


# A Lenten Devotional Guide for 2026



a journey to  
find the  
light

# GRACE UNFOLDING



Produced by  
Huntingdon College



## Welcome to *GRACE UNFOLDING*, a Lenten guide!

The results of daily practice of Scripture, thoughtful meditation, and prayer are rarely seen daily. To be sure, there are days when activities coincide with the themes of the daily readings. Most often, though, the results of our devotion are seen in the ending of seasons. In other words, while God's work in our lives is sometimes seen in the moment, it is *always* seen over time.

*GRACE UNFOLDING* is an invitation to see God's activity in your life over a 40-plus day period called Lent. It is a season of preparation. It is a season of trial. It is a season of intentionally setting our personal desires in the back seat so that we might hear and grapple with this unfolding work that grace is doing in us.

The authors of these devotions are students, faculty, staff, Trustees, and friends of Huntingdon College. I am grateful for each of them.

President Anthony Leigh proclaimed this academic year as a year to *Celebrate Huntingdon!* While Lent is decidedly not a season for celebration, we continue to be grateful for this thriving institution of the Church. Here are some reasons for our gratitude:

- The largest Fall and Spring residential enrollment in Huntingdon history
- A Top 10 ranking among regional colleges in the South by U.S. News and World Report
- A 38 percent increase in gifts to the Huntingdon Fund
- The renovation of facilities and the building of new facilities through the Heart of Huntingdon Campaign

Thank you for joining us on this Lenten journey of looking for GRACE UNFOLDING in our lives. If you would prefer the online experience, each day's devotional can be found online at [www.huntingdon.edu/church\\_relations](http://www.huntingdon.edu/church_relations).

May you see and know the goodness of God even in this season of self-denial.

Peace,



Rev. Dr. Brian V. Miller  
Vice President for External and Church Relations  
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## Ash Wednesday, February 18

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

Humans have been performative since long before Instagram. We learned long ago that we can curate the image we want others to see by just showing what we want to show them. The people of God have long had signs for repentance and lament. The ashes we receive on Ash Wednesday are an heir to those signs. (I must admit that I like to get my ashes the first thing in the morning so everyone sees them!)

The appointed scriptures for today address the performative possibilities of our signs of repentance. They address the sacrifices we ostensibly make for God. They may, indeed, be for God. They may, though, be for others' approval or acceptance or favor. Actual repentance and confession create a low-pressure system, inviting grace to replace the pride that has been emptied. It is when we have actually emptied ourselves of pretense that the Holy Spirit can move within us. Our performative signs of sacrifice could simply be the continuation of pride and self-interest that doesn't allow space for the Spirit.

The aroma of genuine sacrifice is sweet to God. Self-righteousness stinks.

When we ignore those who are hurting around us, self-righteousness is particularly noxious to God. It's no surprise that Jesus's admonishment against "storing up for yourselves treasures on earth" comes soon after the Beatitudes. Jesus is simply echoing Joel and Isaiah, among other prophets. "Your self-righteousness stinks."

Genuine sacrifice, then, happens within our hearts and among our neighbors. This may be a helpful way for us to think about this inward and outward activity. On the vertical plane, you are engaging in devotion, the individual act of prayer and connection with God. You may also be regularly engaged in worship, the corporate act of prayer and connection with God. On the horizontal plane, you can choose to engage with individuals in a compassionate way. You may also work for justice, recognizing and pushing against the ways that groups are disadvantaged or chronically afflicted by society.

However you choose to proceed in these 40-plus days, it's not for the 'Gram or Snap-worthy. It's for God, for your neighbors, and for you.

Prayer:

O God, who knows the impulse of our hearts and before whom our souls are bare, grant us grace while we empty ourselves in this season, so that devotion, worship, compassion, and justice may be the signs of our repentance. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Brian Miller is Vice President for External and Church Relations at Huntingdon College and an ordained elder in the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

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**Thursday, February 19**

Read: Psalm 51; Jonah 3:1-10; Romans 1:1-7

“Lord, Who Throughout These Forty Days”

*(United Methodist Hymnal, 269)*

Lord, who throughout these forty days  
for us didst fast and pray,  
teach us with thee to mourn our sins  
and close by thee to stay.

As thou with Satan didst contend,  
and didst the victory win,  
O give us strength in thee to fight,  
in thee to conquer sin.

As thou didst hunger bear, and thirst,  
so teach us, gracious Lord,  
to die to self, and chiefly live  
by thy most holy word.

And through these days of penitence,  
and through thy passiontide,  
yea, evermore in life and death,  
Jesus, with us abide.

Abide with us, that so, this life  
of suffering over past,  
an Easter of unending joy  
we may attain at last.

WORDS: Claudia F. Hernaman

TUNE: LAND OF REST

MUSIC: Annabel Morris Buchanan

METER: CM

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## Friday, February 20

Read: Psalm 51; Jonah 4:1-11; Romans 1:8-17

Generations are often defined by historical or technological shifts, but if you grew up in the church, your age can likely be identified by your Youth Group trends. You might belong to the era that first brought drums into the sanctuary or the one that never took off their WWJD bracelets. Perhaps your group debated the poetic lyrics of David Crowder (“unforeseen kiss” is the answer here, folks) or played "Oceans" at every single retreat for two years straight.

If you are in your mid-twenties, you likely remember the "Unashamed" movement. Sparked by the music of Christian rapper Lecrae and rooted in Romans 1:16, this trend emphasized a bold, vocal confidence of spreading the Gospel without fear of shame. The goal was to share your faith in any situation and to stand on the Word of God.

However, Paul’s original intent carried a deeper weight. When Paul wrote those words, the Gospel started with the literal shame and public humiliation of the Roman cross. To the surrounding world, there was nothing prestigious about following a crucified Savior. The "Good News" began in a place of deep social and physical disgrace. Though it may seem counterintuitive, this is where Lent finds its footing.

The Lenten journey is built upon these kinds of paradoxes:

- From darkness to light
- From graves to gardens
- From lament to joy
- From shame to resurrection

Throughout Lent, we witness God creating something out of what feels like nothing. We see Him reclaiming the places of our lives that feel the most broken or embarrassing. Perhaps the paradoxes you are currently living through are exactly where God is most active. If we are willing to accept the humility of the cross, we open ourselves to the power of His transformation.

Prayer:

O Lord, let us embrace the spaces that feel the most empty. Let us find your love and grace in the places we least expect. Help us to see you at work in the places where we doubt your presence the most. Amen.

*Mr. Miles Barnhardt '18 is Director of Student Ministries at Fairhope United Methodist Church in Fairhope, Alabama.*

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## Saturday, February 21

Read: Psalm 51; Isaiah 58:1-12; Matthew 18:1-7

Perhaps the 51<sup>st</sup> Psalm best captures the essence of the season of Lent. David in a time in his life of deep remorse and repentance cries out in this prayer: "Create in me a clean heart O God and put a new and right spirit within me...Restore to me the joy of your salvation". Here is voiced the longing of every follower of Christ and his ways.

In recent years since my retirement, I have discovered meaning and enjoyment in participating in the Rotary Club. Here in these weekly meetings, I am greeted by community leaders throughout our city trying to do the best for the Pensacola community in their professional relationships and in their personal opportunities. Each meeting commences with a recitation of "The Four Way Test," during which participants collectively affirm: "Of the things we think, say, or do: IS IT THE TRUTH? IS IT FAIR TO ALL CONCERNED? WILL IT BUILD GOOD WILL AND BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? WILL IT BE BENEFICIAL TO ALL CONCERNED?" What a better world we will have if all of us from time to time slow down in the rush of daily living and examine our lives in the light of what we have known to be best and hit the restart button.

### Prayer:

This season and the scripture of today helps us voice our prayer: "Create in me a clean heart O God and put a new and right spirit within me. Heavenly Father, Forgive our sins and restore us to your desires and your purpose for our life, through Christ our Lord we pray. Amen.

*The Reverend Henry Roberts '65 is a former member of the Huntingdon College Board of Trustees and a retired elder in the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

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## **The First Sunday in Lent**

**February 22**

Read: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

As I reflect on this passage today, January 16, I know that when I read this printed on February 22, we will be on the fifth day of our Lenten journey together. I traditionally embrace a Lenten sacrifice into my life as a daily reminder of Christ's sacrifice for me. This year, my Lenten sacrifice will be abstaining from desserts and sweet treats.

Perhaps there is no more difficult place of employment in America to have a 40-day abstention from sugar-infested bites of goodness than Huntingdon College. There is a basket of honey buns in the conference room directly across the hall from me. My colleague, Sherry, regularly brings around the most decadent apricot cake she makes. There are four tubs of ice cream available in the Huntingdon College dining hall available at every lunch and dinner, and we're talking about the good stuff like moose tracks and chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream. Plus, we have the great tempter of all -- the dessert bar -- home of Miss Christina's homemade larger-than-a-plate cookies and regular servings of chocolate chip bread pudding. I will truly be surrounded by Lenten sacrifice temptation for 40 days.

What's your Lenten sacrifice?

This story in Matthew describes Jesus being led into the wilderness for 40 days to be tempted by the devil. The first enticement Satan offers Jesus is bread after Jesus has fasted for 40 days. Knowing what I will be giving up for Lent, I know that I will be clinging to Jesus's words in Matthew 4:4 the day this is published and for the following 35 days. Jesus says to Satan, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." In this text, Jesus demonstrates for us obedience, resistance, and the power scripture plays in our spiritual disciplines. Jesus further admonishes Satan to refrain from testing God and to worship Him only.

Jesus's responses to Satan provide us with a road map to overcome not only the temptations of our Lenten sacrifices, but all the temptations that consume us. Many find the practice of memorizing scripture to be a helpful exercise when they are intentionally fighting sin and seeking to grow closer in their relationship to God. Paul's words to the church in Corinth are especially useful to those seeking to avoid a particular temptation in their life. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man, and God is faithful;" 1 Corinthians 10:13 reminds us, "he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it."

So, if you see me this Lenten season in the Huntingdon dining hall, know that I'm channeling the power of God to avoid the temptation provided to me by the dessert bar. Don't show me the daily cookie!

Prayer:

Lord, we praise you for the example of Jesus, who overcame the temptations of the devil in the wilderness. We confess that we have fallen short of your standard and have succumbed to sin in our lives. We love you and seek to be more Christ-like in our daily lives and in our avoidance of temptations and sin. Give us strength to be obedient to you and to remember your words to resist the sins and temptations we seek to avoid. Amen.

*Dr. Anthony Leigh is the 15th President of Huntingdon College*

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**Monday, February 23**

Read: Psalm 32; 1 Kings 19:1-8; Hebrews 2:10-18

“The Head That Once Was Crowned”

*(United Methodist Hymnal, 326)*

The head that once was crowned with thorns  
is crowned with glory now;  
a royal diadem adorns  
the mighty victor's brow.

The highest place that heaven affords  
belongs to him by right;  
the King of kings and Lord of lords,  
and heaven's eternal light.

The joy of all who dwell above,  
the joy of all below,  
to whom he manifests his love,  
and grants his name to know.

To them the cross with all its shame,  
with all its grace, is given;  
their name an everlasting name,  
their joy the joy of heaven.

They suffer with their Lord below;  
they reign with him above;  
their profit and their joy to know  
the mystery of his love.

The cross he bore is life and health,  
though shame and death to him,  
his people's hope, his people's wealth,  
their everlasting theme.

WORDS: Thomas Kelly

TUNE: ST. MAGNUS

MUSIC: Jeremiah Clark

METER: CM

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## Tuesday, February 24

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

One of my husband's favorite quotes from *The Andy Griffith Show* comes from an episode called "*The Sermon for Today*." A big-city preacher arrives in laid-back Mayberry to preach about the need to slow down. Barney, unsurprisingly, falls asleep. As they leave church, Andy and Aunt Bee gush about the sermon. Barney finally adds, "Yes—that's one subject you just can't talk enough about... sin!"

Yet sin is not where the Bible begins—or ends.

Scripture opens with God's beautiful and good creation and closes with a new creation, a New Jerusalem, where God once again dwells among God's people. But in between—and we live in between—it's a mess.

After Adam and Eve leave the garden, violence enters the story in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel. While that story raises many questions, today the focus is God's interaction with Cain. When God looks favorably on Abel's offering and not Cain's, Cain becomes angry and resentful. And just as God came looking for Adam and Eve and as the father goes out to the resentful elder son in Jesus' parable, God goes out to Cain, asking, "Why are you angry?" and warning him that if he does not address it, sin is waiting at the door.

This was likely not the first time Cain harbored resentment toward his brother. God names a truth we all know: unaddressed anger opens the door to sin. As Jesus later teaches, what comes out of us begins in the heart.

We know what happens next. Cain allows his resentment to take hold, and he kills his brother. And once again, God comes looking. Cain faces real consequences: the land will no longer produce, and he will become a wanderer.

