

PRACTICES FOR THE

JOURNEY

A LENTEN GUIDE

PRACTICES FOR THE JOURNEY

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INTRODUCTION TO LENT & PRACTICES

Lent is a season of reflection and preparation in the church year that begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter.

There are a number of ways to understand and approach Lent: as a time of examination and repentance; as a time to remember Jesus in the wilderness and recognize the Lord in our places of wilderness; and as a time to create more room in our lives for God's work.

This year as a community, we are going to focus on the idea of journey during Lent. Specifically, we will reflect on and dwell in two journeys. The first is Jesus' journey to the cross. It was a journey that He willingly took out of love for us. The second is our journey of following Jesus, becoming more like our Savior and learning to love God and others as He did.

Following Jesus and becoming like Him is not something we do on our own. It's something that God does in and through us as we open ourselves to the Holy Spirit. A good image is one of a sail boat. A sail boat cannot move on its own. It is the wind that moves a boat. But the sails must be up in order to catch the wind. In the same way, we cannot transform ourselves. The Holy Spirit transforms us. Yet we have a part to play: we hoist our sails. Practices, classically called disciplines, are ways in which we "hoist our sails" and allow room for the Spirit to transform us. Engaging with this devotional, which contains suggested practices and daily Scripture readings, is one way to hoist your sails.

Following Jesus and becoming like Him is something we do with the Lord, and it is also something we do with each other. God has called us to follow Jesus together. We are gifts from God to each other as we encourage each other, pray together, share our joys and struggles together, and remind each other of God's truth and grace. If you are in a small group, consider sharing honestly and deeply. If you are not in a formal small group, consider sharing this Lenten journey with a spiritual friend.

HOW TO USE THIS DEVOTIONAL

This year we will focus on seven different themes, one each week of Lent: following, meditating, praying, loving others, thanking, mission, and gathering at the cross. For each week, the devotional book will contain 3 suggested practices to help us engage with the theme of the week. There are two practices for adults and youth and one geared towards children to do with their parents or on their own (though adults are welcome to engage in these as well!). These practices will be explained at the beginning of the week's devotional reading, and you are encouraged to try 1 or 2 anytime it works for you during the week.

There are daily Scripture readings that follow the weekly theme. Quotes from our church fathers and mothers throughout history are also interspersed.

Remember that doing the practices and getting the readings done is not the end goal. The end goal is to fall more deeply in love with Jesus, and to become more like Him. That is our journey. So as you approach the devotional please let go of any "shoulds," "oughts," or guilt about getting it done or doing it right, and instead remember that God is pleased that you are creating room to be with Him. God journeys with you and loves you.

ASH WEDNESDAY | FOLLOWING JESUS

INTRODUCTION

In our day, when we follow someone it means we track them on twitter, a blog, or the news. In Jesus' time when a person wanted to follow a teacher, called a rabbi, they literally followed the rabbi. They left their jobs and home and went wherever the rabbi went, listening to him, asking him questions, watching his interactions, and emulating his example. Early rabbinic teachings describe a faithful follower as covered in the dust of the rabbi: sitting and walking so closely to the master that they would be covered by the dust from his feet.

Jesus invites us to: "Come, follow me." We are invited to follow Him: to listen to His words in Scripture, to ask and to talk with Him in prayer, to emulate His love for God and others, and to let His Kingdom be our home. Jesus does not invite us because we are worthy or because He thinks we have the potential to become like Him on our own. He invites us to follow Him, and become like Him, because He loves us. He does not leave us to follow Him on our own. He is our companion in the presence of the Holy Spirit: guiding, comforting, challenging, and encouraging.

Let us begin our Lenten journey with confidence, not in ourselves, but in the One who invites us into relationship with Himself and sustains us along the way.

PRACTICE: Solitude

Listening to Jesus can be difficult in our world of constant noise. Noise is both outside of us and inside of us. Solitude is a classic practice that helps push the noise aside so we may listen for the still, small voice of the Lord. Jesus Himself spent forty days in solitude before beginning His ministry. As you prepare for your Lenten journey, spend some time in solitude. If solitude is difficult to come by in your world, try some creative ideas: turn off the radio in the car; turn off your television or music at home; you can even turn the shower into a time of solitude, being mindful of the Lord.

PRACTICE: Take a hike or a walk

Jesus and the first disciples walked everywhere they went. Many of their discussions about God and life happened on the road, while the disciples were getting covered in the dust from Jesus' feet. This week, take a walk or hike and reflect on your journey of following Jesus. Be mindful of the presence of the Lord with you while you walk. Share with the Lord your feelings about your journey in following Him: your doubts and questions, your fears and hopes, your joys and struggles. Share with the Lord what you hope for this Lenten season, and open yourself to whatever the Lord has in store for you, expected or unexpected.

WEDNESDAY, March 1

Ash Wednesday

LUKE 5:1-11

¹ Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.

THURSDAY, March 2

*God has come down to us, has taken our nature,
and has become one of us, that he might be our companion.*

Johnathan Edwards

JOHN 15:12-17

¹² "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷ I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

MATTHEW 19:16-26

¹⁶ Just then a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?"

¹⁷ "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, keep the commandments."

¹⁸ "Which ones?" he inquired.

Jesus replied, "'You shall not murder, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not steal, you shall not give false testimony, ¹⁹ honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'"

²⁰ "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?"

²¹ Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me."

²² When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth.

²³ Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. ²⁴ Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God."

²⁵ When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, "Who then can be saved?"

²⁶ Jesus looked at them and said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

*Only Jesus Christ, who bids us follow him, knows the journey's end.
But we know that it will be a road of boundless mercy. Discipleship means joy.*
Dietrich Bonhoeffer

MARK 2:13-17

¹³ Once again Jesus went out beside the lake. A large crowd came to him, and he began to teach them. ¹⁴ As he walked along, he saw Levi son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," Jesus told him, and Levi got up and followed him.

¹⁵ While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house, many tax collectors and sinners were eating with him and his disciples, for there were many who followed him.

