twelve, proclaimed, "I will not believe" in the resurrection of Jesus unless he saw the wounds of crucifixion on the body of the risen Christ.

A week later, Jesus appeared to Thomas and the others. Thomas could see and touch Jesus. "Put your finger here. Look at my hands.....no more disbelief. Believe!"

Over the years, many of us look for concrete evidence to strengthen and shape our belief in God. Perhaps we have felt the presence of the Holy Spirit within us, or reading, meditation or testimony of others has brought us closer to believe and embrace the grace of God in our lives. Several weeks ago, as I was rummaging through the box of memorabilia that has survived multiple moves through several states and several attempts at decluttering, I found a sermonette that I had written as a high school student for Youth Sunday. Ironically, the topic was Thomas. I posed typical questions of a curious teenager such as "Who is Jesus Christ, what significance does his life have on ours?" I compared Thomas to the modern "young person.....trying to find a relationship with Jesus, searching for the truth to soothe our doubts." I wrote "in Thomas, we see ourselves projected into the life of Jesus.....in some ways he (Thomas) brings us closer to Jesus." The last sentence was, "It is better to doubt and find the truth rather than believe without knowing in what we believe or to doubt and not see the truth."

Maybe Jesus, by presenting himself to Thomas is acknowledging Thomas' doubting nature and in turn his humanity with all of its flaws, implying that it's OK for us to doubt, as we seek the truth.

John concludes with the familiar verse, "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe." New and future Christians will rely on the testimony of the disciples as they grow in faith and experience the presence, guidance and grace of God.

*Gracious God,*

*Help me to embrace my doubts, enabling me to move forward and open my heart and senses to the presence, guidance and grace of God. Amen.*

## Fishing with Christ | John 21:1-14

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Jennifer Morgan

Friday, April 15 (Good Friday)

This passage describes the last appearance of the Lord to seven of his disciples. They have had a weary night of fishing without results, when Jesus appears and suggests they throw their nets over the left side of the boat one more time. (At this point in the story, they do not recognize him.) Suddenly, the net is filled with fish, more than can be dragged onto the boat. Now they realize it is Jesus who has provided their net with so many fish. When they come ashore, a fire and breakfast are already prepared for them.

As he has so many times before, the Lord breaks bread and shares a meal with them. In this narrative, I see a theme that is familiar to us. Not knowing what else to do while still mourning the loss of their friend and teacher, the disciples returned to the mundane tasks of their lives, one of which for these men, was fishing. Then Christ appeared, making himself known by his actions, and they are uplifted. If I can stay alert to the divine presence during my everyday routine, I can “see” Jesus, and am reminded of the Lord’s faithfulness. It may be as simple as a timely note from a friend, or as big as a loved one’s recovery from major surgery- these are uplifting moments- times when we can feel God’s presence, if we are open to it!

*Lord,*

*Help us to remain in constant contact with you and recognize your faithfulness to us as we go about living in your world. May we let the Holy Spirit guide us to live as the people you want us to be. Amen.*

## Leaning In and Letting Go | John 21:15-25

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Jo Wiersema

Saturday, April 16

I don't do well when I'm not in control. I'm organized and I keep my schedule on track from personal to professional tasks. Often when reflecting on scripture, I'll think through what it would feel like to be a part of this time and in another person's shoes. Would I have sat as Peter and confidently told Jesus that I love him and not question where the point of the story was going? As much as I want to think I would have been patient in these moments, I must admit I would have done exactly as Peter did. "Jesus, what in the world? Why are you asking me the same questions, we have people to heal and things to do and we need to get back to the POINT."

But isn't that exactly the point? As much as I think I know better than Jesus, that I know better than God's will, I don't. The schedule I try to keep with Jesus doesn't line up with the patient nature he tries to grow in me daily. It's moments when I'm looking at the clock and making the to-do list that I am humbled by the repetitive nature of this passage. "I love you, Jesus, you know I love you, what more do you want?" What I think God wants of us is to say I love you until we mean it. Until we live and breathe the words, in the best of times, but also in the worst of times. I love you when I'm broken. I love you when I'm exhausted. I love you, when I am forced to let go of control and give it up and lean into God's will. I love you even when I struggle to love myself because it was you who first loved me.

*Gracious God of love and care,*

*Thank you for the challenges you present to us. Thank you for growing us in your image, so that we might be humbled by the power we have to love others well and to love you with our heart, soul, and mind. Thank you for the love we must give not only you and our neighbors, but the love we can offer ourselves. In your son's name. Amen.*



# Easter Sunday

Sunday, April 17

I AM the Resurrection and the Life