But when Cain cries out that this is more than he can bear and fears for his life, God does something unexpected. God places a mark on him—not a mark of shame, but a mark of grace. A sign of protection and of God's continued care, even after terrible sin.

Our psalm today echoes this truth. David describes how the weight of hidden sin wore him down, but confession brought healing. Guilt acknowledged before God leads to restoration; shame that hides from God leads only to isolation and pain.

Too often, preaching about sin turns guilt into shame, convincing us that we are the problem rather than pointing us toward the God who heals. But God's response to both Cain and David tells a different story.

Even in the face of brokenness, God offers presence, mercy, and grace. Consequences remain, but abandonment does not.

That is why we can walk through Lent with honesty and hope. While we have been marked with ashes to remind us of our mortality, they also mark us as people held by grace.

Prayer:

Gracious God, search our hearts and turn us toward you. When anger or fear takes root within us, meet us with your mercy. Help us to confess honestly, receive your grace freely, and walk this Lenten journey trusting in your love.  
Amen.

*The Reverend Sherrill Clontz is Superintendent of the North District of the North Alabama Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church and serves on the Huntingdon College Board of Trustees.*

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**Wednesday, February 25**

Read: Psalm 32; Exodus 34:1-9, 27-28; Matthew 18:10-14

At my previous appointment, we were getting ready for the Nativity pageant practice and had pulled out all the costumes to try on and get the kids dressed. One of the little boys was given the lamb costume, and as soon as his mama had zipped up the back, he went on the run. For the rest of the evening, the adults all took turns as the lamb would try to escape, going for the doors as quickly as he could. At one point, I found myself sprinting down the aisle as the other adults were preoccupied, and his hand went straight for the door. The little sheep on the run was not quite happy when “Brother Hunter” blocked his exit.

I chuckle at this memory, as it became commonplace to chase this little one around the church. He would go on the run, and usually one of the adults or I would find him and bring him back to the fold. Over the years, he got quicker and yet he never got quite to the point where one of us would take our eyes off him long enough for him to get away completely. The little lamb was always going to be found, and we all had our eyes on him.

As we read the gospel of Matthew, we hear of how Jesus speaks about little ones and how all are valued in the kingdom of God. To make his point, he talks about the shepherd who, having one hundred sheep, discovers one is missing. The shepherd leaves the ninety-nine to search for the one and then brings them back. The shepherd is happier when they find the one than the ninety-nine who did not wander off. In the same way, the Father in heaven feels the same way about the little ones so they should not be lost.

This beautiful passage and my little friend at Brantley UMC remind us of how much God loves us. At some level, even in adulthood, we are all children who at times wander off or get away from God. We try to find our own way in our self-sufficiency, our professionalism, or all the other things we chase as we believe we can do all things without God.

Like a shepherd, Christ comes and finds us, rejoicing when the search is over. Through various seasons of life, when I have “wandered off,” I find God comes for me not with reproach or anger. Instead, I find the good shepherd who cradles me and rejoices in finding me. As we go through the season of Lent we discover how God is searching for us and no matter how far we stray, God always comes after us.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for being our good Shepherd who comes and searches for us. Help us to feel your love and embrace even when we wander or stray. In Christ’s name, we pray. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Hunter Pugh is Pastor of the Pike Road United Methodist Church. He also serves as adjunct faculty in the Religion Department at Huntingdon College.*

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## Thursday, February 26

Read: Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:1-3; 2 Timothy 1:3-7

In January of this year, about 30 alumni of Huntingdon's campus ministry from about 1979-1981 gathered for a mini-reunion. It was a powerful reminder of the ripple effects of one's life. We rarely have the blessing of knowing our effect on people we meet along life's journey. We were given holy moments with each other to remember and express our gratitude. In this season, reach out to those who have touched your life in life-giving ways. Find them. Make sure they know.

Renee Good's parents and her four siblings offered this testimony shortly after their dear child and sister was fatally shot in Minneapolis: "We want to thank everyone who has reached out in support of Renee and our family. The kind of unending care we've been given during this time is exactly the kind that she gave to everyone. 'Nae' was the beautiful light of our family and brought joy to anyone she met. She was relentlessly hopeful and optimistic, which was contagious. More than anything, she is there when your heart breaks and fills for another person. When we remember Nae, we remember her abundant heart, and we will move forward imitating that unending care."

I offer some version of this at the celebration of life services in which I am honored participate: "The best way to honor your loved one is to embody the best of them in your own life."

2 Timothy 1:3-5 I am grateful to God...when I remember you constantly in my prayers both night and day. Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you. For this reason, I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands...

Huntingdon alum Rev. J. Michael Bryan wrote a song that captures this gratitude for the witness and presence of others:

*I remember your faith, helping me to grow, I remember your faith, helping me to know  
That I will never be the same, and every time I hear your name  
I remember your faith*

In another song, J. Michael declares, "I hear Jesus in your song." May it be so in our lives.

Prayer:

Risen Lord, help me pursue holiness, kindness, wisdom, and justice that others will hear you in the song of my life.

*The Reverend Dr. Chris B. Hughes '76 is a retired United Methodist Elder who served as Campus Minister and Associate Director of Church relations from 1979-81.*

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## Friday, February 27

Read: Psalm 121; Micah 7:18-20; Romans 3:21-31

Psalm 121 was likely recited by travelers heading to Jerusalem, navigating through tough landscapes, facing dangers like bandits, scorching sun, and unknown threats. Their world was unstable, yet they trusted that “the Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore.” Our journeys are different—carpool rides and hospital visits, late-night news alerts and security alarms—but our hearts feel the same tug-of-war between fear and faith.

We live in a culture that tries to engineer safety: national security, home security, online security, even “safety” as a brand for children’s products. Some of this is wise and necessary; locking doors and planning ahead can be acts of love. But when fear becomes the air we breathe, our lives shrink. We brace for impact, assume the worst, and quietly accept a version of life that is far smaller than the life God longs to give.

Psalm 121 repeats one Hebrew verb six times in the NRSVue: “keep”—to watch over, guard, protect. God keeps our feet from slipping on the path, stays awake when we cannot, shades us from scorching heat and from the mysterious terrors of the night. In a world where other gods were thought to sleep or disappear for a season, Israel confessed a God who does not slumber or sleep.

This is not a promise that no harm will ever occur; the pilgrims who prayed this psalm still traveled through dangerous land. It is a promise that no danger, no valley, no wound will have the final word over those whose help comes from the Lord. When we live “inside” fear, every hill on the horizon appears threatening. When we live “outside” fear—under the shade of God’s keeping—we still see the hills, but we also see the One who created them.

This Lent, we can practice stepping “outside” of fear, not by denying danger, but by refusing to let it be the loudest voice in the room. Here is a simple daily practice:

### **1. *Pause and notice***

When we feel anxious or our chest tightens, we can pause for a minute. We might sit in a chair, put our feet on the floor, and take a slow, deep breath.

### **2. *Name the fear before God***

Silently or aloud, we finish this sentence: “Holy Keeper of Israel, today I am afraid of \_\_\_\_.” We do not edit ourselves. We simply tell the truth to the One who neither slumbers nor sleeps.

### **3. *Pray the promise***

After naming our fear, we recite one line from Psalm 121 slowly, serving as a counterbalance to that fear. For example: “The Lord will keep my life.” We repeat this line for three slow breaths,

allowing the words to move from our minds into our hearts. When our thoughts drift back to the fear, we gently bring our focus back to the promise.

**4.     *Take one small step of faith***

Finally, we ask, “If I trusted, even a little, that you are keeping watch over me, Lord, what is one small step I could take today?” Maybe we make a phone call we've been avoiding, give our child a bit of space, turn off the constant news feed, or simply go to sleep trusting that God will stay awake. We don't try to fix everything in one day; we just take the next faithful step.

As we walk through this Lenten season, we will still lock our doors, buckle our seatbelts, and do what love requires in protecting one another. Yet we do not have to live trapped inside fear. The God who kept watch over pilgrims on desert roads continues to watch over us as we go out and come in, today and forevermore. May we journey in that protection and discover that life with God is larger, freer, and more generous than fear could ever allow.

Prayer:

God of protection and provision, who through the presence of the Holy Spirit assures your love for us, grant us ability to recognize our anxious or fearful hearts so that by faith, we might walk confidently in the way of Jesus, with whom you and the Holy Spirit reign, one God forever and ever. Amen.

*The Reverend Dale R. Cohen is Senior Pastor at the First United Methodist Church of Florence, Alabama and serves on the Huntingdon College Board of Trustees.*

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**Saturday, February 28**

Read: Psalm 121; Isaiah 51:4-8; Luke 7:1-10

Everyone loves a good helping of justice. Don't you just love when people get what they deserve, especially when that person just *really* has it coming? I remember when I was in high school there was this guy on an opposing team who went around running his mouth about how they were going to beat us and he was going to embarrass me individually. The trash talk eventually got personal and after informing my teammates what was going on, we were locked and loaded! Fast forward to the game: he's the kickoff returner and decides to return the opening kick. It proved to be a costly mistake as he was hit so hard his helmet rolled from the 15-yard line almost into the endzone! After we get the ball back, we march down the field and my quarterback throws me a jump ball in the endzone, and guess who tries to break up the pass? It wasn't long after this when he was pulled from the game, not seeing the field for the rest of the night.

To me, that's a great representation of justice. He started the trash talking and got all that he wanted and more.

Fortunately for all of us, the Lord's justice works differently than this. The scriptures for today are written over the course of hundreds of years, but they share a common element of the Lord's justice. Even when we feel alone, overlooked, or just beaten on, these passages remind us that our God sees and reconciles all, even if it isn't always in the way we may think.

Psalm 121 reminds us that the Lord is on our side, guiding all of our steps, protecting us as we traverse this life. Isaiah 51 highlights the same with supporting themes of God's sovereignty over not only all the earth, but all creation as well. Both put our problems, skirmishes, and squabbles in an eternal perspective. Luke 7 does the same thing when talking about the Roman officer. Now, the texts say he was a good one, but you can imagine how most Jews felt about most Romans at this time in history. This is an awesome story about Jesus' healing power and about faith, but I also think we can learn a lot about the justice (and, in turn, mercy) of God.

We all have people we wish God would just smite with fire from Heaven (shoutout Elijah), because "they deserve it." I'm sure there were people who thought this Roman officer deserved smiting, even though he's a good guy in this story. Regardless, Jesus showed him grace and mercy. I'm sure we are a little quick to say what God should do because "they deserve it", but does God give us what we deserve? Even our worst enemies carry pain, burdens, regrets, just like we do. No matter how wrong others may do us, we've done God 100x worse.

One of my professors once told us that God's definition of justice isn't getting what you deserved but getting what you needed. We all needed a savior, and we were given one in the Lord Jesus. And, despite holding all the power to condemn and smite, He gave us His life! We



are called to do the same thing. I don't know what you carry with you as you read this, but I do know that Christ died so you can live in freedom.

Prayer:

God of mercy, help us be good stewards of the grace you have lent us on behalf of your son Jesus' blood. We deserve death, yet you still give us life. Thank you, Lord.

*Conner Bradford '24 teaches Elementary Math and Science and serves as an assistant football coach at McKenzie School in McKenzie, Alabama.*

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## The Second Sunday in Lent

### Sunday, March 1

Read: Genesis 12:1-4a; Psalm 121; Romans 4:1-5, 13-17; John 3:1-17

How many times have you heard, “There is more to life than what meets the eye.”?

Over time, I have interpreted this quote to mean simply, you must look beyond what we can see: especially, in situations of life; in relationships with family, as well as in experiences with co-workers, neighbors and the like. It is amazing what you learn when you look beyond what you see.

It was in 1983 that I became a reluctant mechanic. Having years of watching a “shade-tree” mechanic at home, I desired not to repeat experiences seen and those in which I participated. My wife’s father was a mechanic and we became well acquainted. I had purchased a vehicle with too many perks but not enough power. It was in the mountains of North Georgia that I learned, much too late, the limits of my vehicle. In essence, my father-in-law and I spent a great deal of time together - towing my car back and forth to the dealership. With an entrepreneurship mindset, we even developed a towing device especially for cars similar to what I drove. We shared so much time together, that I dove into the world of the auto mechanic. Yet, I believe it was in the sharing of “grease”, with him that my father-in-law appreciated more of my sharing together of faith with him. It was our journey of faith and trust. Likewise, Nicodemus reminds me of many on the Christian journey. We think highly enough to call Jesus our “teacher”. We are impressed with stories of miracles and healing that we go to church and try our best to do the right things. We desire a deeper relationship with the Lord, but haven’t truly experienced the life-giving power that Jesus invites us to experience.

We recognize we have too many priorities. We know God’s desire for us is to pause our self-imposed time limits, to stop the urge to do life by ourselves and to linger a little longer in God’s presence. But it seems we are in an unrelenting, unwavering, storm that won’t end. In the midst of our fast food, drive through, one-day Amazon delivery world, the mantra of relentless attack has crept into our conversations. It teaches us never to back down, that the fight is never over and the only answer to any question is to destroy, even if destruction of one means the destruction of many and the obliteration of sanity and hope.