¹⁶ When the teachers of the law who were Pharisees saw him eating with the sinners and tax collectors, they asked his disciples: "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

¹⁷ On hearing this, Jesus said to them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

WEEK 1 | MEDITATING

INTRODUCTION

*¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the Lord;
yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago.
¹² I will consider all your works
and meditate on all your mighty deeds.*

Psalm 77:11-12

At the beginning of the poem the author of Psalm 77 is in distress, unsure of God's presence and goodness. In his distress, the psalmist makes the choice to meditate on God's works and God's character.

To meditate is to dwell in, to ruminate on, to focus on, and to remember. When we meditate on God's work and God's character, most clearly displayed in Jesus Christ, it gives the Spirit space to change our perspectives, to form our loves, and to heal our souls. This happens not only when we find ourselves in distress, as was the psalmist, but also in our daily lives. Our daily lives are filled with competing messages and images of what makes the good life. Meditating on the Lord recalibrates us to the truth of the good life: life in and through Jesus Christ.

This week the suggested practices give you two different ways, among many, to quiet your mind and focus on the Lord. The daily readings focus on God's awesome deeds and character. As you read, ask the Lord to bring the words of scripture back to your mind throughout the day and week.

PRACTICE: *The Holy Trinity* Icon by Andrei Rublev (page 11)

The Holy Trinity is one of the most famous Eastern Orthodox Icons. Icons are stylistic pictures meant to aid people in their devotion (but never to be worshipped themselves). Icons are laden with symbolism. You can find numerous explanations of the symbolism in *The Holy Trinity*. Instead of belaboring the details, here is one aspect of the icon to focus on. The three members of the Trinity sit around the table, and there is any empty spot at the table as if someone is expected. Except the spot isn't empty. You are

the one at the table. You are the one who was expected and is enfolded. In Jesus Christ, we have been invited and enfolded into the loving community of the Trinity. Take a couple minutes to use this icon to meditate on the Lord, pondering the amazing love that has welcomed you to the Table and into community.

PRACTICE: Breath Prayer

Breath prayer is an ancient Christian practice that has been used at least since the 6th century. It's also known as the "Jesus Prayer," named after the most well known breath prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God; have mercy on me, a sinner," sometimes shortened to "Jesus, have mercy." Breath prayers are short and simple, only 6-8 syllables so that you can verbally or silently pray it while you inhale and exhale. Breath prayers are an excellent way to meditate, quiet your heart, and know that God is God. They can be used anywhere and everywhere, even as you work and play.

This week, try forming your own breath prayer. Following these suggested steps may help:

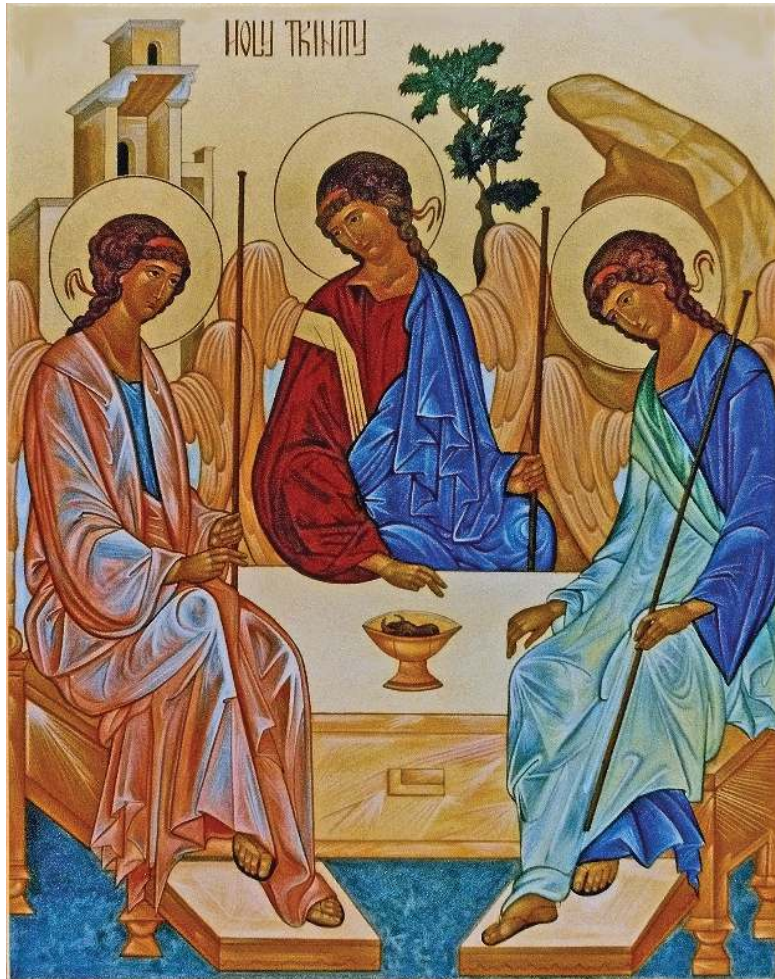
1. Ask God to direct your prayer.
2. Choose a name and/or characteristic of God that tugs at your heart and mind. This will be the first part of your breath prayer, prayed when you inhale.
3. Reflect on what you may need. This will be the second part of your breath prayer, prayed when you exhale.
4. Breath prayers can adjust depending on what you need and how God leads.

Examples of breath prayers:

- Holy God....give us/me your peace.
- Lord Jesus.....be near.
- You are my shepherd...I shall not want.

PRACTICE for children and their families: Breath Prayer

Breath prayers are a great way to introduce children to prayer and to quiet their hearts. It's especially helpful for children (and adults) when they are dealing with strong emotions.



The Holy Trinity Icon by Andrei Rublev

As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Now remain in my love.

John 15:9

Biblical faith is, above all, faith in a God who reveals Himself through historical events, a God who saves in history.

