



Meditations for
LENT



**FIRST UNITED METHODIST
CHURCH OF PENSACOLA**

WEEKLY DEVOTIONALS • LENT 2021

FUMCPensacola.com/Lent2021



Lent is a solemn religious observance that begins on Ash Wednesday and lasts the 40 days (plus six Sundays) leading up to Easter. Lent is a time of preparation and reflection, and this year we are focusing on the five Lenten disciplines of Serving, Studying, Praying, Fasting, and Giving.

We invite you to journey through the season of Lent with us using *Meditations for Lent* as your guide. These weekly devotions have been thoughtfully and prayerfully written by our clergy and lay people to foster a deeper understanding of this time of year. In addition to the meditations there are daily readings. There are four readings for each day. There is a reading from the Psalms, a reading from the Old Testament, a reading from one of the Epistles, and a Gospel reading. You can read any and all of these scriptures each day. You can just read the Gospel lessons. You can read two lessons in the morning and two in the evening. Whatever you do, we encourage you to sit, pray, and reflect this season as we prepare our hearts for renewal in Christ Jesus.

The Sunday readings are from the Revised Common Lectionary for Year B. The daily readings are taken from "The Daily Office Lectionary" in the *Book of Common Prayer*.

Visit us online at FUMCPensacola.com/Lent2021 for more details and other opportunities to get involved this season.

ASH WEDNESDAY

BY: DR. WESLEY H. WACHOB, SENIOR PASTOR

“Remember that you are dust....”

Genesis 3:19, *“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

The Christian season of Lent begins on ‘Ash Wednesday’ and lasts “40 days” (not counting the Sundays, because Sunday is always a feast of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ).

Ash Wednesday “begins in ashes”—reminding us that we are sinful human beings. As Bishop Frederic Borsch says: Lent “is not a season for groveling; rather, it is a time for reality, for genuine humility, for repentance and forgiveness and renewed commitment to following the ways of Jesus. [It] is a season of preparation, and we are already looking forward to Jesus’ passion and death for us and then to Easter” (*Introducing the Lessons of the Church Year*, p. 80).

Lent is often referred to as “the forty days.” The number “40,” of course, is very significant in Holy Scripture: Noah was in the ark 40 days; Moses was on Mount Sinai 40 days; Israel wandered in the wilderness 40 years; Jesus was out in the wilderness and tempted by Satan 40 days.

With God’s people, we begin our 40-day wilderness-journey, not without temptation. During Lent, we shall—in one way or another—‘fast’, ‘serve’, ‘study’, ‘pray’, and ‘give’ in the Name of Jesus Christ. With God’s people throughout the world, we shall begin our Lenten pilgrimage—“a pilgrimage through a wilderness of renewal and faith . . . following Jesus on the way to agony, passion, and death—and then new life.”

Number 269, in our hymnal, offers us in ‘five stanzas’ a beautiful summary of Lent. It begins this way: “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.” And Number 268 provides a prayer that we can make our own: “O God our deliverer, you led your people of old through the wilderness and brought them to the promised land. Guide now the people of your church, that, following our Savior, we may walk through the wilderness of this world toward the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.”



	Psalm	Old Testament	New Testament	Gospel
Ash Wednesday	51:1-17	Joel 2:1-2	2 Cor. 5:20b-6:10	Matt. 6:1-6, 16-21
Thursday	37:1-18	Deut. 7:6-11	Titus 1:1-16	John 1:29-34
Friday	95 & 31	Deut. 7:12-16	Titus 2:1-15	John 1:35-42
Saturday	30, 32	Deut. 7:17-26	Titus 3:1-15	John 1:43-51

SERVE

BY: TODD CUNNINGHAM

“Serve one another humbly in love.” (Galatians 5:13)

Servitude is not a glamorous concept. Who in their right mind would sign-up for a life of servitude? And yet, this is what God has in mind for his people. God knows how service to others will bless us as well as the community around us.

Serving others is a great way to put aside our differences and self-centeredness and really notice how we are connected, and in many ways even indebted to one another. When we begin seeing the genuine needs of others around us it can cause our own sense of entitlement to fade into obscurity. None of us have become the individuals we are on our own. We are the person we are today because of the investment and sacrifice, the service if you will, of many others throughout our lifetimes. And this doesn't even take into consideration the immeasurable ways in which God has affected our lives, the love and sacrifice of His only son, Jesus, for our redemption.

Serving others not only reveals the bonds between us, it reflects the love of God for us. When we become aware of service to us and when we become involved in service to others, we are better able to experience the grace of God. Service points people to Christ. During his ministry on earth, Jesus modeled grace that is beyond our understanding. His example calls us to *“submit to one another out of reverence for Christ”* (Ephesians 5:21).