In our scripture, John 3:1-17, we discover that Jesus does not judge or condemn Nicodemus for his lack of understanding but issues him an invitation of faith. Eugene Peterson’s interpretation of this passage in *The Message* says it this way:

*“Jesus said, You’re absolutely right. Take it from me: Unless a person is born from above it’s not possible to see what I’m pointing to – to God’s kingdom.”*

Jesus invites Nicodemus to go “deeper” on this journey of faith. As we continue on our journey of Lent, we are asked to go deeper in our faith. Nicodemus desired proof of God’s presence before taking the next steps. However, the journey of faith is one of trust, not proof. To become the witnesses God needs us to be means we must make space for God to work – to be born from above and believe.

I submit to you that we must make space in our lives for God to work through us. We must “change from the inside out”.

An anonymous writer wrote,

*“When I was young and free and my imagination had no limits, I dreamed of changing the world;*

*As I grew older and wiser, I realized the world would not change.*

*And I decided to shorten my sights somewhat and change my country. But it too seemed immovable.*

*As I entered my twilight years, in one desperate attempt, I sought to change only my family, those closest to me, but alas they would have nothing of it.*

*And now here I lie on my death bed and realize (perhaps for the first time) that if only I’d change myself first, then by example I may have influenced my family and with their encouragement and support, I may have bettered my country, and who knows, I may have changed the world.”*

Beloved, to look beyond what we can see demands we move from our comfort zone to a courage zone.

Now your “comfort zone” is risk free. It is safe and secure and does not require you to stretch.

But your “courage zone” requires risk. In your courage zone, you’re stretched to reach your full potential.

Nicodemus experienced a stretch of his faith and on this Lenten journey – so do we.

Prayer:

Generous God, thank you for opportunities to stretch and to grow. Give us your power, that we might go deeper for our own rebirth and your glory. In Christ’s name, Amen.

*Bishop L. Jonathan Holston is resident bishop of the Alabama-West Florida and North Alabama Conferences. Bishop Holston is married to the former Felecia Brown.*

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## Monday, March 2

Read: Psalm 128; Numbers 21:4-9; Hebrews 3:1-6

What a chaotic scene we find in Numbers 21:4-9... The Israelites are grumbling and whining because they are wandering in the wilderness, they are surrounded by enemies, and there is no food or water (but really there is, they are just *fed* up with it—pun intended). Then, God sends some serpents (which we all remember how unwelcomed those creatures are) to resolve this? Sure, it's God and God can do as God pleases. But this seems extreme. Eventually the people repent and God... makes them look at a serpent on a pole to be healed. Of course this is not the most outlandish story in Numbers, but it also is not the most logical. So, we must lean into what the season of Lent does: slows us down, unsettles us, and calls us to honest self-examination.

If we are willing to look at this story in the full context of Numbers, and of the story of the Israelites, we can start to see that this is not a story about snakes. This is a story about attention. Since the moment of the Exodus, the Israelites have been grumbling, unable to see the big picture of what God is doing (see Exodus 14:11). And, each time, God makes a way. The people then praise God until something less than ideal happens and then the cycle repeats: grumbling, deliverance, praise, repeat. Eventually, the cycle takes us to this point in Numbers where Israel's grumbling has led to a real "Snakes on a Plane" situation. Their grumbling turns to fear and then we hit the deliverance portion of the cycle. It would be quite the undertaking to try and outline this situation as either literal or metaphorical and then explain God's logic here, but that is not what the texts asks of us. Instead, our task is to pay attention where the Israelites did not.

God is trying to do something amazing with this people, but they keep getting in the way! In fact, the only reason the people are still wandering in the wilderness is because they were too afraid to enter the Promised Land (see Numbers 14). So, when we get to Numbers 21, we receive the implicit response to "pay attention to that which is poisoning you!" The people receive healing when they look up to the serpent that Moses crafted. What could easily be seen as a moment of idolatry can instead be viewed as a powerful rhetorical device. "Pay attention!" says the Lord. Take a close look at the real problem. The people have routinely been short-sighted while God has been laying the stepping stones for generations to come. If they could only see beyond their current circumstances, placing their trust in God, then perhaps they would stop grumbling long enough for God's faithfulness to unfold before them.

This season of Lent gives us the opportunity to reflect, to see where we have been standing in God's way with our own priorities. God did not take the serpents away from the Israelites, like they had asked. Instead, God had them reflect on the real poison among them. Where might God be calling you to *pay attention*? What chaos might be a result of us getting in God's way? And what might God be asking you to reflect on this season?

Prayer: God of healing and order, when we stir up chaos with our own priorities, when we poison ourselves and others with our short-sightedness, challenge us. Make us uncomfortable until we recall that you are the only source of peace, and we find our trust in you. Amen.

*The Reverend Micah Wright '15 serves as associate pastor at Foley United Methodist Church in Foley, Alabama and is a Licensed Professional Counselor.*

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**Tuesday, March 3**

Read: Psalm 128; Isaiah 65:17-25; Romans 4:6-13

Psychologists, anthropologists, and other students of human behavior have long observed that fear tends to turn people inward. When fear takes hold, we grow more insular—more suspicious of others, more distrustful, and more isolated. We can see ample evidence of this dynamic in the world today, as many people live with deep uncertainty and anxiety about the future.

Lent, of course, is a season of reflection and repentance, a time when we follow the story of Jesus as he sets his face toward Jerusalem. Given the gravity of that journey, it might seem natural to assume that fear belongs at the center of this season. Yet the scriptures for today tell a different story—one marked not by fear, but by hope. The psalmist speaks of joy found in walking in God's ways. The Apostle Paul reminds us that God's grace does not depend on human achievement or religious markers (circumcision). And the prophet Isaiah dares to imagine a new creation in which all people know belonging, nourishment, shelter, and peace.

Together, these texts offer a shared and powerful vision: a future defined by universality and peace. In this new creation, the faithful gather without fear, weapons are laid down, and neighbors live in harmony. Former enemies become companions, the land yields enough for all, and God's purposes for humanity are finally revealed. In such a world, fear has no place.

If fear is what drives us to distrust one another, to hoard resources, to vilify our neighbors, and to turn away from suffering, then perhaps Lent calls us to repent not only of our actions, but of our fear itself. In releasing it, even imperfectly, we may begin to take small but faithful steps toward the world God longs to bring into being.

Prayer:

God, who created all and called all things good, grant me your eyes today that I might see others with your generous love. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Tyler Christiansen is Pastor of Grace, a United Methodist Congregation, in Birmingham and serves on the Huntingdon College Board of Trustees*

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**Wednesday, March 4**

Read: Psalm 128; Ezekiel 36:22-32; John 7:53-8:11

As a mother of three, two toddlers and an infant, patience is a finite but crucial resource. Through tattling, tears, and tantrums, I am constantly on the defense hoping to stave off the explosion that in very tense moments feels inevitable. And before another whine echoes in the chaos, I feel the desperate, angry, helpless “STOP” shoot up from my diaphragm, travel along my vocal cords and land on the ears of my shocked and bewildered children. What becomes important in this parental predicament is my decision to A) double down on the frustration and continue to shout, B) immediately console the hurt feelings, or to C) pause and linger briefly in the silence of our collective “what just happened” in the hopes that not too much damage hasn’t been done.

In the Gospel of John, the story of Jesus’ interactions with a woman “caught in the *very* act of adultery” and her would-be accusers provides us a Masterclass in parenting through a difficult moment. Rather than fueling the fire of emotions by condemning the woman brought before him or lambasting the accusers for interrupting his teaching, Jesus does something I rarely have the energy or clarity of mind to do; he takes a beat. I imagine him closing his eyes and taking a deep breath as he enters a deep squat to doodle on the ground. When Jesus’ non-responsive response does not elicit the kind of alarm that *should* be becoming of one who is deeply committed to the teachings of Torah, the accusers continue to make a big stink. Until finally, with the patience only the Son of God could possess, he stands back up to diffuse the tension once and for all. “Let anyone among you...” is the starting point of a new alternative to the petty vindictiveness of the accusers, the fearful dread of the woman, and the silence of those who bore witness to the scene. Not through an alter call or loud proclamation, but through another sequence of breath and deep squat, Jesus invites the accusers, the woman, and the witnesses alike to really see each other by asking them to look into themselves. The miracle in this exchange is Jesus’ ability to course correct the people’s self-righteousness, fear, and complicity through invitation.

It’s a bold strategy that I haven’t yet mastered how to make effective in arguments between two-year olds, but it works in this passage, throughout the Biblical witness, and in the great stories of love and redemption we encounter today. This story reminds us that the work of forgiveness, of vindication, of justice does not begin with *our* notions of how those things are accomplished. It begins **only** with God’s willingness to extend grace, forgiveness, and love to us and God’s invitation to us to respond in kind.

Throughout this season of Lent, my journey as a parent, as a citizen of the world, and as a beloved creation of God will continue. I anticipate that this season will call me deeper into taking these identities seriously and “going my way to sin no more.” But I am most grateful that the journey begins with, and only with, the invitation of the One who loves me enough to take a beat and await my response.

Prayer:

Give us, O God, the courage to wait before judging. Give us the grace to forgive. Give us the wisdom to know that we can do so because you have done much more for us. Amen.

*Mrs. Bria Rochelle-Stephens '18 is Vice President for Strategic Academic Initiatives, Director of the Presidential Scholars Program, and Instructor of Religion at Huntingdon College, returning to the College after completion of a Master of Divinity at Duke Divinity School. She is a candidate for ordination in the United Methodist Church.*

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**Thursday, March 5**

Read: Psalm 95; Exodus 16:1-8; Colossians 1:15-23

**“Sweet the rain’s new fall sunlit from heaven, like the first dewfall on the first grass. Praise for the sweetness of the wet garden, sprung in completeness where God’s feet pass.”** These words come from the second stanza of “Morning Has Broken” written by Eleanor Farjeon in 1931. Eleanor was known in England for her whimsical nursery rhymes. The stories she crafted were simple, but they captivated young minds. This is because her work compels readers to employ their imagination in a way that makes them feel a part of her stories.

I invite you to employ your imagination in such a manner that you find yourself in the story of the Israelites. Can you feel the excitement that flooded through the community as they experienced deliverance from Egypt? Can you also feel the fear and confusion that comes along with leaving behind everything you have ever known to follow the God of your ancestors? Can you feel their weariness as they travel indefinitely with no food? Their bodies were depleted of energy as they were desperate for sustenance. Their spirits all the more drained as they searched for meaning in following this God they barely knew into the desert.

Just as they are ready to abandon YHWH and turn back towards Egypt God provides them with the sustenance they were searching for, spiritual and physical. God's providential act declares to the Israelites that the God who delivered them from Egypt is the God who will sustain them. God gives the Israelites the peace of knowing God's sustenance is not just to sustain them in the desert, but that it is an everlasting sustenance. Through Christ, the everlasting sustenance of God is fully realized. By looking to the one all the fullness of God dwells in we can clearly see how the places that God's presence passes over all spring to completeness.

Prayer:

Lord, when our hearts are ready to forsake you lift our eyes to see the budding of the flower bushes which you are bringing to completion all around us.

*Mrs. Savannah Smith Edmonds '25 is a Master of Divinity student at Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey.*

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## Friday, March 6

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

“Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.” (Exod. 16:9)

Recently I was on a plane for 21 hours—my personal record. There were problems beyond my control, and honestly beyond the pilots’ control, that had us stuck longer than anyone wanted. And I did what I sometimes do when I’m tired and trapped: I grumbled. I bellyached for a long time.

And the truth is: I was fine. I was safe. I survived. My complaining didn’t match reality—it matched my anxiety.

That’s what makes Exodus 16 so honest. Israel is in the wilderness, hungry and afraid, and they complain. They murmur. They grumble. It’s not a polished prayer. It’s the low, repetitive sound of discontent—the *mutter-mutter* of a weary people. Even in English, “murmur” almost sounds like what it is.

Then Moses says a line that is both convicting and comforting:

“Draw near to the LORD, for he has heard your complaining.” (Exod. 16:9)

Not “God has heard your faith.” Not “God has heard your worship.” But “God has heard your complaining.”

That’s convicting because God is not fooled by our spiritual performance. God hears what is actually going on in us—the frustration we vent, the fear underneath it, the suspicion that we won’t have enough.

But it’s also deeply comforting. Because the next move in the story is not punishment. It’s provision. God gives manna—bread from heaven—enough for each day. The people are told to gather what they need, not to hoard, not to panic, not to live as if scarcity is their lord. This is grace: God answers them even when they don’t deserve it, and God teaches them trust one day at a time.

So, here’s the invitation: draw near. Bring the grumbling. Bring the bellyaching. Bring the honest truth. God can handle it. God hears it. And God still provides—often not the way we demand, but in the way we actually need: enough for today, and mercy again tomorrow.