Gustavo Guterrez

DEUTERONOMY 26:1-11

¹ When you have entered the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance and have taken possession of it and settled in it, ² take some of the firstfruits of all that you produce from the soil of the land the Lord your God is giving you and put them in a basket. Then go to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name ³ and say to the priest in office at the time, "I declare today to the Lord your God that I have come to the land the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us." ⁴ The priest shall take the basket from your hands and set it down in front of the altar of the Lord your God. ⁵ Then you shall declare before the Lord your God: "My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. ⁶ But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, subjecting us to harsh labor. ⁷ Then we cried out to the Lord, the God of our ancestors, and the Lord heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. ⁸ So the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with signs and wonders. ⁹ He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; ¹⁰ and now I bring the firstfruits of the soil that you, Lord, have given me." Place the basket before the Lord your God and bow down before him. ¹¹ Then you and the Levites and the foreigners residing among you shall rejoice in all the good things the Lord your God has given to you and your household.

No one should be so active as not to seek the contemplation of God.
St. Augustine

JOHN 17:1-5

¹ After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:

“Father, the hour has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. ² For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. ³ Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. ⁴ I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. ⁵ And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.

PSALM 37:1-7

¹ Do not fret because of those who are evil
or be envious of those who do wrong;

² for like the grass they will soon wither,
like green plants they will soon die away.

³ Trust in the Lord and do good;
dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture.

⁴ Take delight in the Lord,
and he will give you the desires of your heart.

⁵ Commit your way to the Lord;
trust in him and he will do this:

⁶ He will make your righteous reward shine like the dawn,
your vindication like the noonday sun.

⁷ Be still before the Lord
and wait patiently for him;
do not fret when people succeed in their ways,
when they carry out their wicked schemes.

EXODUS 20:1-21

¹ And God spoke all these words:

² "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

³ "You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

⁷ "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

⁸ "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. ¹¹ For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the

sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

¹² "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³ "You shall not murder.

¹⁴ "You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ "You shall not steal.

¹⁶ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

¹⁷ "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

¹⁸ When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance ¹⁹ and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die." ²⁰ Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

²¹ The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

MATTHEW 4:1-11

¹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

² After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

⁴ Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. ⁶ "If you are the Son of God," he said, "throw yourself down. For it is written:

"He will command his angels concerning you, and they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone."

⁷ Jesus answered him, "It is also written: 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me."

¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him.

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

¹ As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

This is the main purpose of the Gospel, that, although we are by nature children of wrath, the quarrel between God and us can be resolved and He can receive us into His grace.

John Calvin

ROMANS 8:31-39

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? ³³ Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. ³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶ As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.”

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹ neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

WEEK 2 | PRAYING

INTRODUCTION

Prayer is the heartbeat of the Christian life. In any healthy relationship, communication is vital. Our relationship with God is no different. Simply said, prayer is conversation with God. It is sharing our thoughts, feelings, confusion, and requests with God. It is listening to God.

Though the definition of prayer is easy to understand, prayer can be difficult work. Distractions, both outside and inside of us, are endless. Discouragement, doubt, and even boredom keep us from praying faithfully or honestly. Especially in these times, it is good to be reminded of Jesus' example of prayer and Jesus' command that we pray. We pray even when we don't feel like it, trusting that God is the one who makes prayer effective. We pray even when we don't hear God's voice, trusting God is there and transforming us. We pray even when we don't have the words because of our confidence that the Spirit intercedes for us (Romans 8:26). We pray because we love God and are loved by God.

When a small child shares her heart with her good and loving father, her dad doesn't look down on her or push her away for her style or lack of vocabulary. There is no reason to feel like we need to be polished or perfect when we approach God. Our Father is simply pleased that we share our heart with Him. The best way to grow in our prayer life is simply to pray: to talk with God and allow God space to speak to us. So as you see the examples of prayer in the daily Scripture readings this week, don't stop at reading. Let the examples lead you to prayer.

PRACTICE: Prayer of Examen

The Prayer of Examen is a five-step prayer practiced by St. Ignatius as a daily reflection, often used at the end of the day. Take 10 minutes at the end of one, or more, of your days this week to try it out.

1. **Stillness:** Remember that you are in God's presence. Invite God into your time of reflection.
2. **Gratitude:** Give thanks to God for the gifts you have received today (like a beautiful sunset, or a good night's sleep, etc.). Think about the gifts that you have given today. How have you helped others to see God's goodness?
3. **Reflection:** Ask the Holy Spirit to guide your reflection. Review the events of the day and notice your actions and emotions.
When did you notice God's presence?
What opportunities did you have to grow?
When did you succeed and when did you fail?
Draw out the positive and negative aspects of your day, identifying them without dwelling on them.
4. **Repentance:** Spend time expressing sorrow over the ways that you failed to follow Christ. Give thanks for God's grace and ask God to help you follow Him the next time you encounter those situations. Look on yourself with compassion.
5. **Hopefulness:** Look toward tomorrow, asking God to help you grow. End with the Lord's Prayer.

Additional practices for this week can be found on page 21



Prayer by Steve Prince

PRACTICE: Prayer Postures

To borrow the idea from James K.A. Smith, we are more than brains on sticks. We are creatures with bodies, and our bodies matter. Our bodies can be a part of our prayer, embodying our prayers and shaking us out of our routines so that we may better hear the Lord. This week, try out one or more of these prayer postures:

- **Bowing** - is a posture of giving honor and respect (*Psalm 95:6*)
- **Kneeling** - is a posture of humility and dependence (*Act 7:60; Luke 22:41*)
- **Standing** - is a posture of respect. The early church often stood during corporate prayers.
- **Lying prostrate** (flat on ground) - is a posture taken when overwhelmed by need, thanksgiving, or awe (*Numbers 20:6; Revelation 7:11*)
- **Hands raised** - is a posture of adoration (*Psalm 134*)
- **Palms up/down** - Holding open hands, palms up, during prayer is a posture of receiving. Placing your palms down is a posture of letting go. Try opening your hands while listening to God in silence, and then turning your hands over when praying for needs, releasing them to God's sovereignty.