In our “me first” culture, God calls us to put others first. What a challenge!



	Psalm	Old Testament	New Testament	Gospel
1st Sunday	25:1-10	Gen. 9:8-17	1 Peter 3:18-22	Mark 1:9-15
Monday	41, 52	Deut. 8:11-20	Heb. 2:11-18	John 2:1-12
Tuesday	45	Deut. 9:4-12	Heb. 3:1-11	John 2:13-22
Wednesday	119:49-72	Deut. 9:13-21	Heb. 3:12-19	John 2:23--3:15
Thursday	50	Deut. 9:23--10:5	Heb. 4:1-10	John 3:16-21
Friday	95, 40, 54	Deut. 10:12-22	Heb. 4:11-16	John 3:22-36
Saturday	55	Deut. 11:18-28	Heb. 5:1-10	John 4:1-26

STUDY

BY: REV. JENNY MEDLEY

“I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways. I delight in your decrees; I will not neglect your word.” (Psalm 119:15-16)

When I was graduating from seminary, unsure of my next steps in life, where God was calling me, and, for the first time in 20+ years, not planning to be enrolled in any form of class work, I knew I needed something to help ground me. I studied Spiritual Formation in seminary and learned of the Academy for Spiritual Formation through Upper Room Ministries. As it turned out, a Two-Year Academy was set to start the following August.

The program, which met quarterly for a week at a time, opened me to a rhythm that involved study, as well as other elements of a grounded and purposeful Christian life. It related to the seasons of the Church, as well as of the world. We took time to enjoy the beauty of nature found in the changing of the leaves, the sounds of the birds, the silence of the snowfall, and even huddled together as tornadoes passed over one spring. Through all of this, we spent time together in study, and having read assigned readings, we joined one another for lectures from faculty, and shared discussion following time of reflection. These times of sharing were indeed sacred.

I found the rhythm of the Academy life-giving, and the emphasis on study compelling. It compelled me not simply to look for what is required of me, but for what is challenging, and for what calls me to truly live into my calling to continually grow as a human being and as a follower of Christ. I am also grateful for the ongoing motivation I now have to fulfill a continuing education goal each year as a Board Certified Chaplain.

Through all of this, I continue to seek opportunities to study, learn, and grow, as an individual, a member of our congregation, and now the chair of First Church’s Christian Education Committee. I also participate with the Academy every few years to reconnect with that familiar practice, rhythm, and to renew my soul. How are the studies of First Church calling you to live out your faith during this Lenten Season?



	Psalm	Old Testament	New Testament	Gospel
2nd Sunday	22:23-31	Gen. 17:1-7, 15-16	Rom. 4:13-25	Mark 8:31-38
Monday	56, 57, 58	Jer. 1:11-19	Rom. 1:1-15	John 4:27-42
Tuesday	61, 62	Jer. 2:1-13	Rom. 1:16-25	John 4:43-54
Wednesday	72	Jer. 3:6-18	Rom. 1:28–2:11	John 5:1-18
Thursday	70, 71	Jer. 4:9-10, 19-28	Rom. 2:12-24	John 5:19-29
Friday	95, 69:1-23, 31-38	Jer. 5:1-9	Rom. 2:25–3:18	John 5:30-47
Saturday	75, 76	Jer. 5:20-31	Rom. 3:19-31	John 7:1-13

PRAY

BY: DONELL SEAGER

Lent literally means springtime, and it's fitting as the season of Lent is an opportunity to plant seeds in our lives and souls that will lead to spiritual growth.

Prayer is integral to spiritual growth. Yet for many years I found it to be challenging and not very rewarding. At this point in my life, I knew prayer as simply “talking to God.” Eventually this led to a crisis of faith because God wouldn't answer my heart-felt prayers for the healing of two of my children.

God and I wrestled about prayer and its purpose until I came to understand prayer as what we do to be in relationship with God and to sustain and nourish that relationship. Prayer is what we do to be present to God's presence within us and all around us.

I discovered and began practicing different prayer practices, which birthed an intimate and deeper relationship with God. These prayer practices were the means to the grace of transformation as described by Paul in Romans 12:2, “*Stop imitating the ideals and opinions of the culture around you, but be inwardly transformed by the Holy Spirit through a total reformation of how you think. This will empower you to discern God's will as you live a beautiful life, satisfying and perfect in his eyes*” (The Passion Translation).