Prayer: Lord, you have heard my complaining. Teach me to draw near, to receive today’s bread, and to trust you for tomorrow. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Geoffrey Lentz is Senior Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Pensacola and serves on the Huntington College Board of Trustees.*

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## Saturday, March 7

Read: Psalm 95; Exodus 16:27-35; John 4:1-6

In the barren stretches of the Sinai wilderness, the children of Israel faced a crisis of "enough." Their stomachs were empty, and their faith was wearing thin. In Exodus 16, God responds not with a warehouse of grain but with Manna—a daily, rhythmic gift that could not be hoarded. When some tried to gather more than they needed, bypassing the Sabbath rest, they found only emptiness and decay. The lesson was sharp and clear: God's provision is inextricably tied to His timing. The Manna was not merely food; it was a daily invitation to trust that the Provider would show up again tomorrow.

Centuries later, we find Jesus sitting by a well in Samaria. Exhausted from His journey, He rests at Jacob's Well at the "sixth hour"—the blistering heat of high noon. This moment in John 4 mirrors the wilderness experience. Just as the Israelites were weary and hungry, Jesus sits in the dust of human exhaustion. Yet as the story unfolds, we see that the "Living Water" He offers is the ultimate fulfillment of what the Manna foreshadowed.

Lent is our modern wilderness. It is a season when we intentionally strip away the "extra" to see whether we can truly survive on the "enough." We often find ourselves like the Israelites, frantically gathering, worried that God's grace might run out. We try to secure our own futures, filling our schedules and hearts with "bread" that rots by morning. He reminds us that the Manna kept in the golden jar (Exodus 16:33) was kept as a testimony—not of the bread itself, but of God's faithfulness through the generations.

As you walk through this Lenten season, consider where you are "gathering" out of fear rather than resting in faith. The same God who rained down bread from heaven now sits at the well of your deepest need, offering satisfaction that never runs dry.

What is the "extra Manna" in your life—a habit, a worry, or a pursuit of security—that God is asking you to release this Lent so you can learn to rely fully on Him each day?

Prayer:

Lord of the Wilderness, thank You for providing exactly what I need today. Forgive me for the times I try to store up Your grace out of fear of tomorrow. As I journey through Lent, draw me to the well of Living Water. May I find my rest in Your presence rather than in my own provision. Amen.

*The Reverend Misty Barrett '89 is an ordained elder in the Global Methodist Church and Pastor of Christ Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. She will serve as a reserve delegate of the Alabama-Emerald Coast Conference at the GMC General Conference in 2026.*

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## **The Third Sunday in Lent**

**Sunday, March 8**

Read: Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95; Romans 5:1-11; John 4:5-42

In this holy season of Lent we continue to make preparation for our celebration of Easter, the resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom “we now have a restored relationship with God.” (Romans 5:11 CEB)

It is natural for us to prepare for important celebrations because we are so grateful for that which we are celebrating. Restored relationships are especially precious because we experience them as the healing of division and the renewal of love that has been damaged.

As Christians we give thanks for God’s creating us, redeeming us through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, and sustaining us through the Holy Spirit’s presence with us every moment.

This year let us focus on the opportunities Lent gives us to prepare for a glorious Easter celebration!

Prayer:

Lord, help us to prepare our hearts and minds to celebrate your redeeming love throughout this season of preparation, so that we will be ready to join together in celebrating Easter this year.

*Bishop B. Michael Watson is a retired Bishop of The United Methodist Church, having served from 2000- 2016. He currently serves as Bishop-in-residence at Canterbury United Methodist Church in Mountain Brook, Alabama. Prior to episcopal election, Bishop Watson served as an ordained elder in the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.*

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## Monday, March 9

Read: Psalm 81; Genesis 24:1-27; 2 John 1:1-13

There is a holy ache that runs through today's scriptures—the ache of a God who longs to bless a people who will listen.

Psalm 81 opens with music, joy, and celebration. The tambourines are raised, the song is strong, the festival is alive. But the psalm does not end where it begins. The praise gives way to God's own voice, and that voice carries sorrow. *"I relieved your shoulder of the burden... but my people did not listen."* The tragedy here is not divine absence; it is divine neglect—and if we are honest, most of us recognize that pattern in our own lives. And still, the promise lingers: *"If my people would only listen... I would satisfy you with honey from the rock."* Even now, God's desire is not punishment, but provision—abundance drawn from the most unlikely places.

Genesis 24 gives us a living picture of what faithful listening looks like. Abraham's servant is entrusted with a future-shaping task: finding a wife for Isaac. He stands at a well, far from home, aware that human effort alone will not be enough. So, he prays—not loudly, not dramatically, but honestly. He asks for guidance, then watches carefully—the way we do when a decision is waiting on us and silence fills the room. Rebekah's kindness is not flashy or supernatural; it is practical, generous, and costly. She draws water again and again, serving without knowing the significance of her actions. In that ordinary faithfulness, the servant recognizes God's answer. Scripture tells us that before he explains himself, before the journey is completed, *he bows and worships*. Listening leads to recognition. Recognition leads to gratitude.

The brief letter of 2 John brings urgency and focus. The elder reminds the church that truth and love are inseparable companions. Truth without love becomes rigid and cold. Love without truth drifts into sentimentality. Both require attentiveness—walking according to what God has already revealed. There are many voices, the letter warns, that distract, distort, and divide. Faithfulness is not about novelty; it is about remaining rooted in Christ.

Together, these readings ask us a searching question: Are we listening carefully enough to discern God's guidance when it comes quietly—through prayerful waiting, through acts of kindness, through truth spoken in love? God is still speaking. God is still guiding. God is still offering honey from the rock. But listening demands humility, patience, and the courage to respond when clarity arrives.

May we be a people who listen—not only in moments of worship, but in decisions; not only in prayer, but in daily obedience. And when we recognize God's hand at work, may we bow in gratitude and walk forward in truth and love.

Prayer:

Gracious God, quiet our hearts enough to hear your voice, strengthen us to walk in your truth, and teach us to respond in love wherever you lead.

*Lemuel D. Gorden, III, MD is a physician with Alabama Pathology Associates and on the launch team of Pike Road United Methodist Church. He and his wife Josie are parents to Yvette Gorden, Huntingdon College's All-American golfer.*

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**Tuesday, March 10**

Read: Psalm 81; Genesis 29:1-14; 1 Corinthians 10:1-4

*Who gets the water?*

That was a real and pressing question in the world of the Bible, where water was scarce and survival depended on it. Wells were often covered with a large stone, so heavy that it took multiple shepherds to roll it away. This was an accountability measure put in place so that no one shepherd could take more than their share. The stone protected fair access for the whole community.

In Genesis, Rachel arrives at the well with her flock and has to wait. Only a few of the shepherds have gathered. And then Jacob sees Rachel walking up with her flock.

Instead of waiting for the other shepherds to show up and the system to work the way it always has, Jacob steps forward. He rolls the stone away himself. It's an impressive feat, even if it does break the rules. But love does that sometimes. Compassion does that. When Jacob sees Rachel, he cannot stand by. He finds a way to make sure she and her flock get water.

That story reminds me of another one.

Earlier this winter, Mrs. Heather—our Children's Director—and six faithful volunteers took our campers to Blue Lake for winter retreat. One of the central mission themes that weekend was access to clean drinking water, and the lesson stuck. My daughter Hazel came home and said, very matter-of-factly, "Mom, did you know thousands of people die every day because they don't have clean drinking water?"

The campers learned about a group right here in Alabama that designs a simple filtration device, something that can be added to an ordinary bucket to make unsafe water drinkable. To demonstrate how it works, the kids were sent down to Blue Lake to collect water. To make sure it was good and murky, they added cow manure. Yes, you heard me right, cow manure! Then they filtered the water through the device, and it came out perfectly clear. The yucky water had been purified.

Can you guess what they did next? Every kid at camp got to taste the water. There were squeals of delight over the fact that they were drinking water that once had cow manure in it and that something so simple could make such a difference!

As joyful as that moment was, it doesn't begin to compare with the joy of children around the world who will have clean drinking water for the first time. And our kids understood that. Mrs.

Heather shared that the next day many of them reflected on their own gratitude and then gave generously from their wads of crumpled dollar bills for the mission offering that night.

Our children don't always know what to care about, or how to help, but they want to help.

Jacob saw Rachel and her flock in need he was compelled to act. In the same way, once our kids saw these children in need, children they could identify with, who are part of the family of God, they were compelled to act.

The question then, and now, is still the same: *Who gets the water?*

When we see someone waiting at the well, will we stand by and protect the stone—or will we be so moved by love that we step forward, even if it costs us something, to make sure everyone has access to the life God intends?

Prayer:

Generous God, help me on this day to remember your goodness to me and reflect that generous love to my neighbors, my coworkers, my family, and all whom I meet. In Christ's name, Amen.

*The Reverend Gillian Walters '08 is Senior Minister at Dauphin Way United Methodist Church in Mobile, Alabama and serves on the Huntingdon College Board of Trustees.*

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**Wednesday, March 11**

Read: Psalm 81; Jeremiah 2:4-13; John 7:14-31, 37-39

*Lectio Divina: A Process for Meditating on Scripture*

One of the oldest spiritual practices of the Church is meditating on Scripture. It's a way to allow God's Word to penetrate our hearts and lives. Lectio is a simple process. Maybe you will choose to practice it with one of today's Scripture readings.

1. *Choose a scripture for focus:* You will sit with this one a while. So, it probably shouldn't be especially long.
  2. *Read it once quietly:* Just give it a pass through your mind, allowing it to sweep out other thoughts.
  3. *Read it again aloud:* Look for words or phrases that might stick out to you as you read.
  4. *Read it aloud again:* Allow that word or phrase to permeate the reading this time.
  5. *Read it a final time quietly:* Listen for how God might be speaking to you through the reading.
  6. *Notice:* Consider if there is a response that is being called for by God through this reading.
  7. *Pray:* Offer this response to God and listening for God's direction.
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**Thursday, March 12**

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

The Apostle Paul would have hated the algorithm.

The algorithm is the way that social media posts and information are ranked and presented to each of us. The algorithm is based on tons of data that machines learn from each of us. They know what we like and what we dislike. Most importantly for the platforms, they know what gets us to engage with the platform and with others on the platform.

Our emotions are often what drive our engagement. Whether purposeful or not, the result of the algorithm is often the prioritizing of things that make us angry more than make us happy. Getting hit with instances of highly emotional information can shape us in certain ways.

I'm concerned that the algorithm has helped the Church to forget about some basic tenets of Christian ethics. After a season of division in our broader social culture and within the Church, maybe we've allowed "the devil a foothold" as Paul describes in Ephesians 4:27. That foothold shapes our orientation toward others and toward the world.

The Reverend Dr. Mike Pearson recently reminded me that Paul, and Psalm 4:4 that Paul references, does not say that anger is sin. It specifically makes room for our feelings. The admonishment from Paul is about what we do with that anger and, ultimately, how we treat others. This is the foundation of Christian ethics. When we are pressed by others, do we respond as if we only have hope in strength to win the argument, the fight... the skirmish... the battle... the war? Or, do we respond with the trust in the way of Jesus?

Paul's reference to grieving the Holy Spirit is helpful here. Through the Holy Spirit, God seeks to transform us into the image of Christ. In Galatians, Paul references the fruit of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives (5:22-23). If we deny that work of love and joy and peace and patience and the others in our lives, surely we grieve the Holy Spirit. If we choose "bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander" (Eph. 4:31), surely grieve the Holy Spirit.

What is more formative in our lives? The Holy Spirit? Or the algorithm?

Prayer:

Gracious God who forgives, grant us grace to guard the Holy Spirit's work in our lives pricking our hearts when then devil is getting a foothold through anger so that we might reveal Christ to this world, in whose name we pray and who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Brian Miller is Vice President for External and Church Relations at Huntingdon College and an ordained elder in the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church*

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**Friday, March 13**

Read: Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:22-31; Ephesians 5:1-9

“He Leadeth Me: O Blessed Thought”

*(United Methodist Hymnal, 128)*

He leadeth me: O blessed thought!  
O words with heavenly comfort fraught!  
Whate'er I do, where'er I be,  
still 'tis God's hand that leadeth me.

Refrain:

He leadeth me, he leadeth me,  
by his own hand he leadeth me;  
his faithful follower I would be,  
for by his hand he leadeth me.

Sometimes mid scenes of deepest gloom,  
sometimes where Eden's bowers bloom,  
by waters still, o'er troubled sea,  
still 'tis his hand that leadeth me.

[Refrain]

Lord, I would place my hand in thine,  
nor ever murmur nor repine;  
content, whatever lot I see,  
since 'tis my God that leadeth me.

[Refrain]

And when my task on earth is done,  
when by thy grace the victory's won,  
e'en death's cold wave I will not flee,  
since God through Jordan leadeth me.