PRACTICES for children and their families: Color Your Prayers

Prayers do not always need to be spoken in paragraphs. They can also be drawn with pictures or words. This is especially helpful when you don't have the words to fit your need, or when you aren't sure what you want and need, but trust that God does. Ask children about something or someone they would like to pray for. Then encourage them to draw that person or situation as a prayer. For "coloring your prayer" templates (and more ideas about praying in color), go to prayingincolor.com/handouts

PSALM 27

¹ The Lord is my light and my salvation—

whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

² When the wicked advance against me
to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.

³ Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.

⁴ One thing I ask from the Lord,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the Lord
and to seek him in his temple.

⁵ For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his
sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

⁶ Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with

shouts of joy;

I will sing and make music to the Lord.

⁷ Hear my voice when I call, Lord;
be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸ My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, Lord, I will seek.

⁹ Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;

you have been my helper.
Do not reject me or forsake me,
God my Savior.

¹⁰ Though my father and mother
forsake me,
the Lord will receive me.

¹¹ Teach me your way, Lord;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.

¹² Do not turn me over to the desire of
my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.

¹³ I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the Lord
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the Lord;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the Lord

The purpose of the prayer of petition

is not to have our own way

but to bring our will into conformity with the will of God.

Donald Bloesch

1 THESSALONIANS 5:13-22

¹³ Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵ Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray continually, ¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil.

MATTHEW 26:36-46

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. "Couldn't you men keep watch with me for one hour?" he asked Peter. ⁴¹ "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.

⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour has come, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"

WEDNESDAY, March 15

ACTS 6:1-7

¹ In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. ² So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. ³ Brothers and sisters, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them ⁴ and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."

⁵ This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. ⁶ They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

⁷ So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

THURSDAY, March 16

PSALM 62

¹ Truly my soul finds rest in God;
my salvation comes from him.

² Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.

³ How long will you assault me?
Would all of you throw me down—
this leaning wall, this tottering fence?

⁴ Surely they intend to topple me
from my lofty place;
they take delight in lies.

With their mouths they bless,
but in their hearts they curse.

⁵ Yes, my soul, find rest in God;
my hope comes from him.

⁶ Truly he is my rock and my salvation;
he is my fortress, I will not be shaken.

⁷ My salvation and my honor depend
on God;

he is my mighty rock, my refuge.

⁸ Trust in him at all times, you people;
pour out your hearts to him,
for God is our refuge.

⁹ Surely the lowborn are but a breath,
the highborn are but a lie.

If weighed on a balance, they are
nothing;

together they are only a breath.

¹⁰ Do not trust in extortion
or put vain hope in stolen goods;

though your riches increase,
do not set your heart on them.

¹¹ One thing God has spoken,
two things I have heard:

"Power belongs to you, God,

¹² and with you, Lord, is unfailing love";
and, "You reward everyone
according to what they have done."



Lifted Hands, 1 Timothy 2 by Kristin Miller

No one can feel hatred towards those for whom he prays.

John Chrysostom

1 TIMOTHY 2:1-6

¹ I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— ² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. ³ This is good, and pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all people.

LUKE 18:1-8

¹ Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. ² He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. ³ And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' ⁴ "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually come and attack me!'" ⁶ And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?"

WEEK 3 | LOVING

INTRODUCTION

In our culture, the word “love” is like an empty container. Each person fills the container with whatever meaning he or she would like: hallmark sentimentality, intense enjoyment, the bond of family, emotional highs. These definitions of love leave us with a sense of haunting; the sense that there is more. That sense of longing is a gift from God because it tells us that there is more: we were meant to be filled with and to share God’s love, which has a definite shape. God’s love takes the shape of the cross: the cross tells us that God made us for Himself, prevented nothing from hindering His pursuit of us, sacrificed Himself to reconcile everything in creation to Himself, and gave Himself so that we could be invited into the loving relationship of the Triune God.

God’s desire is to invite us, through faith in Christ, into His loving relationship as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God’s intention is to shape us with His love, fill us with His love, and share His healing love with others and all of creation through us.

This week, our daily Scripture readings are about the shape of God’s love: God’s love for us which God wants us, in turn, to share with others. As we study and reflect on God’s love and the ways we are formed by it, remember that love demands action. Receiving God’s love requires vulnerability and an honest awareness of your own self. For many of us, allowing ourselves to be fully known and embraced by a loving God is not always easy. And, to love another person with the sacrificial, unconditional love of God is also not an easy thing. In fact, responding in love can even be risky, as the Good Samaritan demonstrated in Luke’s Gospel. The writer of Ephesians describes the people of God as being dead because of sin, as being far off from God; even as being enemies of God. Yet God’s radical love moves toward all people. It compels us to show radical love toward others who are far off,

who are vulnerable, who are outcast, even those we see as enemies. It is no wonder that the writer of Deuteronomy describes loving God as an action that demands all of a person’s heart, soul, mind and strength. To love and be loved is a brave, bold thing! Thus, the practices this week offer two counter-cultural and counter-intuitive ways that we can share God’s radical love with others.

PRACTICE: Sharing God’s love with PNLUs

Our human nature is to gather with people like us: “PLUs” as one wise person worded it. We hang out with people like ourselves, support those like us, share love more easily with people like us. Jesus shared God’s love with everyone and asks us to do the same, including those not like us: PNLUs to give it a name. As God’s children in Christ, we are called to break down the human barriers that separate us. We are called to reach out and include those who are lonely, isolated, in danger, and vulnerable.

This week, ask God about one way you can reach out to someone who is not like you. Perhaps you encounter this person regularly but don’t interact with him or her more than a polite hello. Perhaps you need to go out of your way to make a connection. Or maybe you realize that your world is filled with people like you. If this is the case, talk with God about how He wants to expand your comfort zones and reach out to His children no matter who they are or where they come from. One idea is to join one of the Good Neighbor teams at church. The Good Neighbor teams participate in efforts to welcome and support refugees.