These were the primary prayer practices that were so transformative: Centering Prayer, Lectio Divina (praying scripture), and praying the hours. Centering Prayer introduced me to the discipline of silence with God, of listening to God, and resting in God's presence. Here's a [link](#) for instructions on Centering Prayer. Lectio Divina is an ancient prayer practice that engages one in praying the scriptures while being in dialogue with God. Here's a [link](#) for instructions. *Seven Sacred Pauses: Living Mindfully Through the Hours of the Day* by Macrina Wiederkehr is my favorite prayer book. She offers instruction on each of the hours and the liturgy for each hour is short and easy to use; yet beautifully evocative and transformative. Here's a [link](#) to the book.

Join me in practicing these prayer practices during Lent. I trust that if you do, come Easter you will not be the same person you were before Easter.

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	Psalm	Old Testament	New Testament	Gospel
3rd Sunday	19	Exodus 20:1-7	1 Cor. 1:18-25	John 2:13-22
Monday	80	Jer. 7:1-15	Rom. 4:1-12	John 7:14-36
Tuesday	78:1-39	Jer. 7:21-34	Rom. 4:13-25	John 7:37-52
Wednesday	119:97-120	Jer. 8:18--9:6	Rom. 5:1-11	John 8:12-20
Thursday	83 or 42, 43	Jer. 10:11-24	Rom. 5:12-21	John 8:21-32
Friday	95, 88	Jer. 11:1-8, 14-20	Rom. 6:1-11	John 8:33-47
Saturday	87, 90	Jer. 13:1-11	Rom. 6:12-23	John 8:47-59

FAST

BY: DAVID BOYD

What comes to your mind when you hear the word “fasting?” The dictionary defines fasting as “abstaining from all or some kinds of food..., especially for religious observance.” The word’s etymology discloses it comes from a prehistoric Germanic word meaning to “hold firmly.” Evolving to mean “having a firm control or to hold oneself to an observance.”

“...Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness... He fasted forty days and forty nights... The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ But he answered, ‘It is written,...’” (Matthew 4:1-4). Satan saw this as a perfect time to drive a wedge between Jesus and his Father. However, Jesus used his fast to hold firmly to his belief that his Father would care for him.

John Wesley maintained a habit of fasting each week from sundown on Thursday to 3 pm Friday. Wesley said fasting was “a means of grace...which God himself has ordained...” (Sermon 27.I.4). Wesley saw fasting, coupled with prayer, as a way to increase the “seriousness of spirit, earnestness, sensibility, and tenderness of conscience, deadness to the world, and consequently the love of God, and every holy and heavenly affection” (Sermon 27.II.6). He wrote fixing our eyes on the Lord; we fast “...to glorify our Father...to express our sorrow and shame for our manifold transgressions of his holy law; to wait for an increase of purifying grace, drawing our affections to things above; to add seriousness and earnestness to our prayers; to avert the wrath of God, and to obtain all the great and precious promises which he hath made to us in Jesus Christ” (Sermon 27.IV.1).

This last year we’ve all experienced things that could drive a wedge between us and our faith, between our neighbor and us. Take time to fast and pray, with God’s grace, we will hold firmly to our belief that our Father will always care for us. “Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I” (Isaiah 58:9).

Visit these websites to learn more about a “Wesleyan fast,”: [Fasting in the Wesleyan Way](#) or [The Wesley Fast](#)

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	Psalm	Old Testament	New Testament	Gospel
4th Sunday	107:1-3, 17-22	Num. 21:4-9	Eph. 2:1-10	John 3:14-21
Monday	89:1-18	Jer. 16:10-21	Rom. 7:1-12	John 6:1-15
Tuesday	97, 99, 100	Jer. 17:19-27	Rom. 7:13-25	John 6:16-27
Wednesday	101, 109:1-4(5-19)20-30	Jer. 18:1-11	Rom. 8:1-11	John 6:27-40
Thursday	69:1-23(24-30)31-38	Jer. 22:13-23	Rom. 8:12-27	John 6:41-51
Friday	95, 102	Jer. 23:1-8	Rom. 8:28-39	John 6:52-59
Saturday	107:33-43, 108:1-6(7-13)	Jer. 23:9-15	Rom. 9:1-18	John 6:60-71

GIVE

BY: HOLLY HOUGHTON

My family faced many difficulties in 2020. We buried loved ones, had injuries, illness, diagnoses, surgeries, and changed jobs. Even though every situation is different, I think it's safe to assume most people would say, "2020 was a difficult year." But, through each of these difficult situations, we felt God's love. We felt God's love as others shared their gifts with us. People shared their gifts through prayers, cards, hot meals, and deliveries.

Being on the receiving end of these gifts reminded me how important it is to give. What a blessing it is, to be able to give! After all, isn't everything we have a gift from God? Doesn't God give us everything we have, so that we can share our blessings with others?