[Refrain]

WORDS: Joseph H. Gilmore, 1862

TUNE: HE LEADETH ME

MUSIC: William B. Bradbury, 1864

METER: LM with Refrain

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**Saturday, March 14**

Read: Psalm 23; 1 Samuel 15:32-34; John 1:1-9

Lent invites us to slow down enough to notice where we are being led and who we are trusting along the way. These passages gently bring us to a personal question: Who is shaping my decisions, my pace, and my sense of security right now?

I remember in 2020 during the Covid shutdown....Anyone remember that? I moved to Freeport in 2019 to launch our Crosspoint, Freeport Campus. I spent an entire year getting acclimated to a new city. I didn't know anyone in the community, and in case you didn't realize, it takes people to build a Church....so I had spent that year meeting people, positioning myself at community gatherings, hosting Launch Parties, and building a Launch Team. We launched on January 26th, 2020 and boy was God faithful!

349 people showed up for our first services. In a 5,500 sq. ft. facility, we packed out 3 services, and I thought we were in the middle of revival! God was moving, adding people weekly, people were making professions of faith, and so much more....until 7 weeks later we were forced to close the doors for 3 months. Remember when I said it takes people to build a church? We ended up being closed longer than we were open in those early weeks. Upon re-opening that June, we went from 3 services to 1, 349 people to 40, and I began to question God's voice and his faithfulness.

Had I heard God wrong? Did he really call me to this? This certainly wasn't part of the plan....right God? I was tempted to quit, run back to what was familiar, and give up all together. But in an ever so gentle way, God reminded me. "Sam, I didn't call you to gather crowds...I called you to make disciples. If you stay faithful and obedient that, I promise you I will stay faithful to you".

It was in this experience that I truly understood Psalm 23. In fact, that famous passage reminds us that God's nature is deeply personal. He is not distant or detached. He walks with us. Many of us can point to seasons where we felt clearly led, moments when God restored our soul, or times when we were carried through valleys we never would have chosen.

If you find yourself in a similar season or circumstance, I encourage you to slow down, get alone with God, turn down the noise of the world, and turn up the voice of the Lord. He is close. He is personal. He is with you and guiding you. He is your shepherd. He is your rest.

Another great reminder is found in John 1. In this passage, we see something profound. Jesus does not stay at a distance from our struggles. In fact, quite the opposite...he chooses to enter them. The Word became flesh. The Light shines into darkness, including the places in our lives that feel confusing, painful, or unfinished.

I imagine that many of us have stories where God met us, not after everything was fixed, but right in the middle of the mess. I experienced that during those months following the shutdown in Covid. Since then, I have had many moments that didn't make sense at all. But our past can be

a great reminder of what God can and will do in the future. Often, I draw from the well of Gods promises where he delivered me and it gives me faith that God will do it again!

If you find yourself struggling to make sense of your current pain, your current circumstances, or current failings, take heart! God is the God who will make a way. One day it will all make sense. And while I think many of us think the prize is the outcome, let me challenge that perspective and remind you that the prize is actually found in trusting the Lord in a deeper way. The prize is found in the obedience. Thank God we have a savior who understands our pain!

It is about telling the truth with God and allowing Him to lead us again. Jesus invites us to move from self-reliance to relationship, from control to surrender, and from hiding to light.

As you move through today, reflect on these questions:

Where have you seen God faithfully lead you before?

Where are you tempted to hold control instead of trust?

What part of your story might God be inviting you to bring into the light right now?

Prayer:

Good Shepherd, You know my story. You see where I have trusted You well and where I have struggled to let go. Lead me again today. Help me release what I am clinging to and trust You with what comes next. Jesus, be the Light that meets me right where I am. In Jesus Name, Amen.

*Pastor Sam Brown '11 is the Freeport, Florida Campus Pastor of Crosspoint, a Global Methodist Church.*

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## The Fourth Sunday in Lent

Sunday, March 15

Read: 1 Samuel 16:1-13; Psalm 23; Ephesians 5:8-14; John 9:1-41

It shouldn't be this hard to celebrate a miracle. The entire ninth chapter of John's Gospel tells the story of a man who was blind from birth. Jesus heals him and now, for the first time in his life, he is able to see. This is a hallelujah moment – except that no one is celebrating.

The friends and neighbors of the formerly blind man get into a disagreement as to whether this is truly the same man they have known as a beggar for years. No celebration here.

The religious leaders question that he was ever actually blind and they dispute that a person like Jesus could have healed him. No celebration here.

His parents admit that he is their son and that he was definitely born blind – but that is as far as they will go. No celebration here.

So, there he is, all alone on the greatest day of his life. Until Jesus finds him; and he finds Jesus. Then Jesus reveals to him—and to all of us—what is really going on:

*I came into this world for judgment, so that those who do not see may see and those who do see may become blind.*

In fulfillment of Jesus' words: the blind man receives his sight, but everyone else in the story loses theirs – not their physical vision but their capacity to recognize what they have witnessed. Neighbors, religious leaders, and parents are unable to see.

Thankfully, the formerly blind man never lets up. He can't answer every question they throw at him. But he doesn't need to, for he has absolute clarity about what matters most: *One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.*

If Lent is a season of personal reflection and self-examination, then this story is just what we need. It invites each of us to examine our own life and ask where we can truly say, "one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

Tell me your "once I was blind, but now I see" story. What kinds of blindness have you experienced? Was it anger, prejudice, lust, ignorance, greed, pride? Was it blindness toward another person? When did you regain your sight? Looking back now, don't try to explain it: Confess it. Like the man in John 9, you were blind; but now you see. This is your miracle. Glory to God. It shouldn't be so hard to celebrate such amazing grace.

Prayer:

Call to our minds, O Lord, the many kinds of blindness that we have experienced and from which you have delivered us. Open our lips that we may join the man born blind in confessing: “one thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see.” Through Christ our Lord, we pray. Amen.

*Bishop Lawson Bryan is a retired Bishop in The United Methodist Church, serving from 2016-2021 as Bishop of the South Georgia Conference. Prior to his episcopal election, Bishop Bryan served as an ordained elder in the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

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## Monday, March 16

Read: Psalm 146; Isaiah 59:9-19; Acts 9:1-20

The passages for today reflect on the power of God's grace in our lives, freely given and unearned. The Lenten season is a time to come as we are to God and self-examine areas where we are broken, lacking trust, and separated from God. It allows us the opportunity to reveal and reaffirm God's presence and direction in our life.

Psalm 146 tells us to not put our trust in humans but to always trust in God. The Psalmist also helps us to see God as someone who helps the oppressed, feeds those who are hungry, and gives sight to the blind. He is faithful forever and the source of our strength and hope.

Isaiah 59:9-19 reminds us that our sin separates us from God and as humans we are unable to save ourselves. God intervenes and freely gives himself to us even when we are lost in darkness. During the Lenten season we are reminded that we are broken and only God is able to save us.

Acts 9:1-20 describes Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. This story is a powerful reminder of the transformative power of God's grace. God pursues one of his fiercest persecutors, restoring his sight and leading to his conversion. In this unlikely encounter, God demonstrates that his grace has the power to change the direction and course of our lives in the most unexpected ways.

### Questions for Reflection:

1. In what areas of your life are you holding onto your own plans and not fully trusting in God?
2. In what ways can you use your God given calling and abilities to serve others and show God's grace?
3. Are there any areas of your life where God is calling you to change your habits or actions in response to His grace?

### Prayer:

Lord, we thank you for your grace that you continually give to us and show us each day. We ask that you remove our blind spots and give us your vision. Help us to trust in the plans You have made for us and not our own. During this time of Lent, reveal to us where we can show Your grace to others. Thank you again, God, for loving us despite our brokenness and relentlessly pursuing us with your grace.

*Dr. Sara Shoffner is the Vice President for Student Academic Success and Associate Professor of Sport Management at Huntingdon College and a member of the First United Methodist Church of Montgomery.*

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**Tuesday, March 17**

Read: Psalm 146; Isaiah 42:14-21; Colossians 1:9-14

*While I Have Breath!*

Psalm 146

"Praise the LORD. Praise the LORD, my soul.  
I will praise the LORD all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live."

A weakened and dying John Wesley had one thing on his mind... praising God! He used his energy to sing the Isaac Watts's hymn, "I'll praise my Maker while I have breath." The hymn is based upon Psalm 146, a hymn of praise for the goodness and faithfulness of God. God is the maker of heaven and earth, who cares about the oppressed, the hungry, the prisoner, the blind, the foreigner, the fatherless, and the widow! The list is like those of the prophecy of Isaiah 61:1-2 and the proclamation of Jesus' life mission in Luke 4:18-19. The list of those identified as receiving God's attention is interesting in the light of contemporary events.

The chief purpose of human beings, according to Westminster Shorter Catechism, is to "glorify God and to enjoy him forever." The last testament of Wesley's life was to praise God! When he no longer had the strength and voice to sing the verse, Wesley said over and over, "I'll praise...I'll praise!" What a witness!

How dramatic a change would be required for you to make praising God the focus of each day? Gone would be my bad-mouthing! Gone would be my criticism! Gone would be my sarcasm! Gone with my pessimism! Oh, that I might praise God as long as I have breath!

Do you want to give it a try?

Prayer:

We praise you, O God! We will praise you all of our lives! We will sing praise to our God as long as we live! Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Ken Dunivant is a retired ordained elder in the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church and serves on the Huntingdon College Board of Trustees*

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## **Wednesday, March 18**

Read: Psalm 146; Isaiah 60:17-22; Matthew 9:27-34

### **Joy Found in Everlasting Light**

Hardship is something everyone will face at some point in life. It can alter your course of life and leave you questioning everything and stripped of joy. This summer, I unfortunately was a witness to one of the hardest things an individual and family could experience. One of my family's closest friends was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. The kind of brain tumor that not only brings fear and so many questions but slams the brakes on the reality of a healthy, funny, and involved father who is now bedridden in chronic pain. Life altered in the blink of an eye.

However, one thing never changed. In all the pain and sadness, they never stopped thanking Jesus. Because while this was a total shock to them, this was all part of Jesus's plan and knowing that they have been able to carry themselves with so much happiness, worshipping continuously through music and prayer. Every doctor's appointment became a place to share the Gospel. I will never forget people wondering how they are still able to get up in the morning bearing so much heartache and thank God for the heartache.

It was not until I read his testimony did I understand myself why his happiness remained despite devastating news. It actually was not happiness at all. It was joy! The kind of joy you receive when you completely and whole heartedly turn your life over to Christ. The kind of joy you receive when you have questions about the path your life is taking but recognize God's path for your life is perfect and for His good. It is the hope and peace you receive when you declare Christ as your Lord, and you know where your end goal lies. You have faith and joy because that is God!

God reminds us of this in His Word. Psalm 146:7-8 (NIV) states "The Lord sets prisoners free, the Lord gives sight to the blind," and Isaiah 60:17-22 proclaims the life of hope, security, and blessing that only comes from making the direct choice to follow the Lord. It shows the kind of rapid transformation that happens to our hearts when we let God in and surrender fully to Him and His will for our lives. What joy these deliberate actions bring!

Matthew 9:27-34 demonstrates what proclaiming our faith in the Lord will do for us. The blind men approached Jesus humbly asking for a miracle as they had no doubt of the powers of Jesus. They put their whole faith and trust in God. When Jesus healed the blind men He asked them to tell no one of the miracles performed. But the joy was so overwhelming, they could not help but share the good news of the Lord with everyone they crossed paths with! Yes, they were overjoyed to be healed but they could not wait to tell the Pharisees who doubted them the proof that Christ is King. The blind men wanted everyone to experience the same joy and peace they did. This is the kind of joy that takes over your heart when you trust in the Lord. They received the miracle!

Yet, what if the miracle of healing is not God's perfect plan? The true miracle has already occurred: God's sacrificial love and grace which bring indescribable joy. The kind of joy that lasts through diagnoses and uncertainties. The kind of joy radiates from within and makes it impossible to not share it with others. The kind of joy you receive when you completely trust the Lord.

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for sending Your Son as a living sacrifice so that we may have the hope and promise of tomorrow. May we remember the joy you provide during both the lightest and darkest seasons of life. We pray that you open our hearts to your will, fully trusting in your divine plan for us. Thank you for the work you have done and will continue to do in our lives. During this Lenten season, help us be like the blind men whose joy could not be contained. Amen

*Ms. Ella Hatchcock is a junior Communications student at Huntingdon College from Madison, Mississippi. Ella currently serves as the Next Gen Intern at St. James Church, a Global Methodist congregation in Montgomery, Alabama.*

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## Thursday, March 19

Read: Psalm 130; Ezekiel 1:1-3, 2:8-3:3; Revelation 10:1-11

Today, we have an invitation to remember that Lent is a season that invites us into silence, repentance, and honest self-examination. It is a journey away from surface-level faith and into the depths of our dependence on God. Psalm 130 speaks to this posture: “Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord.” The psalmist cries from a place of need. Lent begins there.