Additional practices for this week can be found on page 31

PRACTICE: Forgiving

One of the radical parts of God's love is that it is forgiving. As God forgives us in Jesus Christ, we are asked to forgive others. We are asked to forgive even when the other is unaware that we are hurt, when the other isn't deserving, or when the other isn't remorseful. Forgiveness is difficult work that only the Spirit can do in and through us. Sometimes the Spirit gives us the ability to forgive fully in a short amount of time. More often, it is a slower work in us. Is there is a relationship or situation in your life in which forgiveness is needed? Ask the Lord about the next step you can take in that process as He does the work in you. Ideas include:

- Praying for that person every day this week, seeking their good and their blessing.
- Confessing your part in the situation to the Lord and perhaps to the other person
- Reaching out to the other person

PRACTICES for children and their families: Thoughtful Sharing

One way we share God's love with others is to share with those in need. Encourage your child to give away a toy or other resource to a child without (likely through a charity). Make sure the toy is not broken or otherwise unwanted and unusable. If giving a toy away isn't a possibility, encourage your child to share a beloved toy with a sibling or friend. Either way, talk with your child about the motivation behind the sharing and give thanks together that God loves us and asks us to love others.

Love

by George Herbert

Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back,

Guilty of dust and sin.

But quick-eyed Love, observing me grow slack

From my first entrance in,

Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning

If I lacked anything.

"A guest," I answered, "worthy to be here":

Love said, "You shall be he."

"I, the unkind, ungrateful? Ah, my dear,

I cannot look on thee."

Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,

"Who made the eyes but I?"

"Truth, Lord; but I have marred them; let my shame

Go where it doth deserve."

"And know you not," says Love, "who bore the blame?"

"My dear, then I will serve."

"You must sit down," says Love, "and taste my meat."

So I did sit and eat.

LUKE 15:11-32

¹¹ Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. ¹² The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So he divided his property between them.

¹³ "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. ¹⁴ After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. ¹⁵ So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. ¹⁶ He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

¹⁷ "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸ I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹ I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' ²⁰ So he got up and went to his father.

"But while he was still a long way off,

his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

²¹ "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.'

²² "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. ²³ Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

²⁵ "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. ²⁶ So he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. ²⁷ 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.'

²⁸ "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So his father went out and pleaded with him. ²⁹ But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet



Prodigal Son by Kristin Miller

A kind Father when thou gavest; and kinder still when he returned destitute.
St. Augustine

you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends.

³⁰ But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!"

³¹ "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. ³² But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

MONDAY, March 20

*For this very end, therefore, did He love us,
that we also should love one another;
bestowing this on us by His own love to us,
that we should be bound to one another in mutual love,
and united together as members by so pleasant a bond,
should be the body of so mighty a head.*

St. Augustine

EPHESIANS 5:1-2

¹ Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children ² and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

TUESDAY, March 21

JOHN 3:16-21

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

¹⁸ Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. ¹⁹ This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed. ²¹ But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.

WEDNESDAY, March 22

GALATIANS 5:2-6; 13-15

² Mark my words! I, Paul, tell you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no value to you at all. ³ Again I declare to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obligated to obey the whole law. ⁴ You who are trying to be justified by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace. ⁵ For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. ⁶ For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.....¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself;" ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

THURSDAY, March 23

*Now there is no greater service of God than Christian love
which helps and serves the needy,
as Christ himself will judge and testify at the Last Day.*
Martin Luther

JOHN 13:31-35

³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, “Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³ “My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴ “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

FRIDAY, March 24

MARK 12:41-44

⁴¹ Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. ⁴² But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a few cents.

⁴³ Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. ⁴⁴ They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”



MATTHEW 25:31-46

³¹ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

³⁷ "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?

³⁹ When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?'

⁴⁰ "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

⁴¹ "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. ⁴² For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, ⁴³ I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.'

⁴⁴ "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?'

⁴⁵ "He will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.'

⁴⁶ "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

WEEK 4 | THANKING

INTRODUCTION

Take a guess at how many times a day you say the word “thanks!” Now, think again about how many times a day you deeply mean the expression of gratitude that is associated with the word. The word “thanks” often rolls off our tongues and our keyboards without a second thought. But *thanksgiving* - the practice, not the turkey-fest in November - is a foundational element of Christian spirituality. We remember from the letter to the Colossians that the Christians in Colossae were exhorted to “be thankful people.” This is a summons not only to the Christians in the first century, but to followers of Jesus today.

The practice of gratitude is our response not only to what God has done for us and for the world, but also to who God is. In light of God’s amazing work through Christ for us and for our salvation, our response can only be resounding expressions of thanksgiving and praise. God’s work in our world and in our lives gives us more than enough reason to celebrate! Thanksgiving takes many forms: we can sing joyfully the words to songs and hymns that lift us beyond our own experiences into the experience of the whole Christian community. We can pray in adoration and praise, and even express gratitude that we can boldly approach God’s throne in prayer. And, like the Christians in Colossae, we can lead thankful lives; we can be people marked by robust gratitude and profound praise. Our own expressions of thanksgiving toward God and others are a response to the grace God has given us. It is only appropriate that we should begin and end each day by crying out our thanksgiving to the God from whom all blessings flow!

PRACTICE: Thank You Notes

Write a thank you note (or five!) to people in your life for whom you are grateful, recalling the reason for your gratitude and your appreciation for that person’s role in your life. Or, you could journal a thank-you note to God, or write a prayer of thanksgiving to God.

PRACTICE: Sing!

Look up the words or sing the hymn, “Now Thank We All Our God.” Consider how singing can be act of celebration and thanksgiving. Or, begin and end each day by singing the Doxology:

*“Praise God from whom all blessings flow! Praise Him, all creatures here below!
Praise Him above, ye heavenly hosts; Praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost!”*

PRACTICE: Celebration

Throw a party in celebration of someone whose work or whose presence in your life might be under-appreciated. Or, give a simple gift to that person to acknowledge your gratitude.