In the letters to the Corinthian church, Paul reiterates, that as Christians we have made a commitment to give, that all we have is a gift from God, that giving helps spread God's love and blessings, and that through sharing our gifts we show our appreciation to God.

When you give to First United Methodist Church through your tithes and offerings, you support ministries in our community and the world. Members are asked to give regularly and are encouraged to be faithful stewards. In addition to monetary gifts, you can give your time, energy, or donate items like clothes, books, food, etc. During Lent you'll learn more about missions and service opportunities.

In 2 Corinthians 9:7 Paul writes, "Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Does it bring you joy to give? I am the most cheerful giver when I see the impacts of my gifts. It was about eight years ago when my family began the search to find a church home. In our search, we were not looking for the biggest sanctuary or the newest and most high-tech sound system. Through some unusual circumstances we met Barbara Vititow and learned about the Serve the Hungry program at First church. Seeing my gifts serve the poor in our community makes me a cheerful giver. In what ways are you a cheerful giver?

What can you do to be more generous in this season of Lent?

May you find joy in giving. Know your gifts are sharing God's love with others. Imagine the joy in God's heart when we give generously and cheerfully.



	Psalm	Old Testament	New Testament	Gospel
5th Sunday	51:1-12	Jer. 31:31-34	Heb. 5:5-10	John 12:20-33
Monday	31	Jer. 24:1-10	Rom. 9:19-33	John 9:1-17
Tuesday	120, 121, 122, 123	Jer. 25:8-17	Rom. 10:1-13	John 9:18-41
Wednesday	119:145-176	Jer. 25:30-38	Rom. 10:14-21	John 10:1-18
Thursday	131, 132, 133	Jer. 26:1-16	Rom. 11:1-12	John 10:19-42
Friday	95, 22	Jer. 29:1, 4-13	Rom. 11:13-24	John 11:1-27, or 12:1-10
Saturday	137:1-6(7-9), 144	Jer. 31:27-34	Rom. 11:25-36	John 11:28-44, or 12:37-50

HOLY WEEK

BY: REV. BRANDON BURES, ASSOCIATE PASTOR

The final journey of Lent ends with Holy Week. Lent is a time of repentance and self-examination. Yet, Holy Week has a different focus. The week begins with Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. By the end of the week, Jesus is dead, hanging on a cross. Holy Week is a jarring transition from a spotlight on repentance to focusing on the final week of Jesus' life. If you are willing to journey with Jesus on Holy Week, then Easter is that much sweeter.

Many people over the years have said, "You can't have Easter without Good Friday." Holy Week encompasses some of the most crucial moments in our Lent journey. When you examine the ministry of Jesus during Holy Week, you discover the heart of God. In one of the Holy Week Gospel lessons from John, Jesus says, "Where I am going, you cannot come. I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

I know this season of life has been challenging, but the words of Jesus should comfort us. The love Jesus shows by going to the cross to die reveals God's love toward us. God loves us, and out of the love of Christ, we love each other. During Holy Week, we see Jesus on the cross because the God of all gave Christ for us.

Richard Hayes puts it this way, "God has chosen to save the world through the cross, through the shameful and powerless death of the crucified Messiah. If that shocking event is the revelation of the deepest truth about the character of God, then our whole way of seeing the world is turned upside down... all values are transformed... God refuses to play games of power and prestige on human terms."

Holy Week leaves us with Jesus enclosed in a tomb. Just remember, God is not done. The love of God will spill out on Easter with God raising Christ from dead. Soon you will hear the familiar voices singing, "Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!" By living into Holy Week, Easter takes on a new meaning.



	Psalm	Old Testament	New Testament	Gospel
Palm Sunday	118:1-2, 19-29**, 31:9-16***	Isa. 50:4-9a	Phil. 2:5-11	Mark 21:1-11** Matthew 26:14-27:66***
Monday	51:1-18(19-20)	Jer. 12:1-16	Phil. 3:1-14	John 12:9-19
Tuesday	6, 12	Jer. 15:10-21	Phil. 3:15-21	John 12:20-26
Wednesday	55	Jer. 17:5-10, 14-17	Phil. 4:1-13	John 12:27-36
Maundy Thursday	102	Jer. 20:7-11	1 Cor. 10:14-17; 11:27-32	John 17:1-11(12-26)
Good Friday	95, 22	Gen. 22:1-14 (Wisdom 1:16-2:1,12-22)*	1 Peter 1:10-20	John 13:36-38** & John 19:38-42***
Holy Saturday	95, 88	Job 19:21-27a	Heb. 4:1-16**	Rom. 8:1-11***

*Apocrypha • **Morning • *** Evening