In our passages from Ezekiel 2–3 and Revelation 10, God gives His word to the prophet in a striking form: not as a message to be delivered immediately, but as a scroll to be eaten! Before Ezekiel is sent to speak and before John is told to prophesy again, each is commanded to receive the word fully, to take it into themselves so that it might shape them from the inside out.

To “eat the scroll” is more than just hearing or studying God’s word. It is to receive it so deeply that it becomes part of who we are. Lent presses this question on us: Do we skim the surface of God’s truth, or do we let it nourish, confront, and transform us?

John’s experience in Revelation adds another layer to this truth. The scroll is sweet as honey in his mouth, yet bitter in his stomach. God’s word is indeed sweet! It proclaims forgiveness, faithfulness, and hope. And yet the word is also bitter, because it exposes our sin, challenges our loyalties, and calls us to costly obedience. Lent is the season that refuses to rush past this bitterness. It teaches us that repentance is not a detour from grace, but the path through which grace does its deepest work.

Even still, bitterness is not the final word. Those who eat the scroll are not left in silence. They are sent. God’s word, once internalized, becomes a word to be lived and spoken in the world. But it can only be spoken truthfully if it has first been received humbly.

Lent trains us to hunger for God’s presence, truth, and mercy. It teaches us to wait, as the psalmist waits, “more than watchmen for the morning.” As we move through this season of waiting and fasting, we are reminded that we do not live by our own wisdom or strength, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.

This Lent, may we not merely hear God’s word, but eat it! May we receive it in sweetness and bitterness alike, trusting that God is at work in the depths. Trusting that he is forming us into people who wait, who are nourished, and who are sent.

Prayer: Merciful God, as we journey through Lent, teach us to hunger for Your word and to receive it fully, both the sweet and the bitter. Let it shape us and form us into faithful witnesses of Your redeeming love. Amen.

*Mr. Dillon Bryars '25 is a candidate for ministry in the Global Methodist Church, currently pursuing a Master of Divinity from Asbury Theological Seminary.*

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**Friday, March 20**

Read: Psalm 130; Ezekiel 33:10-16; Revelation 11:15-19

I've always been a strong swimmer. Growing up, I spent a lot of summers on the Gulf Coast. For most of my life, the water felt like a place of confidence and a place where my soul felt at peace. One day in my early forties, however, that confidence was tested when I got caught in a riptide. No matter how strong my strokes were or how hard I pushed, I wasn't gaining ground. For the first time in the water, I felt the limits of my own ability. Strength alone wasn't going to save me. I had to stop fighting, recognize what was happening, and respond in a different way, or face the risk of being pulled under. I had to let the current carry me to the rocks of the nearby jetty. The rocks were the only way out of the water. I emerged from the water a little scraped up and more than a little shaken. I would never enter the water with the same ease and comfort again.

Psalm 130 begins with a cry many of us know well: *"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord."* The psalmist isn't speaking from a place of control or competence, but from desperation. The depths are where illusions of self-sufficiency die. When we rely solely on our own strength, our discipline, our experience, our willpower, we often find ourselves exhausted and sinking. Like fighting a riptide, striving harder can actually pull us farther from safety. The psalm later warns us that if we rely on our ability or righteousness, we are all in fact sunk.

Thankfully, the psalm does not end in despair. It moves out of the depths and into hope: *"I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word, I put my hope."* Deliverance comes not from our ability, but from God's mercy and steadfast love. Out of the depths, we learn to trust not in ourselves, but in the one who hears our cry and has the power to pull us to solid ground.

In this Lenten season, we often take on spiritual disciplines and summon up willpower to give up certain vices. Let me suggest that as we do these things, we remember to not get caught up in the current of what we are doing, but to remember that the purpose of these actions is to open us up to a deeper experience of the living God and to develop more trust in the one who is our rock and redeemer.

Prayer

God, sometimes we are unaware of how deep the water is and how inept we are to save ourselves. Give us the ability to see our need of you and to cry out to you from the depths, to wait for you and put our hope in you. Amen.

*The Reverend Ashley Davis is Assistant to the Resident Bishop and Director of Connectional Ministries for the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church. Also, she serves on the Huntingdon College Board of Trustees.*

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**Saturday, March 21**

Read: Psalm 130; Ezekiel 36:8-15; Luke 24:44-53

*Hope in the Pauses*

Waiting is familiar. It becomes part of the student routine in college, felt when you're waiting for a response to your email asking for an extension or for a friend to come meet you for lunch or as the clock winds down in an important athletic match. Waiting marks the pause between arriving on campus as a new student and slowly growing into the person you were meant to be.

Your teachers, mentors, and supporters are not immune to waiting either. They are in your corner, waiting to see a 'lightbulb' moment in the classroom, to receive news that you've found your calling, or for the phone to ring with you asking for advice.

The problem with waiting, with those pauses, is that the result is not instantaneous. We want clarity, we want an answer! But during that pause is where we find room for hope. "I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word, I put my hope." God is with us in the pauses. He sits with us through every quiet moment and through each second of uncertainty. And because of his presence, we are guided to hope.

In Luke, Jesus opens the minds of his disciples to an understanding of what has always been the plan. They were waiting and he was still with them. As He prepares to go to heaven he leaves them with a promise of fulfillment and they rejoice, even though they must once again wait. Again, the answer is not instantaneous, but the disciples have hope rooted in their trust in Jesus.

So, as you sit in a pause, in the familiarity of waiting, know that you are not alone. Whether you are a student, teacher, mentor, or supporter, know that you have people in your corner. God is waiting with you, let that truth fill you with hope.

Prayer:

Lord, I pray that you open our minds and give us the grace to wait while your plan unfolds. I pray that your presence is felt with certainty by all students, teachers, mentors, and supporters. Remind us to trust your promises and teach us to be hopeful through the pauses in our lives. Amen.

*Dr. Kathleen Penney Childree '15 is Vice President for Student Development and Dean of Students at Huntingdon College. Dr. Childree and her family are active at the St. Peter Catholic parish in Montgomery, Alabama.*

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## **The Fifth Sunday in Lent**

**Sunday, March 22**

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

### *Records—Baseball and Life*

What do the records show? It really depends on how the records were compiled. The meaning of Lent teaches us about records that really matter.

In the 1930s and '40s, baseball was racially segregated. You had the Negro League statistics, as well as the Major League Baseball records, which only contained white players.

It raises the question of who had the most hits, the most home runs, the most strike outs, etc. In the last three years a 17-member panel has been vetting thousands of Negro League box scores to compile the new data for the official record books. Some of the great players like Satchel Paige, Buck Leonard, Cool Papa Bell, and Josh Gibson were excluded from the official records.

Seventy-seven years after the death of Josh Gibson, the slugging catcher, has become baseball's all-time batting champion! Major League Baseball decided it needed to correct what it called a "longtime oversight." Gibson had a lifetime average of .372 while playing for the Homestead Grays, along with some other teams. That placed him ahead of Ty Cobb's .367 lifetime average.

People discuss how well Gibson and others would have fared had baseball not been segregated. Some people are arguing that the Negro League seasons were much shorter, and the competition was not at the same level. Gibson had only 838 verified lifetime hits and Ty Cobb had 4,191. Gibson is credited for having the highest season batting average of .466 but only had 157 at-bats in 1945. They are not putting asterisks by anyone's name—just combining the statistics of both leagues into one record category.

I remember hearing that liars can figure, and figures can lie. It's really hard to compare apples to apples. Kevin Blackstone contends that "the Negro Leagues were never less than major, and the white-only major leagues were not as major as we've mythologized them to be."

It won't go in the record books, but the oldest living active baseball player today is Bill Gleason who is 101 years old. He threw out the first pitch for the celebration of Negro baseball games at Rickwood Field June 20, 2024. I called him "active" because he is now a preacher at Bethel Baptist Church and preaches every Sunday! Only a preacher could throw a strike at 99 years old!

I guess the discussion will go on about who holds the greatest records in baseball. What if we were as interested in measuring how well we serve in God's Kingdom and what would be the score if we determine how effectively we are using our gifts? We could do a lot of arguing about that, but the final authority for any records of the Christian faith rest solely with God. His records

are not debatable, and you are measured not by who will receive the greatest honors, but who gave the most to God's Kingdom.

His records are not based on how much we get, but how much we give. His records are not based on how many homeruns we have, but on how many people we have helped come home. His records are not about how many strike outs we have, but how many bases we have helped people advance.

The most important score card reveals whether or not we struck out in following Him, how many people we carry home with us for eternity—are we winning or losing?

What is your record?

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, thank you for paying attention to us. Thank you for caring enough to help us to do our best. On this day, we commit to following you in everything we think, say, or do. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. John Ed Mathison '60 is Pastor Emeritus at Frazer Church, a Free Methodist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. He reaches a global audience through John Ed Mathison Leadership Ministries*

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## Monday, March 23

Read: Psalm 143; 1 Kings 17:17-24; Acts 20:7-12

As I write today's devotional, I am between the day of my father's death and the day when we hold a service to acknowledge his life, and the promised gift of resurrection.

I cannot count the number of times I have read the words of Psalm 143 in worship, or in private devotional moments. Today, as the words spoke to the aches and pains of my soul, I realized grief gives the heart, soul, and body quite a workout. Psalm 143 is a lament. If you search the word LAMENT it can be defined as a "a passionate expression of grief, sorrow or regret."

This Psalm of David, begins, in verse 1 with the familiar words: "Hear my prayers, O Lord; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness." By verse 7, the plea is more urgent, "Answer me quickly, O Lord, my spirit fails, do not hide your face from me..."

However, David reminds us that the Lord will not leave us in distress as long as we listen with our hearts. In verse 8, for example, we hear these words; "Let me hear your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I will put my trust."

On a Monday, as the sun was setting, my father breathed his last breath. Our souls were comforted by the voice of a hospice nurse serving my father the final act of love...as she bathed his 93-year-old body. She asked my mother, "Was there a favorite hymn?" My mother answered, "In the Garden." My my immediate family will forever remember hearing her loving, soft voice, as she sang; "And he walks with me and he talks to me and tells me I am his own..."

Prayer:

We have tried to mend our own souls for too long, O Lord; and we are not up to the task. Heal our wounds, and those whom we have wounded. And bind up our hearts in your loving hands. For you are the one who leads us, by your steadfast love, to the place of trust and joy. Amen.

*The Reverend Bill Elwell '80 is senior pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.*

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**Tuesday, March 24**

Read: Psalm 143; 2 Kings 4:18-37; Ephesians 2:1-10

*The Hand of God at Work*

When you call upon the Lord, he will hear you. The hard part is waiting. Many variables in this life can make us impatient, such as fast-food services or selecting express delivery when we order online. We must understand that God does not move when we snap our fingers.

David expressed a plethora of times how much he depended on the Lord through the joy and sadness of his words in his psalms. He showed that being vulnerable to God is what made his relationship so meaningful. But what's most important is the honor and praise that he gave before submitting his request to him.

Thanking God should never leave our tongue. He's the reason that our lives continue to move on. Even though we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. This important piece in our history gives us the chance to be born again by giving our lives to God. While we were lost, the devil tried his best to take us down by drowning us in sin, but God's hand reached down and pulled us up to breathe the new life he had waiting for us. This should give us hope that even in the midst of hard times such as death, we should still give him honor and praise. It is only in him that we can get the full value of life on earth and in heaven.

So never fear, the hand of God will always deliver your blessing on time.

Prayer:

Father God, we are forever grateful for the many opportunities that you give us to change our life around. We must continue to tell the devil and the sin that he offers us no and pick up our cross daily. Continue to give us grace by showing us that we can't do it alone, but with you it's already done. In the powerful and matchless name, we do pray, Amen.

*Mr. DeJon Gibby graduates from Huntingdon College in May with a Bachelor in Arts in Accounting. He serves as President of the Student Government Association.*

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## **Annunciation of the Lord**

**Wednesday, March 25**

Read: Isaiah 7:10-14; Psalm 45 or Psalm 40:5-10; Hebrews 10:4-10; Luke 1:26-38

“Then Mary said, ‘Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.’ Then the angel departed from her.” Luke 1:38

The Annunciation, the event in which the angel Gabriel told the very young and unmarried Mary that she would give birth to the Son of God, might at first seem like a strange text to read during Lent. We are used to hearing this scripture read during Advent, when we anticipate the coming of Jesus, not at Lent, when we reflect on Jesus’s journey to the cross and our own life of faith. When we read this scripture during Advent, we usually focus on the words of the angel and the news of the long-awaited birth of the Messiah. Maybe our Lenten reading, though, is a time to shift our attention to Mary’s actions instead.

As you read the passage, try focusing on Luke’s descriptions of Mary. Can you picture her expressions? Notice how she is “perplexed” by the angel’s words and has to ponder what his greeting will mean for her. Seeing her expression, the angel tells her not to be afraid. Is her face betraying that she is fearful about what God might do now that God is speaking into her life?