PRACTICES for children and their families: Jar of Thankfulness

Throughout the week, write down things for which you and your family are thankful. Try to have everyone in your family write at least one thing each day. Put each note into a jar. At the end of the week, empty the jar and read aloud with your family all the expressions of gratitude over the course of the week.

"Thy goodness is better than life"....means that it is better than the one thing you still have when you have lost everything, better than your life.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

PSALM 63

¹ You, God, are my God, earnestly I seek you; I thirst for you, my whole being longs for you, in a dry and parched land where there is no water.	⁶ On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night.
² I have seen you in the sanctuary and beheld your power and your glory.	⁷ Because you are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings.
³ Because your love is better than life, my lips will glorify you.	⁸ I cling to you; your right hand upholds me.
⁴ I will praise you as long as I live, and in your name I will lift up my hands.	⁹ Those who want to kill me will be destroyed; they will go down to the depths of the earth.
⁵ I will be fully satisfied as with the richest of foods; with singing lips my mouth will praise you.	¹⁰ They will be given over to the sword and become food for jackals. ¹¹ But the king will rejoice in God; all who swear by God will glory in him, while the mouths of liars will be silenced.

One of the most evident and characteristic traits of a godly Christian community is that of thanksgiving. We cannot breathe without receiving multiple gifts from our Father, and so we should not breathe without thankfulness.

Douglas Wilson

PSALM 111

¹ Praise the Lord. I will extol the Lord with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly.	giving them the lands of other nations. ⁷ The works of his hands are faithful and just;
² Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them.	all his precepts are trustworthy. ⁸ They are established for ever and ever, enacted in faithfulness and uprightness.
³ Glorious and majestic are his deeds, and his righteousness endures forever.	⁹ He provided redemption for his people;
⁴ He has caused his wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate.	he ordained his covenant forever— holy and awesome is his name. ¹⁰ The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom;
⁵ He provides food for those who fear him; he remembers his covenant forever.	all who follow his precepts have good understanding.
⁶ He has shown his people the power of his works,	To him belongs eternal praise.

ROMANS 8:1-11

¹ Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ²because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

ACTS 2:37-42

³⁷ When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

³⁸ Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call."

⁴⁰ With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation." ⁴¹ Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. ⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Grace and Gratitude belong together like heaven and earth.

Grace evokes gratitude like the voice of an echo.

*Gratitude follows grace like thunder follows lightning...the two belong together,
so that only gratitude can correspond to grace,
and this correspondence cannot fail.*

Karl Barth

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

PSALM 91

¹ Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High

will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

² I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress,

my God, in whom I trust."

³ Surely he will save you

from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence.

⁴ He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge;

his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.

⁵ You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

⁶ nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness,

nor the plague that destroys at midday.

⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

⁸ You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the

wicked.

⁹ If you say, "The Lord is my refuge," and you make the Most High your dwelling,

¹⁰ no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.

¹¹ For he will command his angels concerning you

to guard you in all your ways;

¹² they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.

¹³ You will tread on the lion and the cobra;

you will trample the great lion and the serpent.

¹⁴ "Because he loves me," says the Lord, "I will rescue him;

I will protect him, for he acknowledges my name.

¹⁵ He will call on me, and I will answer him;

I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honor him.

¹⁶ With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

SATURDAY, April 1

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31-33

³¹So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

³²Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God—

³³even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.

Far and away the most important benefit of celebration

is that it saves us from taking ourselves too seriously.

*This is a desperately needed grace for all those who
are earnest about the Spiritual Disciplines.*

It is an occupational hazard of devout folk to become stuffy bores.

This should not be.

Of all people, we should be the most free, alive, interesting.

*Richard Foster,
Celebration of Discipline*

INTRODUCTION

When we become a part of God's family, we are included in the family business. God's family business is the reconciliation, redemption, and renewal of all creation through Jesus Christ! Faith is not a private affair. Genuine faith in God is expressed in action as we follow Jesus, doing what Jesus did for the reasons Jesus did them. Genuine faith is expressed in serving others, sharing the good news of Jesus, and using our God-given gifts to serve the world in the places where God has put us.

This week's Scripture readings are about our missional faith. As you read, ask God how He would like to work through you to share His healing with the world.

PRACTICE: Secret Service

As Jesus tells his disciples in Mark 10 that He came to serve and not to be served, we too must be willing to give of ourselves. Cultivating a servant's attitude and heart happens little by little, through our daily choices. This week, find a way to serve someone in your family, at school, or at work without drawing attention to yourself or your service. Do someone else's chore without being asked or expecting thanks afterwards. Clean the breakroom at work or another chore that everyone avoids, and don't tell anyone it was you. Pick up the litter around school. These are just some of the many ways you can secretly serve others. If you ask God how He'd like you to serve, it's likely that the idea will come pretty quickly (one way to identify the answer is that your first reaction is to say, "not that!").

PRACTICE: Support a Mission Partner

There are many ways to put faith in action and serve our community. For opportunities, go to 1stpres.com/missions/local/

PRACTICES for children and their families: Secret Agent Service

Secret service is a great practice for children as well as adults. Try turning it into a fun family game for the week, calling it "secret agent service."



Spikenard by Martin Erspamer

JOHN 12:1-8

¹ Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. ² Here a dinner was given in Jesus' honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. ³ Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴ But one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray him, objected, ⁵ "Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages." ⁶ He did not say this because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ "Leave her alone," Jesus replied. "It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial." ⁸ You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me."

*We do not become righteous by doing righteous deeds
but, having been made righteous, we do righteous deeds.*

Martin Luther

JAMES 2:14-26

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? ¹⁵ Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. ¹⁶ If one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? ¹⁷ In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.”

Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by my deeds. ¹⁹ You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder.

²⁰ You foolish person, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

²¹ Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? ²² You see that his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. ²³ And the scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,” and he was called God’s friend. ²⁴ You see that a person is considered righteous by what they do and not by faith alone.

²⁵ In the same way, was not even Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction? ²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

ISAIAH 55:6-9

⁶ Seek the Lord while he may be found;
call on him while he is near.

⁷ Let the wicked forsake their ways
and the unrighteous their thoughts.

Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them,
and to our God, for he will freely pardon.

⁸ “For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
neither are your ways my ways,”
declares the Lord.

⁹ “As the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts

WEDNESDAY, April 5

PSALM 24

¹ *The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;*
² *for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.*
³ *Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place?*
⁴ *The one who has clean hands and a
pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.*
⁵ *They will receive blessing from the Lord
and vindication from God their Savior.*
⁶ *Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, God of Jacob.*
⁷ *Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*
⁸ *Who is this King of glory?
The Lord strong and mighty,
the Lord mighty in battle.*
⁹ *Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.*
¹⁰ *Who is he, this King of glory?
The Lord Almighty—
he is the King of glory.*

THURSDAY, April 6

PSALM 146

¹ *Praise the Lord.
Praise the Lord, my soul.*
² *I will praise the Lord all my life;
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.*
³ *Do not put your trust in princes,
in human beings, who cannot save.*
⁴ *When their spirit departs, they return to the ground;
on that very day their plans come to nothing.*
⁵ *Blessed are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the Lord their God.*
⁶ *He is the Maker of heaven and earth,
the sea, and everything in them—
he remains faithful forever.*
⁷ *He upholds the cause of the oppressed
and gives food to the hungry.
The Lord sets prisoners free,
the Lord gives sight to the blind,
the Lord lifts up those who are bowed down,
the Lord loves the righteous.*
⁹ *The Lord watches over the foreigner
and sustains the fatherless and the widow,
but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.*
¹⁰ *The Lord reigns forever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord.*

*Good Samaritan by Kristin Miller***MARK 12:28-34**

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’ ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’ ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no commandment greater than these.”

³² “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

**2 CORINTHIANS 5:16-21**

¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! ¹⁸ All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: ¹⁹ that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. ²¹ God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

WEEK 6 | GATHERING AT THE CROSS

INTRODUCTION

Our Lenten journey has followed Jesus' life as He broke bread and feasted with His followers; as He prayed through the darkness of night and the cold breaking of the dawn; as He infused life to the sick and conquered powers of evil; as He mourned and rejoiced; as He spun stories that revealed the values of the Kingdom; and as He proclaimed the in-breaking power of God to make all things new. About midway through the account of Jesus' life and ministry in Luke's Gospel, we read, "when the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51). Jerusalem was the location of the dramatic events in the final week of Jesus' life that led to His crucifixion. This verse in Luke marks a pivotal moment in Jesus' own life, for it is here that we see Him willingly and obediently turning toward the cross as His final destination. As we have followed Jesus' journey this Lenten season, so our own journeys find us gathering with Him in Jerusalem, our faces turned toward the cross.

The Passion drama that we retell during Holy Week begins with the King of kings riding into Jerusalem, not on a majestic horse but on a donkey, heading not toward a throne but toward a cross. How easy it is to forget that only hours after Jesus entered Jerusalem He was scorned and rejected by the very ones who lauded him as King. The narrative shifts to an upper room, where the One who wraps the heavens in clouds wraps a towel around His waist to scrub the dusty feet of His disciples. In the meanwhile, a betrayer, veiled by the shadows of night, sells out the Giver Of Life for 30 pieces of silver. The story moves to a garden where the Word Become Flesh wrestles in anguish with His humanity and His pending fate, while His closest friends sleep nearby. There is the haunting crow of the rooster outside the fire-lit courtyard; there is the swell of blood as thick thorns are pushed into Jesus' brow; there is the pounding of nails, and the rasping breaths, and the final prayers. There is failure, sorrow, grief, and death. And in all of this, there is opportunity for us to draw near to Christ, to identify with His sufferings

and to express gratitude for the immensity of His sacrifice. Like the disciples in the garden, we are invited to remain near the Lord as an act of love and devotion to Christ. Even to the cross, Jesus invites us to follow.

Let us gather at the cross, then, and remember that Christ's victory over death came at great cost. Let us remember that without the tragic events of Holy Week there is no Resurrection.

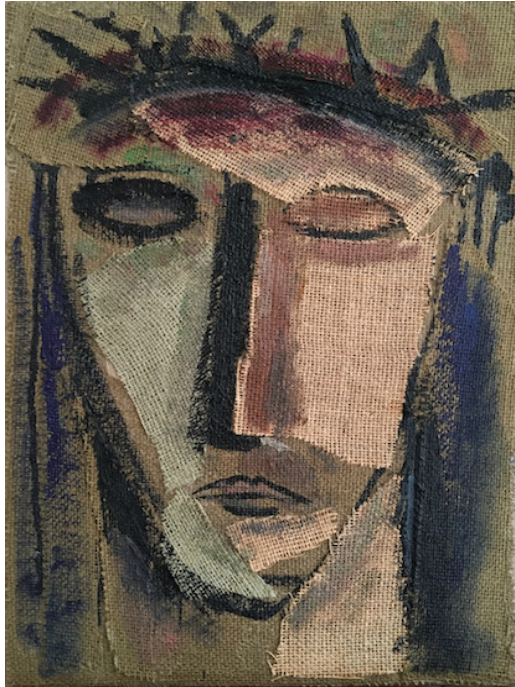
PRACTICE: Participate in Holy Week services at First Pres

Each weekday of Holy Week from 12:15-12:45 pm, First Pres offers a contemplative service called SPACES to remember Christ's journey to the cross through Scripture and prayer, guided meditation, and sensory experiences. First Pres also observes Maundy Thursday, a service of darkening shadows in which we celebrate the Lord's Supper and remember Christ's command to His disciples to love one another as He has loved them.