Mary does not explicitly disclose her confusion and uncertainty, but she reveals it a little bit by questioning the angel, trying her best to understand how any of this was possible. We are not told whether the angel’s answers satisfied Mary’s questions or left her further confused, but the Gospel does tell us what she then replied: “Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word.”

Perhaps this is why the Annunciation is presented to us during Lent; maybe in Mary we are offered a template and a comfort for those times when we, too, do not fully understand what God is asking of us or how it can be possible. Mary’s calling was extraordinary, but we still may recognize some of our own experience with God in hers. What earnest Christian has not found herself perplexed at the words of God, or pondering their meaning? What sincere Christian has not felt fear, sometimes, when confronted with the realization of what God wanted him to do?

Maybe your life, like mine, has had periods when you were confused about what God seemed to be asking of you or times when you couldn’t figure out why God was acting the way God did. Those times can be full of anxiety because the world seems to demand of us explanations, a firm understanding of the situation, and a well-developed plan going forward, yet God seems to prefer, instead, to walk alongside us and reveal the way as we come to it. In times when the calling is clear, but the way is not, let us reflect on what is not asked of us: we are not asked to fully understand, or to have a strategic plan, or to be able to imagine where it all will

lead. Instead, one simple response seems to be enough for our God: let it be with me as you have said.

Prayer:

Dear Lord, thank you for Mary and for her example. We do not always understand you, and often we are perplexed by your words. In our times of fear, uncertainty, or confusion, remind us that we don't have to understand everything in order to be faithful. Help us to welcome your work, whatever it may bring, into our lives. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Kelsey Grissom is Visiting Assistant Professor of Religion at Huntingdon College and an ordained elder in the North Alabama Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

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**Thursday, March 26**

Read: Psalm 31:9-16; 1 Samuel 16:11-13; Philippians 1:1-11

Years ago, while I was preparing to leave the coziest dorm room that anyone had ever known, I read this scripture for the first time—and it stuck to my ribs like a good plate of southern supper. I remember almost everything about my senior year of college: dining hall renovations, the smell of the stacks in the library that made me feel like a real academic, the taste of Fried Chicken Thursdays, and the lure of a trip to Nancy's Italian Ice. I remember all of the sweetness of senior year - and also, the bitterness and preemptive grief of it all ending soon.

You see, college hadn't been a typical experience for our crew. There were about seven of us - misfits who found one another early on and stuck together through thick and thin. Sometimes "thick" meant exams. For me, it meant the sudden death of my father the summer between my junior and senior year. For others, it meant career discernment or changing majors. This group of friends sang at my father's funeral, prayed over procedures, danced through hallways, laughed through movies, stressed through exams, and made every possible memory that we could of the four short years we spent together. And then it was time to begin saying goodbye.

It was a season of transition. College classes, clubs, senior recitals, capstone projects, internships, even childhood itself - all of it was ending. Everything in front of us was unknown. Sure, acceptance letters littered our desks and common room floors, job applications and half-packed plastic bins in obnoxious hues of purple, orange, pink, and green lined the hallways. We knew what was next. But did we really? Everything was so very in-between.

So, what did we do? We took more pictures and stayed up later. We went to more dinners together. We included everyone in everything, every time. We skipped a class or two in favor of an adventure - or four. We packed our hearts and minds and memories full of the community that upheld us as we crossed the threshold from childhood into young adulthood. And what a wild, holy ride that was.

Now, rereading this particular text as we prepare for Lent - twelve years after graduation - the words of Paul swirling around in my head and heart alongside political unrest, to-do lists for first grade homework assignments, and the lyrics to too many children's songs - I find myself wondering what it is WE are packing for the journey ahead. What are we carrying with us forward as we face the bitter sweetness of Holy Week?

Before the parade of Palm Sunday,

before the uncertainty of the cross

and before the miracle of the Resurrection, what do we need to carry with us? Who and what will see us through as we find ourselves in this season of in-between, what is worth bringing along?

What memories from this season are we thanking God for? What people or places are tucked just as deeply into our hearts? Who might we say to, as Paul said to the church in Philippi, “I thank my God every time I remember you”? What place prepared you for where you are today - or for where you are headed next?

If you were to write your own letter, as Paul did, who would you thank, and for what?

And how might it all feed you and sustain you for the journey ahead?

The journey all the way to the Cross.

*The Reverend Heather Jones Butler '14 is an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).*

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**Friday, March 27**

Read: Psalm 31:9-16; Job 13:13-19; Philippians 1:21-30

What did you give up for Lent? This is a common question we hear during the Lenten season. We commit to depriving ourselves life's conveniences in remembrance of the suffering Jesus endured and our own reliance on God.

In Psalm 31, the psalmist describes much that has been given up and the aloneness of suffering. *"I am forgotten like a dead person, out of mind; I am like a broken vessel"* (v.12).

When I was a chaplain in the United States Air Force, I remember being sent to a deployed environment where many of the conveniences of life were given up and I felt deeply alone. Not having Wi-Fi or a comfortable bed was a struggle. But being without my family in a dangerous environment brought on the distress and loneliness that I suffered.

One day when I felt it could not get any worse, it did. The dining facility was shut down, and we were issued left over MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) that no one wanted. I remember picking mine up and sitting outside with a group of Airmen. One of them was named Rick.

Rick and I spent that mealtime talking about what we had given up. Our families, our friends, our favorite places to eat and many other things we missed. But then our conversation turned towards the things we had. How grateful we were for our family's support, the people in our lives, and even the stale MREs we were struggling to get down.

But I think I was mostly grateful for knowing that I was not alone in what I was going through. That someone else was there. I left that deployment with a closer relationship with Rick, and we continue our conversations to this day.

What did you give up for Lent? The Lenten journey is not about what you give up; it's about what you leave with.

After all the distress, fear and aloneness, the psalmist declares, *"I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God'"* (v.14). The main purpose of giving up life's conveniences in Lent is not to focus on what we do without, but what we have in our relationship with God. It is a time to trust that we are not going through our struggles alone, and to leave our Lenten journey with hope in the One who has paved the way to eternal joy.

Prayer:

Holy God, as I walk this Lenten journey with You, let me be honest with myself. As I look into my heart and soul, help me notice the times I have turn away from You. Guide me as I humbly seek to repent and return to Your love. So, I may carry that love from journey's end and evermore. Amen.

*The Reverend Tyler Cox is senior pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Millbrook, Alabama. He also serves as adjunct faculty in the Religion Department at Huntingdon College.*

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**Saturday, March 28**

Read: Psalm 31:9-16; Lamentations 3:55-66; Mark 10:32-34

*From the Pit to the Road*

There are prayers that rise easily, shaped by habit or gratitude or joy. And then there are prayers that come from the depths: *"I called on your name, O Lord, from the depths of the pit."* The writer of Lamentations does not soften the image. This is not a low mood or a passing sadness. It is the place where the walls feel close and the future narrows. Lent gives us permission to begin there.

So often we imagine that faith starts from strength or clarity. But Scripture insists, again and again, that prayer quite often begins in the pit. What matters is not the place from which we pray, but that we call out at all. And astonishingly, the text tells us that God hears. God comes near and speaks a simple, steady word: *"Do not fear."* That word does not undo harm or suddenly explain suffering or erase what has happened. It does something quieter and deeper: It assures the one who cries out that they are not alone in the dark.

The psalmist knows this place, too. Psalm 31 is not a song of triumph, but a prayer offered by someone who is exhausted, misunderstood, and worn down by grief: *"My strength fails because of my misery."* There is no denial here, no spiritual bypassing. And yet, through that raw honesty before God, another sentence emerges: *"My times are in your hand."* This is trust without illusion. The psalmist does not claim to know how things will unfold, but places time itself back into God's care. Lent invites us into that same relinquishment, not because we are done struggling, but because we cannot carry everything alone.

And then there is Jesus, on the road to Jerusalem. He knows what lies before him and names it clearly: betrayal, suffering, death. And still, he keeps going. It is not reckless courage or blind obedience. It is a *chosen faithfulness*, rooted deeply in knowing that even this road is held by God.

The disciples are amazed, those who follow are afraid, and that is important to know. Jesus' clarity does not make the journey easier for those around him. Lent reminds us that faith does not always make things comfortable or understandable or easy. Sometimes it simply means walking forward, step by step, with unvarnished honesty about the cost.

Together, these texts offer a pattern for the Lenten journey: We cry out from the pit. We place our times in God's hands. And we keep walking, not because we are fearless, but because God goes with us.

Lent does not ask us to rush past pain toward resurrection. It asks us to stay present, to tell the truth, and to trust that even here, even now, God is present.

### **For Reflection**

- Where do you find yourself right now: in the pit, in the act of letting go, or on the road ahead?
- What would it mean, today, to place *your times* in God's hands?
- Where might God be inviting you to keep walking, even without certainty?

### **Prayer:**

Holy One, God who comes near, hear us when we cry from the depths, and hold us when we cannot. Fill us with courage to walk the road before us, and remind us always that we do not walk alone. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Michelle Bogue-Trost '88 is senior minister of Asbury First United Methodist Church in Rochester, New York.*

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## **Palm Sunday**

**Sunday, March 29**

### **Liturgy of the Palms**

Read: Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Matthew 21:1-11

I'm not a fan of crowds. I'm sure some of you poor souls reading this are energized by the excitement and bustle, but reasonable people, like myself, much prefer being alone in the woods to feeling like a claustrophobic penguin waddling in line. I would certainly not feel comfortable in the crowd at Jesus' Triumphal Entry into Jerusalem.

At this point in Matthew's Gospel, the crowds are not large; they are *πλεῖστος* (*pleistos*), very large. This is the first time Matthew uses *pleistos*. Earlier in the narrative, the crowds are small, quantifiable. As the story progresses, the crowd continues to grow, culminating in a grand gathering shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven!"

"Hosanna!" is a glorious proclamation, one that rightly guides our Palm Sunday worship, but don't lose the threat of danger in the text. As the crowds grow through Jesus' teachings and healings, so does the danger to Jesus. Rome is no fan of very large crowds unless they are proclaiming the glory of the Emperor or jeering at their favorite gladiatorial blood-spilling. Very large crowds are dangerous because they are a threat to power; too big a crowd of the faithful could topple even the great Empire.

It's not only the size of the crowd that keys us into the danger. Verse 10 tells us that the city was *ἐσεισθη*, which the NRSV translates as "turmoil." I would argue that "turmoil" loses some of the poetry of the word. *Ἐσεισθη* suggests the city itself being stirred or shaken. This is not Agent 007's martini recipe, but something closer to someone kicking a hornet's nest. The city itself vibrates with energy and the potential for riot and revolution. That is what the Messiah is entering the gates to do, is it not? The answer is a resounding yes, but not in the way anyone expected.

Jesus is fully aware of the hornet's nest he is riding toward, and fully aware of the expectations, needs, and desires of the crowd. The needs of an oppressed people under the Empire's boot are so deep that only spilled blood could possibly satisfy them. Jesus' eyes are wide open to the death he is choosing, and to the blood he will offer for the sake of the very crowd that will abandon him.

What a Savior, giving the crowd what they need, not what they think they need. What a Lord, choosing to walk into a city shaking with the potential for violence. What a King, humbly riding a donkey toward death. What a God, the same one we pray to this day.

Matthew will use *ἐσεισθη* again. When Jesus takes his last breath, the veil of the temple is torn, and the earth itself is *ἐσεισθη*, shaken. The city once shook with anticipation and violence, and

the earth now shakes in grief and recognition. What the crowd could not see on Sunday, Creation itself understands on Friday. That contrast matters. It tells us something about how easily we mistake noise for faith and excitement for understanding. The crowd's shaking comes from the expectation of what they hope Jesus will do. The earth's shaking comes from recognition of who Jesus truly is.

We still wave palms and cry "Hosanna," still pray for God to shake the things that threaten us or stand in our way. Palm Sunday gently presses us to ask whether we are prepared for the deeper shaking; the kind that exposes our hopes, unmask our violence, and remakes us through love rather than force.

The God who rides into Jerusalem does not avoid the hornet's nest. Our God enters it, knowing the cost. And if this is still the God we pray to today, the question is not whether the world will be shaken, but whether we are willing to be.

Prayer:

Dearest Jesus, thank you for loving us enough to not avoid the difficult things. Help us to live in ways that take courage during tough times for the sake of others. Amen.

*Rhett Butler '13 is Dean of the Chapel at Huntingdon College and an Elder in the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference.*

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## Monday of Holy Week

**Monday, March 30**

Read: Isaiah 42:1-9; Psalm 36:5-11; Hebrews 9:11-15; John 12:1-11

Can the death of one person bring salvation or new life to another, and if so, how could this happen? Some instances, perhaps, come readily to mind: the soldier on the battle field who dives on the grenade can save his friends; the firefighter who rescues someone from a burning building only to succumb, in the end, to smoke inhalation; the pregnant mother who gives birth to her child after a terrible labor and delivery but who loses her life in the process. These praiseworthy examples of self-sacrifice genuinely bring salvation and life to others.