PRACTICE: Intercessory Prayer

In the events leading to His death, Jesus modeled intercessory prayer. Before entering Jerusalem, He wept for the city and lamented the destruction and suffering that would befall it as a result of the people's failure to recognize the time of God's coming to them (Luke 19:41-44). Knowing the darkness looming in Peter's future, Jesus prayed for Peter that his faith would not fail (Luke 22:32). In the upper room, after washing their feet, Jesus prays for His disciples and for those who would believe because of them that God would protect them and unite them in love (John 17). And even in His anguish on the cross, Christ prays for forgiveness for those who persecuted and executed Him (Luke 23:34-35). We, too, are exhorted to intercede in the way that Christ prays on behalf of others. Spend time praying for your own family and friends; for the congregation at First Pres; for other churches and ministries in our community; for our local and national political leaders; for refugees and victims of oppression and violence; and for other areas of crisis in the world.

Additional practices for this week can be found on page 61



Face of Christ by Marco Bonzini

PRACTICE: *Face of Christ* by Marco Bonzini

Questions for reflection:

What strikes you about this artwork?

What feelings or emotions do you experience?

What feelings or emotions do you imagine Jesus was experiencing?

What questions emerge as you consider this artistic rendering of the crucified Christ?

As you look into the face of Jesus, how do you hear the Spirit whispering to you?

PRACTICES for children and their families: Resurrection Garden

Create a “Resurrection Garden” with your children on or before Friday, in anticipation of Easter. For examples and instructions, see

celebratingholidays.com/?page_id=7042

SUNDAY, April 9

Palm Sunday

LUKE 23:1-49

¹ Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate. ² And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Messiah, a king.”

³ So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?”

“You have said so,” Jesus replied.

⁴ Then Pilate announced to the chief priests and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”

⁵ But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching. He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.”

⁶ On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean. ⁷ When he learned that Jesus was under Herod’s jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.

⁸ When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform a sign of some sort.

⁹ He plied him with many questions, but Jesus gave him no answer. ¹⁰ The chief priests and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing

him. ¹¹ Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. ¹² That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.

¹³ Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, ¹⁴ and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. ¹⁵ Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. ¹⁶ Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”^[17]

¹⁸ But the whole crowd shouted, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!” ¹⁹ (Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)

²⁰ Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. ²¹ But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”

²² For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty.



Good Friday by John Stuart

Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”

²³ But with loud shouts they insistently demanded that he be crucified, and their shouts prevailed. ²⁴ So Pilate decided to grant their demand. ²⁵ He released the man who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, the one they asked for, and surrendered Jesus to their will.

²⁶ As the soldiers led him away, they seized Simon from Cyrene, who was on his way in from the country, and put the cross on him and made him carry it behind Jesus. ²⁷ A large number of people followed him, including

women who mourned and wailed for him. ²⁸ Jesus turned and said to them, “Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. ²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then “they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!” and to the hills, “Cover us!”

³¹ For if people do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?”

³² Two other men, both criminals, were also led out with him to be executed.

³³ When they came to the place called

the Skull, they crucified him there, along with the criminals—one on his right, the other on his left. ³⁴ Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” And they divided up his clothes by casting lots.

³⁵ The people stood watching, and the rulers even sneered at him. They said, “He saved others; let him save himself if he is God’s Messiah, the Chosen One.”

³⁶ The soldiers also came up and mocked him. They offered him wine vinegar ³⁷ and said, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.”

³⁸ There was a written notice above him, which read: this is the king of the jews.

³⁹ One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: “Aren’t you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!”

⁴⁰ But the other criminal rebuked him. “Don’t you fear God,” he said, “since you are under the same sentence? ⁴¹ We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong.”

⁴² Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.”

⁴³ Jesus answered him, “Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

⁴⁴ It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, ⁴⁵ for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. ⁴⁶ Jesus called out with a loud voice, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” When he had said this, he breathed his last.

⁴⁷ The centurion, seeing what had happened, praised God and said, “Surely this was a righteous man.” ⁴⁸ When all the people who had gathered to witness this sight saw what took place, they beat their breasts and went away. ⁴⁹ But all those who knew him, including the women who had followed him from Galilee, stood at a distance, watching these things.

MONDAY, April 10

*All sound Christian theology begins and ends at the foot of the cross.
It is the single event in the Gospels that unveils the full depth
and horror of human sin and the radical nature of God's grace and love.*
George W. Stroup

COLOSSIANS 1:9-14

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you. We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives, ¹⁰so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, ¹²and giving joyful thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of his holy people in the kingdom of light. ¹³For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

TUESDAY, April 11

*What is sacrificial about Jesus' life and death is that
Jesus pours out the superabundance of his life into our life,
overcoming our death with life, lack with abundance, debt with grace.*
Sally Brown

ROMANS 5:6-11

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! ¹⁰For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life! ¹¹Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

WEDNESDAY, April 12

COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

⁸ See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹ For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

¹¹ In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

THURSDAY, April 13
Maundy Thursday

ROMANS 6:15-23

¹⁵ What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace?

By no means! ¹⁶ Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷ But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. ¹⁸ You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

¹⁹ I am using an example from everyday life because of your human limitations. Just as you used to offer yourselves as slaves to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer yourselves as slaves to righteousness leading to holiness.

²⁰ When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness.

²¹ What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²² But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³ For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

FRIDAY, April 14

Good Friday



by Martin Erspamer

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

The Images In My Head

by Madeleine L'Engle

O you who bear the pain of the whole earth,

I bore you.

O you whose tears give human tears their worth,

I laughed with you.

You, who, when your hem is touched, give power,

I nourished you.

Who turn the day to night in this dark hour,

light comes from you.

O you who hold the world in your embrace,

I carried you.

O you who laughed and ate and walked the shore,

I played with you.

And I, who with all others, died for,

now I hold you.

May I be faithful to this final test,

in this last time I hold my child, my son,

His body close enfolded to my breast,

the holder held: the bearer bare.

Mourning to joy: darkness to mourn.

Open, my arms: your work is done.

SATURDAY, April 15

Holy Saturday

COLOSSIANS 2:8-15

⁸See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

⁹For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority. ¹¹In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, ¹²having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.

¹³When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.



Passiontide by Martin Erspamer