Can the death of someone in the distant past also bring salvation or new life to us today? How does the death of someone 2,000 years ago have an effect on our lives now? And not just bodily salvation—as from a fire—but salvation from sin and death: in other words, forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God. How does Jesus' death reconcile us with God?

The book of Hebrews gives us an explanation by making a comparison with the Levitical sacrificial system found in the Torah. Under the Law, the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies once a year with the blood of the sacrificed animals that he offered to God in order to make atonement for the sins of Israel. However, the fact that the priest needed to do this every year signified that this sacrifice did not, ultimately, cleanse the conscience, since it needed to be repeated again and again. The priesthood and the sacrifices all pointed to something greater, namely, to Christ himself.

Because Jesus is God and human, his priestly order is higher than the Levitical priests. Furthermore, the sacrifice that Jesus offered was not the blood of animals, but his own blood, a sacrifice that did not need to be repeated, but one that was offered once for all. “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God “(9:14)!

Reflecting on Christ's priestly work, Charles Wesley writes:

*O thou eternal victim slain a sacrifice for guilty man,  
By the eternal Spirit made an offering in the sinner's stead,  
Our everlasting priest art thou, and plead'st thy death for sinners now.*

*Thy offering still continues new, Thy vesture keeps its bloody hue,  
Thou stand'st the ever slaughtered Lamb, Thy priesthood still remains the same,  
Thy years, O God, can never fail, Thy goodness is unchangeable.*

The lenten season is a time when we face honestly our frail humanity and the sin in our lives. We must recognize and confess our sin—wear the ashes as it were—throughout this period of contrition and repentance. Christ’s sacrifice is too weighty and profound for us to gloss over our transgressions. The fact that we must offer to God our repentance again and again signifies that the “eternal redemption” that Christ obtained is not yet fully realized. But ours is a faith filled with hope. “So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him” (9:28). Brothers and sisters, strengthen yourselves with this hope.

Prayer:

“How precious is your steadfast love, O God! All people may take refuge in the shadow of your wings” (Ps. 36:7).

*The Reverend Dr. Stephen Sours is Chair of Department of Religion and History and Professor of Religion at Huntingdon College as well as an ordained elder in the Alabama-West Florida Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church.*

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## **Tuesday of Holy Week**

### **Tuesday, March 31**

Read: Isaiah 49:1-7; Psalm 71:1-14; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31; John 12:20-36

Jose Altuve is the smallest Major League Baseball player at 5'6" and 166 pounds. Yet, Altuve is a 9-time All-Star, has led the American League in batting 3 years, and was named the 2017 American League MVP. His production makes the wise baseball insiders who overlooked him for his size look foolish.

This season of Lent is filled with truths that are unexpected.

- Confessing our sin brings peace.
- Denying ourselves offers benefits beyond our creation.
- The One who hung on the cross is glorified.

That last one has been a world-changing surprise. No one alive in the First Century would have believed it. The cross was a symbol of shame. The cross was the means of death for thieves and revolutionaries.

Yet, God uses the cross to glorify Jesus. God takes the things of lowest repute and uses them for the greatest impact.

During this Holy Week, glory in the surprising, unconventional wisdom of God.

Prayer:

God wonder and wisdom, grant us grace to trust your use of foolish things for your glory so that our feeble attempts at faithfulness may glorify you in the name of Christ who walked toward the cross. Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Brian Miller is Vice President for External and Church Relations at Huntingdon College and an ordained elder in the Alabama-West Florida Conference of the United Methodist Church.*

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## Wednesday of Holy Week

### Wednesday, April 1

Read: Isaiah 50:4-9a; Psalm 70; Hebrews 12:1-3; John 13:21-32

#### *Focus*

Picture this: you're running in a race. Not a short one either; more like a marathon. You aren't positive what mile you're on or how much farther you must go to reach the finish line. Your breathing grows heavier. Your legs ache. Every step takes more effort than the last. You start wondering why you ever signed up for this race in the first place.

This image isn't far from how many of us arrive at Holy Week. By Wednesday, the excitement of Palm Sunday has faded, the cheers of Hosanna have quieted, and the road ahead once again feels long and desolate. It is in these moments that our lectionary text from Hebrews reminds us where our focus should lie in this long and sometimes arduous journey: "run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus..."

On this Wednesday of Holy Week, many of us, at this point in Lent, are becoming keenly aware of the burdens we are carrying in this journey. We begin to feel the weight of our sins and the distractions that hinder our ability to focus on Jesus. It is in these moments of distraction that we become more conscious of our heavy breathing, our aching legs, and even the distance we still have to complete the race.

To combat this weariness, the writer of Hebrews shares yet another beautiful image in this text: the great cloud of witnesses urging us on in our race. If you have ever run a long distance race or attended one as a supporter, you may have noticed that throughout the race, you can often find friends and family of the runners cheering them on as they stride towards the goal. These cheers, while sometimes more scattered than the runners would like, give encouragement to continue on in the race. It is in the moments where we begin to feel the weight of the burdens we carry that the great cloud of witnesses points to Jesus, reminding us of where our focus should lie.

As we near the end of our Lenten season and the cross comes into view, our text today reminds us in verse three: "Consider him who endured such hostility against himself from sinners, so that you may not grow weary in your souls or lose heart." Yes, the race we run often feels long, weary, and sometimes lonely. However, it is our focus on Jesus that allows us to keep heart and press forward in this race. The race that leads not only to the cross, but beyond it.



Prayer:

Gracious and loving God, when our breath grows heavy and our steps grow slow, turn our eyes toward Jesus and renew our strength to keep going. In his name we pray. Amen.

*The Reverend Chris McCain '17 is Pastor of Grace United Methodist Church in Prattville, Alabama. He also serves as adjunct faculty in the Religion Department at Huntingdon College.*

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## Maundy Thursday

Thursday, April 2

Read: Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

On the night of Passover, freedom begins not with escape, but with attention. God gives the Israelites remarkably detailed instructions: mark time differently, prepare a meal carefully, eat it standing, dress for movement, place blood on the doorposts—belts fastened, sandals on your feet, staff in your hand, eat hurriedly. Before liberation happens *out there*, something must happen *at home*. Before Pharaoh's power is broken, a people learn to remember who they are.

Exodus 12 tells a story shared deeply within Jewish life and honored by Christians as part of our own sacred inheritance. For Jewish readers, this is the foundational story of identity: *We were slaves, and God brought us out*. For Christians, this same story shapes how we understand Jesus' final meal, Maundy Thursday, and the language of liberation, sacrifice, and remembrance that echoes through the Last Supper. What is striking is that the blood on the doorposts is not a weapon. It is a sign. It marks belonging. It says, "This household remembers. This household trusts. This household is ready to leave."

Years ago, I sat at a hospital bedside late on a Thursday night in early spring. A woman in her eighties was nearing the end of her life. Her breathing was shallow, her hands thin and folded tightly together. Her adult son stood nearby, exhausted and grieving. At one point he said quietly, almost to himself, "I don't know how to let her go." I asked if there was anything that had helped their family through hard moments before. He thought for a long time, then said, "Every year, no matter what, she made us gather for dinner. Even when we didn't get along. Even when we were busy. She said, 'We sit at the table because it reminds us who we are.'" That night, we didn't have a table. We didn't have a meal. But we had memory. We had a marking of the moment. And in that remembering, something loosened. Not the grief—but the fear. The son kissed his mother's forehead and whispered, "It's okay."

Passover is not only about escape; it is about being claimed. Maundy Thursday is not only about a commandment to love; it is about a table where people are named and held, even in betrayal and fear—Jesus sat with the beloved disciple on one side, Judas on his other side. In both traditions, the meal does not deny suffering—it faces it honestly while daring to believe that suffering will not have the final word.

The Israelites are told to remember this night forever, not because it was easy, but because it was the night God moved them from who they had been forced to be into who they truly were.

This Maundy Thursday, we stand in that shared story. We remember that liberation begins when we mark our lives differently—when we dare to believe that oppression, loss, and death do not define us. We are marked for freedom. We are fed for the journey. And even when the night feels long, the doorposts of our lives still bear the signs of hope.

Prayer:

God of liberation and remembrance,  
teach us to mark our lives with courage,  
to sit at tables that shape us,  
and to trust that even in the night,  
you are already preparing the way out.  
Amen.

*The Reverend Dr. Jay D. Cooper is Senior Minister of the First United Methodist Church of Montgomery, Alabama and serves on the Huntingdon College Board of Trustees.*

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## Good Friday

Friday, April 3

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

“What Wondrous Love Is This”

*(United Methodist Hymnal, 292)*

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this that caused the Lord of bliss  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,  
to bear the dreadful curse for my soul.

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul,  
what wondrous love is this, O my soul!  
What wondrous love is this, that caused the Lord of life  
to lay aside his crown for my soul, for my soul,  
to lay aside his crown for my soul.

To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing,  
to God and to the Lamb, I will sing;  
to God and to the Lamb who is the great I AM,  
while millions join the theme I will sing, I will sing;  
while millions join the theme I will sing.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on,  
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing on;  
and when from death I'm free, I'll sing and joyful be,  
and through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,  
and through eternity I'll sing on.

WORDS: USA folk hymn

TUNE: WONDROUS LOVE

MUSIC: USA folk hymn, harm. by Paul J. Christiansen

METER: 12 9.12 9

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## **Holy Saturday**

**Saturday, April 4**

Read: Job 14:1-14 or Lamentations 3:1-9, 19-24; Psalm 31:1-4, 15-16; 1 Peter 4:1-8; Matthew 27:57-66

### *The Day God Is Silent*

Holy Saturday is the day we are tempted to skip.

We move quickly from the agony of the cross to the joy of the empty tomb, eager for resolution, allergic to waiting. But Scripture refuses to let us rush past this day. While the gospel writers don't mention this day, there is plenty to ponder from other parts of the Bible today. Holy Saturday is the long pause of the story—the day when Jesus is in the tomb, the stone is sealed, and nothing appears to be happening at all.

Matthew tells us that after Jesus is buried, the authorities secure the grave. Guards are posted. A stone is sealed. Death is declared final. The world does what it always does when it believes it has won: it fortifies security and trusts in its own strength of soldier and weapon.

And God is silent.

Lamentations names this experience honestly: affliction, bitterness, despair, the feeling of being walled in with no way out. Job, too, speaks of human life as fleeting and fragile, asking whether there is any hope beyond the grave. Holy Saturday gives voice to all those moments when God seems absent, when prayers go unanswered, when grief seemingly has the final word.

Yet Holy Saturday is not empty time.

Though unseen, God is still at work, like the roots of a tree in winter. The silence of the tomb is not the absence of God, but the deep mystery of God's hidden labor. As the early church would come to proclaim, Christ descends fully into death itself—not skirting suffering and despair, but entering it completely. There is no place, not even the grave, where God refuses to go. As St. Gregory of Nazianzus wrote, "That which is not assumed is not healed." What this means for us is that Holy Saturday is very good news for us.

This day teaches us that waiting is not failure. Even when all hope seems lost, God is not finished. The sealed stone is not the end of the story.

Holy Saturday is for all who live between promise and fulfillment: for those grieving losses that have not yet healed, for those longing for justice that has not yet come, for those who trust God's love but cannot yet see how it will prevail. It assures us that even when the world declares death victorious, God is already preparing resurrection.

The guards do not know it. The disciples cannot yet imagine it. But even now—especially now—God is faithful.

So we wait. We lament. We hope against hope.

And we trust that the God who raised Jesus from the dead is already at work in places we cannot see.

Prayer:

God of the silent tomb, meet us in our waiting, hold us in our grief, and teach us to trust that even now, you are bringing life out of death. Amen.

*The Reverend Emily Kincaid '06 is Executive Pastor of First United Methodist Church of Pensacola and serves on the Huntington College Board of Trustees.*

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## **EASTER**

**Sunday, April 5**

Read: Acts 10:34-43 or Jeremiah 31:1-6; Psalm 118:1-2, 14-24; Colossians 3:1-4 or Acts 10:34-43; John 20:1-18 or Matthew 28:1-10

### *An Easter Affirmation of Faith*

We believe in God the Father, who created the world, was faithful when we were not, and who continuously seeks to redeem the world.

We believe in God the Son, Jesus Christ, who humbled himself by becoming human and moving into our neighborhood; was sent by the Father to give us life; embodied and taught the righteous love of God; and who, though he knew no sin, became sin and was put to death on a cross.

We believe that three days later, Jesus Christ was raised from the dead by the power of God; was seen in bodily form by his disciples.

We believe that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus give us victory over any form of sin and brokenness and allows us to know the full love of God for the world.

We believe in God the Holy Spirit, who actively works in our lives, giving us grace to be like Jesus, and sends us to show God's love for the world.



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